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A Generational "Family Experiment": A Study of Intergenerational Relationships in the Works of Post-80s Female Writers

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Abstract: Since the turn of the new century, the literary works of post-80s female writers have matured significantly, with their social perspectives broadening in both scope and depth. However, existing research remains insufficient. This paper focuses on the novels of post-80s female writers such as Sun Pin, Zhang Yiwei, and Di An, exploring how their intergenerational relationships narratives employ strategies like disease metaphors, spatial tensions, and non-traditional family structures to present three key themes: intergenerational trauma, intergenerational conflict, and intergenerational reconstruction. Disease symbols not only manifest as symptoms of intergenerational trauma but also point to collective cultural memories. Micro-space imagery, through temporal and spatial compression, becomes a battleground for intergenerational power dynamics. Meanwhile, the "family experiments" with atypical family structures break away from traditional intergenerational narrative paradigms, deconstructing patriarchal family ethics and constructing narratives that emphasize female subjectivity. These works not only provide contemporary literature with a fresh female perspective and aesthetic paradigm but also offer a significant literary framework for understanding the transformation of intergenerational relationships in modern society.

Keywords: Post-80s Female Writers, Intergenerational Relationships, Feminism, Family Experiments

1. Introduction

As an essential component of contemporary Chinese literature, the novelistic works of post-80s female writers have evolved over two decades, shifting from early youth narratives to profound engagements with social realities. Their themes have expanded to include marriage, family relationships, urbanization, modernity's dilemmas, and the spiritual alienation of contemporary individuals, deepening their realist tendencies. However, existing research on these writers often remains confined to topics such as youth writing, body writing, and female narratives. Some scholars, like Wang Xinting, have begun to explore the transformations in their thematic and aesthetic approaches, as seen in her study New Trends in Family Novels by Post-80s Female Writers, which highlights innovations in character portrayal, daily life depictions, and value exploration [1]. Similarly, Han Xudong's Writing Family Trauma Memories and Emotional Identity in Growth

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Narratives delves into the representation, causes, aesthetic traits, and emotional ethics embedded in the family trauma narratives of post-80s female writers, while also pointing out narrative biases [2].

Amidst the ongoing social transformation, the nuclearization and atomization of family structures have led to a multidimensional reconstruction of intergenerational relationships. As witnesses and participants of this transitional era, post-80s female writers have observed the disintegration of patriarchal family structures and the significant shifts in family concepts regarding blood ties, ethics, and intergenerational relationships. They not only grapple with the anxiety and confusion stemming from the erosion of traditional ethics but also feel compelled to narrate their experiences due to a sense of voicelessness. This paper examines the works of Sun Pin, Zhang Yiwei, and Di An, analyzing how their intergenerational narratives employ disease metaphors, spatial tensions, and non-traditional family structures to reveal themes of intergenerational trauma, conflict, and reconstruction, thereby reflecting the emerging female subjectivity and emotional structures of a new generation.

2. Disease as metaphor: the manifestation of intergenerational trauma

In contemporary literature's ongoing exploration of intergenerational relationships, female writers of the post-80s generation have carved out a unique narrative path, using "disease" as a key to interpreting intergenerational trauma. Characters in their works often emerge with some form of physical or psychological ailment, which serves not merely as a bodily anomaly but as a coded metaphor for intergenerational trauma. The hidden scars of individuals within the familial generational chain are translated into visible symptoms of disease, bridging the gap from psychological repression to literary representation. In Freudian discourse, "trauma" primarily refers to psychological rather than physical wounds, as defined in his collaborative work with Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*: "Any experience that induces fear, anxiety, shame, or mental suffering constitutes trauma." [3] Intergenerational trauma emphasizes the transmission of trauma across generations, not only directly between parents and children but also across multiple generations. It suggests that "the impact of traumatic events does not end with the individuals who directly experience them but extends to significant others within that environment." [4] In their works, female writers assign diseases with varying metaphorical or symbolic meanings to characters across different generational coordinates. These physical ailments, with their explicit symptoms, transform the implicit intergenerational trauma into tangible, visible signs.

In the cultural coding of disease, the illnesses afflicting the younger generation often manifest as chronic, long-term conditions with a certain degree of concealment. For instance, in Zhang Yueran's *The Feast of the Commoners*, the only daughter, Yuan Jiaqiao, is perpetually plagued by herpes, which metaphorically represents her unresolved past. The herpes, described as "a vortex of past events," erupts periodically, "like a strand of silk brushing her nose, eyelids, ears, and lips, lingering and swirling without pause, causing irritation and itchiness but not death." [5] The root of this ailment lies in the prolonged pressure of intimate relationships, an inescapable past, and recurring psychological trauma. In Zhang Yueran's *The Experiment*, the only daughter, Xinni, suffered from breast lobular hyperplasia due to prolonged depression and ultimately died suddenly of a heart attack. The author does not delve into the specifics of Xinni's illness, which is instead interwoven into the narrative through fragmented recollections. In the face of Xinni's "illness," both her family and Xinni herself remain in a state of prolonged silence and confusion. "Breast lobular hyperplasia" and "heart disease" are constructed as metaphors for repression and muteness. In *The Feast of the Commoners*, the only son, Xiaomao, is also depicted as physically weak from childhood, a shared experience of illness that draws him closer to Yuan Jiaqiao and sparks their affection. Xiaomao's physical frailty mirrors his mental weakness, stemming from his overbearing mother's indulgence and control, as

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well as his unconscious imitation of his father's "weakness, indecision, and helplessness" in front of his wife [5]. Xiaomao's physical weakness thus serves as a metaphor for his spiritual cowardice.

In their writings on intergenerational relationships, post-80s female writers exhibit an extraordinary fascination with mental illness, particularly in their portrayal of the older generation. With the advancement of modern medicine and society's increasing emphasis on mental health, previously overlooked or trivialized psychological and mental disorders have been more precisely named and defined, offering a fresh perspective and narrative space for depicting the mental states of the older generation. In *The Willow Monk*, Sun Pin meticulously details the process of Ni Hui's mother developing depression and insomnia, including the symptoms of her illness, the diagnostic process, and the side effects of the treatment. After being diagnosed with depression, the elderly woman expresses a sense of relief and even joy— "When Ni Hui approached, her mother looked up, half in surprise and half in grievance, and said, 'So I have depression. I actually have depression.' Her tone was as if she had just won the lottery jackpot. She couldn't understand how such an extraordinary illness had fallen upon her." [6] From a childhood marked by the loss of both parents to an unhappy marriage that forced her to leave her homeland, Ni Hui's mother had long been trapped in a state of repression and pain. This emotional suppression found no outlet—when her mother cried out, Ni Hui, like her father, remained silent. These underlying factors ultimately led to her mother's insomnia and depression. The mother's diagnosis of depression brought her a strange sense of relief as if her long suffering and misery seemed to have finally been taken seriously because of this extraordinary name for her illness. Yet, despite consuming countless medications, the mother showed no signs of improvement. Ni Hui, seemingly healthy, often fell into a state of pathological self-repression, unable to express her emotions through proper communication. She probably didn't even realise herself that she was in the midst of anxiety and depression. The root cause of their illnesses lies in the pathological family patterns and intergenerational relationships — "There was an unspoken understanding between her, her mother, and her father: expressing emotions seemed like a shameful act." [6] As long as this pathological intergenerational cycle remains unbroken, the illnesses can never be cured.

In different stories, the "diseases" afflicting characters across generations carry varying metaphorical and symbolic meanings on the surface, but at a deeper level, they collectively serve as metaphors for intergenerational trauma. First of all, the illnesses of the parent generation often find continuation in their children. In other words, traumatic events leave psychological or behavioral impacts on the older generation, causing them to "fall ill," and these effects are unconsciously passed down to their descendants, who inherit similar "diseases" and exhibit analogous symptoms. In Sun Pin's *The Willow Monk*, Ni Hui's mother falls into a state of depression, insomnia, and memory loss due to the loss of her parents at a young age, an unhappy marriage, and the loneliness of being far from home. Yet, Ni Hui herself frequently experiences emotional instability, irritability, exhaustion, and a sense of repressed pain. At the same time, Ni Hui is forced to inherit her parents' shame in expressing emotions, which the author metaphorically describes as "an internal disability," symbolizing the muteness within intimate relationships [6]. In Zhang Yueran's *The Unseen Sister*, Qiao Lin and Xu Yan's parents descend into poor mental states due to the fallout of a family planning violation, with their lives dominated by alcoholism and constant quarrels. Qiao Lin, the sister who remained with her parents and enjoyed their favor, becomes mired in depression and despair after endless attempts to mediate their conflicts and fight for their rights. After giving birth, she ultimately chooses to end her own life.

Second, certain characteristics of diseases align with the features of intergenerational trauma, making them apt metaphors for such trauma. In Zhang Yiwei's *The Feast of the Commoners*, the narrative spans three generations, clearly illustrating the intergenerational trauma experienced by the protagonist, Yuan Jiaqiao, as a member of the younger generation. One source of trauma is the

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patriarchal, male-preferential ethical model of traditional extended families. Yuan Jiaqiao's father grew up in a three-generation household with six siblings, and this traditional family structure was passed down to his daughter. The father blames his divorce on Yuan Jiaqiao, completely disregarding his own failures as a husband and father, and even negates his daughter's worth. Another source is the parents' neglect of their children, particularly their emotional and psychological needs, leaving the children in a state of loneliness, coldness, and self-isolation, creating a phenomenon of "pseudo-orphans." Yuan Jiaqiao's father, caught in the middle of his siblings, "had a somewhat illegitimate feel, existing on the fringes," and was born colorblind, a "defect" that made him disliked by his parents [5]. Yuan Jiaqiao's mother also experienced neglect during her upbringing— "Your grandmother was so busy; just feeding us was enough. She didn't have the energy to care about whether I was happy." [5] Both parents, as victims of emotional deprivation themselves, were unable to provide their daughter with sufficient care or a healthy intimate relationship. The intergenerational trauma she inherits from her parents is as difficult to eradicate as the herpes on her body, and the complex, endless suffering it brings mirrors the impact of intergenerational trauma on her life. The herpes serves as an external manifestation of the intergenerational trauma she endures, a bodily metaphor for this inherited suffering. The root of the "herpes" must be traced across generations, as the intergenerational trauma continues to pass through three generations, seemingly becoming an incurable disease.

Moreover, from the perspective of "disease" and "cure," the disease metaphors in the works of post-80s female writers rarely correspond to "cure" metaphors. The inability to effectively treat these diseases serves as a metaphor for the irreparable nature of intergenerational trauma. In Sun Pin's *The Willow Monk*, Ni Hui's mother never recovers from her depression and ultimately dies by homicide. Similarly, in Zhang Yueran's *The Unseen Sister*, Qiao Lin eventually drowns herself in depression and despair. As Susan Sontag observes in *Illness as Metaphor*, "Illnesses have always been used as metaphors to enliven charges that a society was corrupt or unjust" [7]. "Modern disease metaphors specify an ideal of society's well-being, analogized to physical health, that is as frequently anti-political as it is a call for a new political order." [7] Family and society are mirror images of each other, and the unresolved intergenerational trauma passed through families affects the overall "health" of society, creating a vicious cycle. This reflects the anxieties and concerns of post-80s female writers.

The literary strategy of encoding intergenerational trauma as disease metaphors provides a path for diagnosing the psychological unconscious of contemporary individuals. First, this approach transforms the hidden nature of intergenerational trauma into tangible sensations of itchiness, pain, or chaotic dysfunction, externalized through specific symptoms such as bleeding, pain, or weight gain. Second, disease places individuals from different generational coordinates in a unique relational environment, magnifying the details of their interactions and highlighting the characteristics of each generation—coexisting harm and warmth, awkward intimacy, and misunderstandings caused by silence, which lead to conflicts and friction. This becomes an effective means of portraying the multi-dimensional images of intergenerational characters in modern society. A prime example is Sun Pin's *The Willow Monk*, in which Ni Hui decides to drive her mother back to their hometown after her mother's diagnosis of depression. The tensions between them during the journey are amplified by the mother's "depression." Furthermore, "Today, more and more people are entering a state of 'sub-health,' where many physical and mental illnesses are invisible but do not heal on their own. How to uncover the new diseases of our era and make them potential resources for writing has become an important issue and a new entry point for post-80s writers and contemporary literature as a whole." [8] The post-80s female writers' exploration of new diseases undoubtedly achieves a defamiliarization effect, offering readers a sense of aesthetic novelty. However, this is not a deliberate pursuit of sensationalism in narrative but carries more profound real-world significance. In the new

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era, the traditional family structures of extended households are gradually disintegrating, replaced by nuclear family models. While the external forms of tradition are being dismantled, the traumas of the older generation continue to unconsciously pass down to the younger generation, becoming festering wounds in intimate relationships. This is the alarm bell that post-80s female writers are sounding for society.

3. Spatial tensions: the compression of intergenerational conflict

Despite the diversification of family structures and the atomization of family units in the modern era, which has freed intergenerational interactions from the confines of a single, fixed "home" space, individuals from different generations still rely on specific spaces as points of connection. The primary socialization of the younger generation continues to take place within the family space dominated by their parents or even earlier generations. Post-80s female writers deliberately create spatial tension to compress intergenerational conflict scenarios, vividly portraying the suppression and rebellion of the younger generation. The tiny spatial imagery as a miniature condenses the complex intergenerational interaction situation, creating a special kind of spatial tension that amplifies the conflicts between generations. When the younger generation attempts to "escape" from the parental-controlled home, they often find themselves entangled in intricate and irreconcilable conflicts, further intensifying this tension.

The "dinner table" serves as a significant spatial metaphor in the works of post-80s female writers, often representing the miniature of intergenerational conflict. "Miniature is one of the refuges of greatness." [9] As Gaston Bachelard suggests, a miniature is not merely a physical reduction but a condensation of the complexity of the external world into a miniature space through imagination. In traditional family novels, multiple generations typically coexist under one roof, symbolizing grand family structures and histories. However, in the contemporary context, generations often live apart, reuniting only during special occasions like holidays or important family discussions, which are frequently centered around the dinner table. This small space becomes a stage for intricate intergenerational struggles. For example, in Zhang Yiwei's *The Feast of the Commoners,* the family gathers for a "family feast" while waiting for the grandfather to pass away. Yuan Jiaqiao, an outsider in the family, coldly observes the hypocrisy and indifference of the older generation and the patriarchal, male-centric ethical norms that have plagued the family for generations. Grandfather's sons and daughters crowded in front of his deathbed to play mahjong, and the only young grandson was surrounded by the family as a "superstar," pointing at Grandfather's nose and asking: "Great-grandpa, when are you going to die? I want to eat mantis shrimp." [5] The limited space of the dinner table confines the participants' words and actions, leaving room for imagination and interpretation, thereby heightening the complexity and tension of intergenerational confrontations.

The dinner table, with its combination of colors, aromas, and flavors, engages multiple senses, making it a more evocative space for family interactions than other domestic settings. As Gaston Bachelard notes in *The Poetics of Space*, "For the sense of taste or smell, the problem might be even more interesting than for the sense of vision, since sight curtails the dramas it witnesses. But a whiff of perfume, or even the slightest odor, can create an entire environment in the world of the imagination." [9] In *The Feast of the Commoners*, the conflict between Yuan Jiaqiao and her father is often subtle, with their complex emotional entanglements hidden in the steam rising from the dishes. During her father's remarriage banquet, Yuan Jiaqiao consumes all the cold dishes, feeling the loss of paternal love. In contrast, her conflict with her boyfriend Xiaomao's parents is more direct. During a dinner with Xiaomao's family, Yuan Jiaqiao feels isolated and uneasy in the face of their arrogance and rudeness. "I remember a few plain cold dishes bubbling with dry ice and smoke. That would have been the fashionable way to eat them, and an old cook like my father couldn't cook them like that. Our dishes were all really hot or really cold. There was no mist between real and fake." [5] She

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despises their cold, condescending demeanor, symbolized by the dry ice smoke. But faced with this unfamiliar generational relationship, she was in a complete hand-wringing panic, unable to resist.

The "house" is another crucial spatial metaphor in the works of post-80s female writers. With the acceleration of urbanization and their own life experiences, these writers often set their stories in large cities. Zhang Yiwei's *The Feast of the Commoners* and *Family Experiments* focus on the lives of ordinary people in Shanghai's worker communities, while Zhang Yueran's *The Unseen Sister* shifts between Taian and Beijing, and Di An's *Dear Honey* unfolds in Beijing. In the concrete jungles of these cities, limited living spaces make intergenerational conflicts unavoidable, with cramped quarters amplifying the tension between generations. "In the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul." [9] The house is supposed to be a shelter for individuals, providing them with warmth and security, but in the narratives of post-80s female writers, the two generations who share the space of the house are often caught in a situation of disorder, uneasiness, alienation and indifference. On the one hand, high housing prices and limited space in big cities have made the argument over "house" a key issue in intergenerational conflicts. The "house" has been alienated into a possessed asset rather than a haven for the body and soul. In Zhang Yiwei's *The Summer of Chunli*, the disputes between Chunli and her daughter revolve around the house. Similarly, in *The Feast of the Commoners*, the demolition of Yuan Jiaqiao's grandfather's old house becomes a major event affecting three generations, sparking conflicts among relatives. On the other hand, the lack of emotional and financial support from parents in "abnormal" family structures further weakens the home's role as a sanctuary. In Zhang Yiwei's *The Slowest is Memory*, Xia Bingbing, forced to endure the sounds of her mother and stepfather's intimacy in their cramped home since the age of thirteen, feels the erosion of her personal space. In Zhang Yueran's *The Unseen Sister*, Qiao Lin, living with constantly quarreling parents, descends into depression and despair, finding solace only in her sister Xu Yan's apartment.

In the works of post-80s female writers, the "house" often symbolizes suppression and discipline. As Foucault suggests, "In the first instance, discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space."[10] This concept of disciplinary power applies to the home as well. Parents control the allocation of space, and until the younger generation achieves financial independence, they are forced to adapt to the home and submit to the authority of their parents. In *The Feast of the Commoners*, Yuan Jiaqiao endures the invasion of her personal space by her stepfather, who occupies the sofa at night, his snoring preventing her from sleeping. The sofa was originally set aside as Yuan Jiaqiao's father's space, her stepfather occupies the sofa in place of her father. From sight to sound, Yuan Jiaqiao senses that the inherent space of the family is being encroached upon, and that her family is slowly falling apart. Yet in this cramped one-family room, Yuan Jiaqiao has always slept in a big bed with her mother, with no space of her own. This means that she doesn't actually physically occupy territory in this home and doesn't have the power to speak out even if she feels her space is being violated. In these narratives, the "house" becomes a cage of control and discipline, and if the younger generation cannot escape, they are doomed to tragic outcomes. In Zhang Yiwei's *The Slowest is Memory*, Xia Bingbing aspires to follow her stepbrother's example and escape her mother's control, but lacking financial resources and survival skills, she has to sink into the unhealthy family environment. In Zhang Yueran's *The Unseen Sister*, the younger sister Xu Yan, abandoned by her parents due to overpopulation, succeeds in life, becoming a TV host and owning an apartment in Beijing, while the older sister Qiao Lin, trapped with her quarreling parents in Taian, fails her college entrance exam, becomes pregnant out of wedlock, and ultimately drowns herself. Through these contrasting fates, the post-80s female writers suggest that without escaping the alienated home, the younger generation will never gain individual agency, rebuild their inner order, or change their own and their children's destinies.

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The "house" is both a symbol of power and a battleground for intergenerational authority. In the "house", where parents hold the dominant voice, the younger generation's rebellion and escape represent a struggle for individual agency and a rejection of parental control. However, in the writings of post-80s female writers, this rebellion is fraught with contradictions. On one hand, the younger generation feels oppressed in the parent-dominated home and seeks to break free to construct a healthier, warmer domestic space. On the other hand, the children's generation tends to experience setbacks in the reconstruction process due to the lack of a proper model from their parents' generation. The realities of life leave them feeling suppressed and self-doubting—their escape from the home does not necessarily signify successful rebellion, and they fear they might repeat their parents' mistakes. This leaves them torn between determination and hesitation, between leaving and longing for the past.

In *The Feast of the Commoners*, Yuan Jiaqiao finally leaves the cramped apartment after starting university, no longer enduring her stepfather's snoring and sleepless nights. Her longing for a complete and warm home leads her to see Xiaomao as a substitute for her absent father— "He is rescuing me, replacing my father to stay by my side." [5] She hastily marries Xiaomao, escaping the one-room apartment, only to fall into the same cycle of marital failure as her parents. However, this irreconcilable contradiction does not mean that post-80s female writers have a pessimistic and negative attitude towards the younger generation. At the end of *The Feast of the Commoners*, after an abortion and serious illness, Yuan Jiaqiao breaks free from her failed marriage and gradually reconciles with her parents. The abrupt ending hints at new beginnings and hope— "Many precious memories remain in my heart, like moist soil, still nurturing new life." [5] In Zhang Yueran's *The Unseen Sister*, after her sister Qiao Lin's suicide and her parents' legal battles, Xu Yan cuts her hair, ends her unsuitable relationship, and moves forward with her sister's daughter into an uncertain future. "She has no confidence in herself, but she can feel the warmth in her hands. Some changes are happening to her, and she has more patience than before. Maybe, she thinks, now she has a chance to become someone else." [11] The younger generation, lost and struggling in their contradictions, also finds rebirth within them. The open-ended conclusions of these characters offer a glimpse of hope for breaking free from the cycle of fate.

4. "Family experiments": the inner theme of rebellion and exploration

In the works of post-80s female writers, intergenerational relationships are often embedded in more diverse, novel, complex, and even absurd family structures. In non-traditional family setups such as single-parent families, blended families, and families without blood ties, intergenerational relationships become more intricate, and generational conflicts are magnified. These innovative "family experiments" reflect, on one hand, the younger generation's deconstruction and rebellion against traditional family structures bound by blood ties, conventional family ethics, and power dynamics. On the other hand, they showcase the bold experiments and explorations undertaken by the younger generation in the face of unprecedented societal changes and rapid development in the new era. Simultaneously, post-80s female writers write more from a female perspective about intergenerational relationships and women's real-life situations in the context of the current era, which, to a certain extent, improves the aphasia of women in the traditional narratives of intergenerational relationships.

Post-80s female writers have deconstructed the traditional family structure centered on blood ties and, through daring "family experiments," explored new family models. Notably, their portrayal of resistance and deconstruction often avoids intense conflicts or arguments, instead adopting an observer's perspective to document the collapse of tradition. Their marginalised status in the family as "daughters" grants them a detached, almost cold, observer's viewpoint. In Zhang Yiwei's *The Feast of the Commoners*, Yuan Jiaqiao, as the only daughter, occupies the third generation in her

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family. During family gatherings, though she is a participant, her marginalized position allows her to withdraw from them, and in terms of her inner perspective, she belongs to the onlookers. On the one hand, her growing sense of individuality and lack of belonging to the family drives her to consciously choose the role of an observer. On the other hand, her status as a "daughter" relegates her to the margins, rendering her powerless to truly "participate." She is both an active and passive observer. In the old house near Shanghai's self-chiming clock, Yuan Jiaqiao coldly observes the farce at her grandfather's deathbed, even with a hint of schadenfreude. Her grandfather, once a figure of authority, lies on his deathbed, his dignity stripped away. "Auntie would feed him water every twenty minutes, absentmindedly spilling it all over his chest, with no one to wipe it. His soiled pants went unchanged."[5] The room is filled with relatives waiting for him to die. They play mahjong, the noise drowning out her grandmother's soft cries. They set up a round table for mahjong and serve eight exquisite cold dishes. "But we had to eat first before we could continue waiting for him to die." [5] Amid the clamor, the grandfather lies in silence. The first-person narrative voice records these events with a calmness bordering on indifference, laced with irony. Yuan Jiaqiao's observations underscore that blood ties alone cannot guarantee emotional bonds.

In the evolution of intergenerational relationships, while the older generation emphasizes the importance of blood ties and structural integrity, the younger generation focuses more on the emotional core and intrinsic essence of "home." Post-80s female writers boldly conduct "family experiments." In the preface to *Family Experiments*, Zhang Yiwei explicitly states: "*Family Experiments*, tell stories of people without blood ties living together, so these stories are about love, friendship, and temporary love, temporary friendship." [12] This fluid, often accidental family arrangement replaces the traditional notion of a stable family. In Di An's *Dear Honey*, single mother Cui Lianyi and her nanny, Auntie Su, raise her daughter, Honey, together. Though Auntie Su shares no blood ties with either Cui Lianyi or Honey, she becomes an indispensable part of this small family. "For eighteen-month-old Honey, I work from early morning till late at night, like a father. Her real mother is actually Auntie Su." [13] In Zhang Yiwei's *Addicted to Scabs*, after Pu Yue's father is imprisoned and Jin Jie's husband moves to Japan, Pu Yue's mother, out of sympathy, takes Jin Jie in. The three of them form a family.

Beyond families without blood ties, blended families are another preferred setting for exploring intergenerational relationships in the works of post-80s female writers. In *The Feast of the Commoners*, Yuan Jiaqiao's parents both go through the process of "divorce and remarriage," leading to a series of generational frictions. From Yuan Jiaqiao's perspective, the author highlights the issue of children's "silence" in blended families. The older generation fails to recognize that children, as family members, should have a voice in the "reblending" process, and their thoughts deserve respect. In contrast, in Di An's *Dear Honey*, single mother Cui Lianyi and Xiong Mobei approach the process of blending their families with greater caution. Their parents, friends, and even nanny Auntie Su participate in the decision-making, assessing the feasibility of the relationship. Cui Lianyi's three-year-old daughter, Honey, holds the ultimate say in the "reblending" matter. The author, from the younger generation's perspective, proposes a more ideal approach to handling "divorce and remarriage." Additionally, there are single-parent families like Mother Song Huaixiu and daughter Gege in Sun Pin's *The Holy Infant*, and single households like Xun Qi and Xin Ni in Zhang Yiwei's *Family Experiments*.

The writings of post-80s female writers also reflect a rebellion against traditional family ethics and power structures, most notably the resistance to and deconstruction of "patriarchy." "In the family context, patricide and the absence of the father are the most typical forms of rebellion. On one hand, it signifies the decline of authority and the emergence of truth; on the other, it foreshadows the fragmentation and end of the family." [1] Post-80s female writers often weaken or erase the "father" figure to explore the theme of patricide. First, they portray fathers as weak or incompetent, with

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mothers often being the stronger, more resilient figures, creating a "strong mother, weak father" dynamic. In *The Feast of the Commoners*, Yuan Jiaqiao's father is described as "weak" four times. Three years after the divorce, he stops providing financial support, leaving Yuan Jiaqiao's mother to shoulder the burden alone. She becomes a hardworking factory worker, embodying resilience in the face of adversity. The contrast between the father's "weakness" and the mother's "strength" is striking. Second, fathers are often absent, either through death or ambiguity. In *Addicted to Scabs*, Pu Yue's father is absent, only mentioned as having "gone to jail," leaving a vague and unflattering impression. In contrast, Pu Yue's mother is depicted as a strong, capable single parent. In Sun Pin's *The Willow Monk*, the father is already dead, appearing only in the mother-daughter dialogues or the daughter Ni Hui's memories. In Zhang Yiwei's *I Really Don't Want to Come*, Luo Qingqing's father is ambiguous, with the actual interaction between father and daughter only at the end of the novel, and the rest of the information about the "father" only slightly revealed in Luo Qingqing's memories. Luo Qingqing's memories of her parents' quarrels and the difficulty and embarrassment of asking her father for money all reveal her disappointment and hidden pain in her father. By diminishing the authority and dominance of the "father" figure, post-80s female writers rebel against the traditional family ethics and power structures centered on "patriarchy."

In contrast to "patricide," post-80s female writers also address the historical marginalization of women in traditional narratives of intergenerational relationships. Drawing from personal and generational experiences, they often adopt the "daughter's" perspective to explore their psychological states, behaviors, and everyday lives. In *The Feast of the Commoners*, Yuan Jiaqiao's first-person narrative reveals her inner pain through detailed psychological descriptions while maintaining a controlled sense of distance and detachment like an observer. Sun Pin's *The Willow Monk* revolves around the internal focalization of Ni Hui, and in the course of the narrative, Ni Hui's memories of her mother peeking into her diary in middle school, her parents' midnight quarrels, and her conflicted and painful inner activities of wanting to apologize to her mother but never being able to do so are naturally interspersed.

However, post-80s female writers do not limit themselves to a single narrative perspective. Instead, they explore the multifaceted identities of contemporary women, enriching the discourse on their condition of living. In Di An's *Dear Honey*, Cui Lianyi's identity encompasses multiple roles: single mother, lover, friend, and producer. She embodies both feminine warmth and professional rationality. This multidimensionality not only creates a rich character but also highlights the complex challenges faced by modern women. The lack of understanding from her parents adds to her psychological burden, sometimes even outweighing the practical pressures of finances and parenting. She unconsciously feels ashamed of her identity as a single mother, and she can be hard on herself for it and is reluctant to ask her parents for help when she is struggling financially. In the intergenerational narratives of post-80s female writers, women are no longer merely silent links between generations. Their multifaceted identities are given fuller attention, transforming them from passive "objects of observation" to active "observers." Drawing from their own experiences, post-80s female writers reconstruct the discourse of female identity.

5. Conclusion

The intergenerational relationships narratives of post-80s female writers intricately weave together the growing pains of individuals with intergenerational trauma, while keenly capturing the new changes and conflicts in generational relationships during a period of societal transformation. In terms of character portrayal, the "illnesses" depicted in characters from different generations may carry varying metaphorical and symbolic meanings on the surface, but at a deeper level, they collectively serve as metaphors for intergenerational trauma. The modern transformation of external family structures cannot sever the intergenerational transmission of emotional wounds, as the root

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cause lies in the collective cultural unconscious where these traumas are embedded. From the perspective of environmental settings, post-80s female writers consciously construct spatial tensions to compress scenarios of generational conflict, vividly portraying the suppression and rebellion of the younger generation. Here, micro-space imagery acts as a miniature, encapsulating complex intergenerational interactions and amplifying the conflicts within confined physical settings. At the same time, when the younger generation attempts to "escape" as a form of rebellion against parental authority, they often find themselves entangled in intricate and irreconcilable contradictions, sometimes even falling into the paradox of reliving past dilemmas. Thematically, post-80s female writers explore the rebellion and exploration of the younger generation through innovative "family experiments," while also addressing contemporary generational relationships and the authentic lived experiences of women from a female perspective, thereby enriching traditional narratives of intergenerational relationships with a feminine voice.

However, the intergenerational relationships narratives of post-80s female writers still grapple with issues inherited from earlier youth-oriented writing, such as the over-indulgence in individual experience, the single character type, and the solidification of the narrative mode. The somewhat forced reconciliations and understanding at the end often render the rebellion of the younger generation hollow. Uncontrolled emotional outbursts and oversimplified treatments of real-world problems weaken the depth and impact of their narratives in addressing the symptoms of the times. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the fresh perspectives, new reflections, and unique voices they bring to the table. It is also evident that their focus on societal issues has broadened and deepened, and their creative work continues to evolve and mature. Their relentless exploration and moving forward with the times deserve our continued attention.

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