

The female images in literary works of Junior High School Chinese Textbooks and their practical significance: Taking the compulsory textbooks as an example

Yuan Fang*

School of Preschool Education, Jiangsu Second Normal University, Nanjing, Jiangsu, 210013, China

Abstract. With time, people have paid increasing attention to the image and status of women. However, in real life, there are still phenomena where women are discriminated against or are in a disadvantaged position. These negative concepts can hurt students and are not conducive to forming their correct values. As an important medium for disseminating knowledge and ideas, the female images in compulsory junior high school Chinese textbooks have rich educational value and play an indispensable role in cultivating students' emotional attitudes, gender concepts, and core literacy. By using the methods of literature research and content analysis to study the connotation and practical significance of female images in compulsory junior high school Chinese textbooks, it is found that the female images in the junior high school Chinese textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education have rich practical significance, but the number of female image texts is relatively small and there are some limitations. Based on this, this paper puts forward relevant teaching suggestions, aiming to provide references and assistance for the future compilation of textbooks and facilitate the multi-faceted development of students' moral qualities and literary literacy.

1 Introduction

In recent years, people have increasingly paid attention to the establishment of female images and the dissemination of female consciousness. However, in today's society, there are still cases where women suffer from workplace bullying and some families do not allow girls to continue their education. This makes me deeply aware that it is very necessary to form correct female consciousness and disseminate the idea of female independence in the compulsory education stage, and to achieve such dissemination of ideas and consciousness, it is necessary to rely on Chinese language education and Chinese language textbooks.

The female images in the literary works of the Compulsory Edition of junior high school Chinese textbooks are diverse. These female images convey important educational signifi-

* Corresponding author: f_yuan0216@outlook.com

cance and can help teenagers form correct gender concepts and establish correct gender consciousness. However, the interpretation and understanding of female images in textbooks and the research on their practical significance still need to be strengthened. Based on this, this paper takes the literary works in the Compulsory Edition of junior high school Chinese textbooks as the main object. It uses the methods of literature research and content analysis to focus on analyzing the female images, exploring their practical significance, and providing more references and assistance for the future compilation of textbooks and teaching practice.

2 Research Status

The first wave of feminism emerged in the West as early as the mid-18th century, and women began to fight for gender equality and political rights. In the second wave, education became a particularly concerned area for feminists. On this basis, countries worldwide have also been committed to conducting gender role analysis and research in textbooks and actual teaching.

In the 1970s, British scholar Lobban analyzed the gender role presentation in British reading textbooks and found that there were widespread gender stereotypes in the textbooks [1]. Lobban believed that female characters were usually depicted as passive and dependent on the family, while male characters were more often portrayed as active, independent, and professional. This stereotypical presentation of gender roles has a profound impact on students' gender cognition and reinforces gender inequality in society.

"Gender, Class and Education" points out that gender stereotypes and class biases in textbooks subtly influence students' values and behavioral patterns. Such gender and class inequality in society should not be perpetuated in education [2].

In recent years, female images in junior high school Chinese textbooks have become a research hot topic. Scholars have conducted in-depth research from the perspectives of the type characteristics, teaching value, and strategies of female images in textbooks. Hu Yiyi and Liu Chun [3] explored the teaching strategies of special reading of female images in junior high school Chinese textbooks from the perspective of core literacy. Through analyzing different types of female images in the textbooks, they summarized their teaching value and emphasized that reading about female images should be used to cultivate students' critical thinking, aesthetic appreciation ability, and cultural inheritance awareness. Li Junjie [4] classified the female images in the textbooks from the perspective of social roles, dividing them into mothers, wives, professional women, etc., and explored the impact of female image teaching on students' gender concepts and cultural cognition.

Therefore, through the review of research by scholars from various countries, it is found that gender stereotypes in textbooks exist and they reinforce students' gender biases, causing adverse effects. Although domestic scholars' research adopts multiple perspectives and methods, the research on their practical significance still needs to be strengthened to provide more references for textbook compilation and teaching practice.

3 Classification and Characteristics of Female Images in Literary works of junior high School Chinese Textbooks Compiled by the Ministry of Education

3.1 Types of female images

In the unified edition of textbooks, as the grade increases, the number of texts with female protagonists gradually decreases. These characters are mainly divided into four types: family women, professional women, folk women, and mythological and historical women.

In family life, women mainly play the roles of mothers and wives. Among them, there are mother images from the author's perspective, such as in "Autumn Remembrance" and "Recalling My Mother", as well as wife images in "Fan Jin Passed the Imperial Examination" and "My Uncle Yu Le". Professional women, on the other hand, include teachers, athletes, scientists, etc., such as Marie Curie in "Beautiful Colors" and Lu Wei in "Flying to the Sky - The Story of Diving Girl Lu Wei Winning the Championship". There are also some female folk characters, such as Mother Chang in "From the Hundred-Plant Garden to the Three-Flavored Study" and Yang Ershao in "Hometown". In addition, there are also female figures such as Hua Mulan and Nuwa created in myths and history.

Overall, in these selected female images, the female images in family life account for the majority, mainly family roles such as mothers and wives. There are relatively few women in the social field. Apart from those who have achieved success in certain fields, there is a lack of roles related to professional women, which is inconsistent with the current status of women in society [5].

3.2 Characteristics of female images

In textbooks, female images are mostly selected from positive and active figures in literary works throughout history, both at home and abroad. Such images are more likely to touch students and trigger their thoughts and resonations.

First of all, there is the image of a hardworking, kind and deeply loving woman. In "Memories of Autumn", Shi Tiesheng depicted his mother's selfless love for him with delicate strokes. Facing her disability, the mother had boundless grief in her heart, but she never showed it. Even though the mother was seriously ill in the end, she still cared about him and his sister all the time. Such maternal love is touching. Similar images also include the ordinary, simple, but intelligent and hardworking mother of Zhu De in "Recalling My Mother", as well as Bing Xin's praise for her mother's selflessness by using a lotus leaf to shield the red lotus from the wind and rain, and other articles expressing maternal love.

Secondly, there is the image of a brave and strong woman with fine qualities. The text "Pear Blossoms along the Post Road" depicts the kind, friendly and helpful Hani girls. Deeply influenced by the People's Liberation Army, they provide dry food and accommodation for passers-by in the mountains, just like white pear blossoms blooming in people's hearts. In "The Man Who Remakes Life", Helen Keller, despite being blind in both eyes, did not give up her desire for life and always bravely faced setbacks. This was also inseparable from the patient guidance and effective teaching of her teacher, Sullivan. For Helen Keller, what her teacher Sullivan brought her was not only knowledge, but also light, hope and happiness.

Finally, there is the image of women who bring honor to the country and have a sense of responsibility and commitment. Hua Mulan in "The Poem of Mulan" is a classic female figure in Chinese literary works. The story of Mulan taking her father's place to join the army shows that women can also defend their homeland and take on heavy responsibilities. In "Flying to the Sky - The Story of Diving Girl Lu Wei Winning the Championship", Lu Wei's brilliant jump at the Dakadara Swimming Pool not only won the gold medal for China, but also demonstrated the spirit of Chinese women who dare to strive and forge ahead.

Through analysis, it is found that the female images in the literary works selected in the

teaching materials are almost all full of a positive and upward spirit, as well as the fine qualities of kindness and bravery. For junior high school students, these female images in the textbooks set positive examples for them and play an important role in cultivating their sense of social responsibility and correct and good qualities.

4 The teaching value of female images in literary works of the junior high school Chinese textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education

4.1 Cultivate students' good emotional attitudes

For junior high school students, it is very necessary to cultivate correct moral concepts and good emotional attitudes, and these female images in the literary works in the textbooks lay a good foundation for them.

Whether in the prose poem "Lotus Leaf - Mother", Bing Xin uses the lotus leaf as an image to depict a mother who is willing to sacrifice herself to protect her child, or Tagore in "The Golden Flower" views his mother's dedication from a child's perspective, they all convey the selflessness and greatness of the mother's image. Through reading, students can experience their mothers' selfless love more profoundly and reflect on themselves accordingly.

In addition, female figures such as Hua Mulan, Lu Wei, and Marie Curie broke free from the shackles that bound traditional women and carved out their paths through their efforts and perseverance. For students, such female images are objects worthy of their imitation and learning, and they also teach them to view the status of women correctly and objectively and recognize the social value of women.

4.2 Help students establish correct values

Junior high school students are in a special period of adolescence, during which they start to have new views and understandings about gender and their image. Therefore, during this period, the female images in the textbooks can help establish their gender concepts, thereby forming correct values and outlooks on life [6].

In textbooks, the era and identity background behind each female image are different. Maybe in that era, they were not treated equally and received a good education, but they still did not give up hope for life. They dared to fight against fate and express themselves. Such a spirit is very valuable and worthy of students' learning. Just like Helen Keller, although fate treated her unfairly and did not give her bright eyes and the ability to listen and speak, she still became an educator.

The female images in the teaching materials not only shape the qualities of diligence, bravery, and selflessness, but also break the shackles of traditional gender concepts, demonstrating the value of women in different fields. Based on this, junior high school students will develop a greater sense of identification and belonging towards female characters, which can help them understand the text more deeply and thus form a correct gender awareness.

4.3 Enhance students' core literacy

In the Chinese learning process of junior high school students, their core literacy abilities, such as reading and writing, as well as, aesthetics are particularly important. The female images in the teaching materials can not only deepen students' understanding of this image and

improve their writing skills, but also enable them to appreciate the beauty of female images and enhance their aesthetic ability.

Many students write about their mothers in their compositions or diaries, but most of them are limited to the fact that their mothers cooked a meal for them or took them to see a doctor, lacking observation and depiction of their mothers. The female images in the teaching materials provide excellent models and materials for students' writing. For example, by reading and appreciating "Remembrance in Autumn", students can feel the author's delicate descriptions of the mother's expressions, actions, language, and other aspects, as well as the mother's selfless emotional expression, thereby learning the writing techniques and generating a deeper understanding of maternal love.

In addition, among the female images in the textbooks, some are "visually beautiful" (Ning, 2023). By learning about these female images, students will also have further improvement in their aesthetic sense. For instance, in "The Pear Blossoms along the Post Road", the energetic Hani girls, after their elder sisters got married, took over the small wooden house and kept bringing warmth to passers-by. This is not only a manifestation of their willingness to help others, but also a kind of inheritance of beauty. The pear blossoms running through the whole text are also an expression of their noble qualities and fine spirit.

5 The practical significance of female images in the junior high school Chinese textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education

5.1 Practical impact on students

For students, the influence brought by the female images in textbooks is not only the imparting of knowledge, but also has an important impact on their future life roles. In the future, every student will enter society and they will undertake various social roles. The mother who shoulders the heavy responsibility of the family and the professional woman who constantly strives and challenges herself in teaching materials will plant a seed in the hearts of students. Through reading, they can feel Shi Tiesheng's selflessness in "Memories of Autumn" when his mother is seriously ill but still cares about him all the time. He uses verbs like "quietly" and "pout" to describe the details of the mother's actions and expressions. Students will feel their mother's indescribable love and thus reflect on their relationship with their mother. Such a seed will keep growing during its growth process and even accompany them throughout their lives.

Secondly, the positive female images in the teaching materials play an indispensable role in shaping students' moral character. These female images are kind, brave, and selfless, shining with the brilliance of humanity. The ideas conveyed in the articles of female authors include not only reflections on life and praises of human nature, but also a sense of patriotism and the pursuit of ideals. The fine qualities conveyed by these female images and the delicate brushstrokes of female authors are important resources for cultivating the moral qualities of junior high school students.

Finally, the female images in the teaching materials also have aesthetic educational significance. Whenever we praise women, we always say they are very beautiful. The beauty of a woman's image should not only be physical but also spiritual [7]. Junior high school students have their pursuit of "beauty", and the beautiful female images in the textbooks provide good guidance for them. Just like the Hani girls in "The Pear Blossoms on the Post Road", they infect every passer-by with their kindness and enthusiasm. Maybe they are not pretty, but in the hearts of those who have received help, they are as beautiful as the white pear

blossoms. Such an image enables them to learn to distinguish what true feminine beauty is and what language beauty is, which is of great significance in "cultivating people through beauty".

5.2 Implications for teachers' teaching

When helping students recognize the image of women and understand the connotations they express, teachers should first abandon their gender stereotypes and have a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the image of women [8]. In the teaching process, teachers play the role of guides. If teachers themselves fail to establish a correct concept of gender and have an in-depth interpretation of the female images in the text, students are very likely to fall into ideological misunderstandings.

Secondly, some teachers rely too much on teaching references and take exam-oriented education as the main teaching objective, thus neglecting the shaping of students' gender concepts and values. Students in junior high school are very curious about the emotions between the sexes, and many teachers often choose to avoid this aspect. Teachers should take these female images in the textbooks as examples to guide students on the correct relationship between the two sexes and shape their correct view of love.

Finally, teachers should make full use of these female images to help students appreciate different emotions, thereby achieving a profound understanding of the article. For instance, in "Hometown", Yang Ershao, who was once beautiful and dignified in her youth, has now become sharp-tongued and caustic. Why has she undergone such a significant transformation? Teachers can start from this change and design relevant discussion questions for students to conduct specific analyses, helping them better understand the character's image.

5.3 Suggestions for textbook compilation

The current Chinese language textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education adhere to the compilation concept of "cultivating virtue and nurturing talent, upholding tradition while innovating, and enhancing Chinese language proficiency", and shoulder the will of the country and the nation to "cultivate virtue and nurture talent" [9]. However, they also have some limitations.

First of all, the selected texts related to female images in the teaching materials should be added. Although there are a large number of texts in the textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education, the number of texts covering female images is relatively small, and the distribution is uneven [10]. Female images have their unique practical significance and have a multi-faceted influence on students. If different types of female images could be added, such as excerpts of female images from literary works like "Gone with the Wind" and "Old Stories of South City", it would be of even greater practical significance.

Secondly, most of the female images in the teaching materials have some limitations. Many female images are derived from the works of male writers and do not entirely belong to the female perspective, which can make female images carry some gender biases [4]. Furthermore, the achievements of some female characters are often measured by male standards, such as works like "Mulan". Based on this, in the selection of texts, more works by female authors can be chosen, such as those by female literary writers like Li Juan, Chi Zijian, and Tie Ning. At the same time, attention should also be paid to whether the expression of female images in the article conforms to the correct concept of gender equality.

Finally, teaching materials should not only play a role in language literacy and moral education, but also provide correct guidance in gender education. In the textbooks compiled by

the Ministry of Education, although the concept of gender equality has always been conveyed, due to the scarcity of female images, teachers often neglect gender education and guidance on gender understanding for teenagers in the teaching process. Therefore, when compiling and revising teaching materials, some units related to gender education can be set up separately, or some after-class thinking questions about gender discussion can be added at the end of the text to guide students to understand and think.

6 Conclusion

The junior high school Chinese textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education, as a carrier for disseminating knowledge and educational concepts, have a profound influence on students. The diverse female images in the selected texts bring about different educational significance. By reading relevant literature and analyzing the female images in the selected texts, researchers can find that the current female images in textbooks show a trend of diversification and three-dimensionality. This enables students not only to improve their literary literacy, but also to enhance their emotional attitudes and gender concepts, and points out the direction for the social roles and life paths they will undertake in the future.

However, at present, there is a lack of relevant research on the educational value of female images in teaching materials. This article hopes that through such research, it can provide inspiration and assistance for future educational practice and textbook compilation, thereby better promoting the balanced development of students in multiple aspects and contributing to social progress. In the future, research will be further expanded, and strategies will be better adjusted in combination with relevant teaching practices and teaching outcome evaluations to facilitate the compilation of teaching materials.

References

1. G. Lobban, SEX-ROLES IN READING SCHEMES. *Educational Review* **27**(3), 202-210 (2006)
2. S. Walker, S. Barton, et al., *Gender, Class and Education (Routledge Revivals)* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2012)
3. Y. Hu, C. Liu, Research on Special Reading of Female Images in Junior High School Chinese Textbooks from the Perspective of Core Literacy. *Middle School Curriculum Resources* **19**(10), 72-75 (2023)
4. J. Li, Analysis of Female Character Images in the Unified Junior High School Chinese Textbooks and Teaching Research. Master's thesis, Jinan University (2022)
5. C. Tang, Analysis of Female Images in the Unified Edition of Junior High School Chinese Textbooks. *Bilingual Education Research* **6**(04), 47-52 (2022)
6. B. Wang, Analysis of Female Images in the Second Volume of Junior High School Chinese Textbooks from the Perspective of Gender Culture. Master's thesis, Yangzhou University (2019)
7. H. Ning, Research on the Teaching Value and Strategies of Female Images in the Unified Edition of Junior High School Chinese Textbooks. Master's thesis, Shenyang Normal University (2023)
8. D. Chen, Teaching Analysis of Female Images in the Unified Edition of Junior High School Chinese Textbooks. *Composition (Z4)*, 69-70 (2024)
9. X. Wang, Integration and Practical Exploration of Moral Education Themes in Junior High School Chinese Textbooks from the Perspective of "Moral Education and Talent Cultivation". *Chinese Teaching Communication* (29), 15-19 (2021)

10. W. Fan, Teaching Analysis and Suggestions on the Image of Chinese Women in the Junior High School Chinese Textbook Compiled by the Ministry of Education. Master's thesis, Southwest University. DOI:10.27684/d.cnki.gxndx.2022.003630 (2022)