

Feminism and the Development of Chinese and Foreign Feminine Literature

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Abstract: This article explores the synergy between feminism and historical materialism, with a foundation in Friedrich Engels' assertion that a comprehensive grasp of human history is essential for historical materialism. It emphasizes that historical materialism, to be truly comprehensive, must extend beyond the confines of class society's historical process and encompass the entirety of human history. The article further addresses the internal contradictions within the feminist movement, particularly in relation to the roles of "housewife" and "prostitute," highlighting their impact on the feminist narrative and female group cohesion. Engels' critique of the "housewife" role is examined, emphasizing the need to redefine domestic labor as a public domain contribution and the prerequisite for women's liberation. It concludes by underscoring the urgency of overcoming these dilemmas, advocating for the development of social productivity, and fostering ongoing collaboration among diverse feminist groups to navigate contemporary challenges.

Keywords: feminism, historical materialism, housewife

1. Introduction

With the continuous development brought to society by the industrial revolution, people began to pay attention to the creation of spiritual life while ensuring the abundance of material life. Women's literature developed under this background: they are literature of a female nature or written by women, or they can be literature that focuses on women's destiny, emotions, and lives based on gender subject consciousness and gender perspective expressed by female writers. Also, it is a text of universal significance to human beings, including women's survival. However, female literature is still a proposition that needs to be explored and improved.

1.1. Definition and Background of Feminism

A feminist is an individual who advocates for social, political, and economic equality among all genders. This social theory aims to attain parity between men and women. The feminist movement is a social movement that crosses class and race lines. Feminist movements in each culture are unique and raise issues for women in that society.

1.2. The Development of Feminism in Western Countries

The most important catalyst for the rise of women's rights was the industrialization process. The rapid development of capitalist industry in Britain, France and other countries provided economic conditions for the emergence of the women's movement. In the 1830s and 1840s, Britain, France and other countries entered the stage of great development of machine industry, and the factory system with large machines as the main body replaced the workshop and handicraft system, the capitalist mode of production has occupied the dominant position, and the social productive forces have been rapid and tremendous development. At the same time, under the influence of the industrial revolution, advanced women broke through the feudal bondage since the Middle Ages and entered the society [1], having the same social weight as men. However, the new patriarchal politicians still despised women, so they began to fight for equal rights.

1.3. The development of Chinese Feminism

Since the Hundred Days' Reform and the May Fourth Movement at the end of the 19th century, women's rights began to attract social attention. Since then, China's feminist movement has been continuously promoted and deepened after experiencing development under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the KMT. After the founding of New China, the Chinese government introduced a series of policies to protect women's rights and interests, such as the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests, which provided legal protection for women's equal rights and interests. With the deepening of reform and opening up, the status of women has been further improved, and the opportunities for women to participate in economic, political, cultural and other fields have gradually increased. As the book "Surface of History" says: In the collective memory of Chinese women in the future era, the historical and cultural changes experienced by our nation at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries must be an inexhaustible moment of reflection and aftertaste: The silent woman who has been crouching in the center of history for more than two thousand years was ejected and pushed out of the earth at this moment, and stepped on the yellow and cloudy horizon of our history for the first time." As a female work in the new era, the author believes that women in feudal China do not have their own history [2]. They are either tools of their native family or property of their husband's family. Talented women who want to be heard must speak out through the social status of a male relative (father or husband). As a result, they have long lived below the surface of history. Although women have gained more respect in the future, female independence is not equal to gender equality. For women, it is more important to find their own identity and identify with it, so as to be mentally independent.

2. The Current State of Feminism

2.1. Western Countries (America)

Women's Studies in the 1990s no longer takes gender as the only subject, but advocates multiple themes, including ethnicity, race, class, sexual orientation, etc. Women's Studies emphasizes women's multiple identities and pays attention to the relationship between gender identity and other identities. At the same time, starting from the radical feminist consciousness-raising group activities in the 1960s, American feminism has not given up on this activity for more than 20 years, but has promoted it to mainstream American society: consciousness-raising group activities have started from the feminist kitchen and living room transferred to classrooms in American colleges and universities and middle schools. The content and form of consciousness-raising activities have undergone great changes. Today's women's studies must not only raise male and female students' awareness of gender discrimination, but also improve students' ability to rationally analyze and criticize all inequalities.

The feminist movement has not died [3], but, together with progressive forces, continues to promote the development of justice and progressive causes in American society in the ongoing struggle with conservative forces in American society.

2.2. The Chinese

In the 1980s, with the grand historical background of people's ideological emancipation and the integration of Western modernism, female writers first realized the existence of women and examined women as a living group. Since then, the female theme has truly been fully publicized. They use women's own experience to describe women's temperament, pursuits, women's pain and a series of difficulties caused by women's gender, creating a kind of female consciousness. By the early 1990s, ideas of ideological liberation, freedom of speech, and humanitarianism were prevalent. In such an overall environment, feminist thought has grown healthily [4]. At the same time, with government support and subsidies, Chinese women have also begun to actively safeguard their rights.

3. The impact of women's literature on gender equality on society and culture

3.1. Cultural Impact of Female Literature

3.1.1. Chinese Literature

We can notice that in traditional Chinese literature, at least in the classical literature we often read, the image of women is either missing or has a very personal character. In ancient times, women mostly lived by caring for their husbands and teaching their children. This makes the heroic female image more prominent. *Mulan Ci* is an outstanding example of this kind of character. The poem mainly tells the story of Hua Mulan [5], a traditional Chinese woman who disguises herself as a man and joins the army in place of her father. She killed countless enemies on the battlefield, returned triumphantly, and finally returned to the story of home. In the poetry content, the image of Hua Mulan shows a romantic color, and the spirit of bravery, strength, benevolence and filial piety makes her have a strong character appeal. This feat of serving for her father, although there is inevitably too much respect for the supremacy of the patriarchy, but Mulan's courage and determination still set up a perfect female image for later generations, and also proved that women's intelligence and courage are not inferior to men. In de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, she argues that "the so-called natural sex is not in fact born, and people's gender distinctions are not born, but are given and imposed." Hua Mulan represents women in ancient society who do not want to be tied down (in fact, this concept is very similar to modern feminist thinking), so the poem constantly emphasizes "truth and self", so that Hua Mulan can realize self-value in the process of military. The second type of Chinese female image is mainly hard-working, intelligent and family-oriented. [6] "*Le Yangzi's Wife*" has shaped a wise and noble personality of the female image, her words and deeds are flashing the light of wisdom. Faced with the ill-gotten gains Wen Fu brought back, she rebuked him, saying that an honest man could not accept the financial gifts given to him by others. When her husband wavered in his will, she discouraged him by saying that learning was a cumulative thing, and that to give up halfway was like cutting off the silk that was being woven. So Le Yangzi went out to study again and did not return home for seven years. Yue Yangzi's wife's heart and ambition put many men to shame before her. It is because of such a partner that Le Yangzi eventually succeeds in his studies.

The third female figure is usually faithful to love until death. The main content of many works describing women handed down from ancient times is the praise of love. For example, Liu Lanzhi in the article "*Peacock flies Southeast*", she is kind-hearted, diligent and thrifty, and has deep feelings with Jiao Zhongqing, but finally she can not escape the fate of being sent home. In the face of the ensuing misfortune, she did not yield to the feudal parental system and the ruling class, but used her

life to defend her promise of "being a flexible and strong woman and following her husband all her life." The reason for the enduring popularity of Liu Lanzhi's image lies in her interpretation of love. True love needs to be paid, even at the cost of life.

What is interesting, however, is that even though the female characters in classical Chinese works are usually dominated by personal charm, they are still essentially women of the old era. Mulan is not so much a brave person as a dutiful one, she is on the path to join the army for her father, which is not necessarily her own goal. Although Le Yangzi's wife is intelligent, she does not go out to study, but encourages her husband to study, which corresponds to the idea that "women only need to take care of the family". Liu Lanzhi's fate is also not necessarily tied to her husband. Their love is impressive, but the idea of "following her husband" [7] is still a reflection of women's lack of independent consciousness. To make matters worse, the situation of "ordinary Chinese women in the old society", which is never described in classical literature, is not optimistic.

Chronicles of Baiyangdian [8] is a work published in 1944 when Sun Li came to Yan 'an to study and work in Lu Xun Art Academy. It tells the story of ordinary women in Baiyangdian, led by the wife of Shui Sheng, who successfully led the enemy into the encirclement placed by their husband's army in the background of the intense Anti-Japanese War. The husband's words before he left are the first half of the novel "Chronicles of Baiyangdian" worthy of regret: "You must continue to progress, read, produce." ... "Don't fall behind in anything!" ... "Don't let the enemy traitors capture you alive. Catch him and fight him hard." The first two sentences are relatively polite instructions, and only the third sentence really reflects a husband's concern for the safety of his wife in enemy-occupied areas. There is no doubt that fighting the enemy is a glorious thing, but for the Shui Sheng's wife, the husband's tasks and responsibilities will not only put him in danger, but also force him to work hard to be strong in order to better bear the heavy responsibility of the family. At the same time, the book also reflects the various psychological activities of the Shui Sheng's wife, depicting a playful and tough woman.

In the history of local literature, Sun Li's works are certainly unique - through the detailed depiction and psychological analysis of women, exudes a tough and pure rural atmosphere. Although the author deliberately hid the darkness of the war and the suffering imposed on the people in his works, through these beautiful and elegant language arts, we can still feel the hidden worries of women in the society at that time, so that readers can experience a combination of "beautiful imagination" and "cruel reality" writing characteristics, so as to obtain lasting artistic charm. We can also see that the Chinese female characters of this period are still relatively conservative, but the difference is that the writers of this period began to pay attention to and describe their lives, and they also have their own ideas about life, rather than following the mission imposed on them by society.

It was not until the founding of New China that women truly began to be placed at the center of narratives in so-called "female literary works." For example, the short story "Red Beans" written by Zong Pu uses flashback to tell the story of the love tragedy between college student Jiang Mei and her lover Qi Hong on the eve of the liberation of Beijing due to their differences in life attitudes and political stances, thus showing how in the face of great changes in the times, The arduous and tortuous spiritual journey of a generation of young intellectuals. When Jiang Mei was growing up, revolutionary Xiao Su and boyfriend Qi Hong represented the two forces of revolution and love respectively, and they exerted completely opposite pulls on her. Xiao Su brought her into a whole new world, helping an innocent girl living in an ivory tower to enter the broad society. Qi Hong tried to bring her into a smaller world with the power of love and art. Different from the mainstream writing methods at the time, the author made the characters (especially women) more three-dimensional and complex. Different from the common image of a revolutionary, what Xiao Su gave Jiang Mei was not a pale idea, but comfort, knowledge and strength, bringing her into a new world through a kind of human care. As for Qi Hong, the author's exposure of his selfish and domineering nature is also

treated as a more complex process, rather than simply affixing a label based on class analysis [9]. This approach changes the flattening and labeling of character creation in literature, and at the same time allows people to have a clearer understanding of "the thinking of an independent woman."

In short, Chinese women's literature has been linked to "liberation" for a long time, pointing out the direction of struggle for all women in wars and turmoil. Even in the peaceful times that followed, the spirit contained in it still existed.

3.1.2. Foreign Literature

The emergence of British and American women's literature was marked by "A Room of One's Own" written by British writer Virginia Woolf in 1929. After the 1930s, with the development of society, the social status of women has changed. They gradually have rights that they did not have before, such as voting rights and property rights, and have free time to work. A large number of female writers have emerged. For example, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, and the famous female poet Emily Dickinson all lived in this period. [10] We are familiar with the works "Wuthering Heights", "Jane Eyre", "Pride and Prejudice", etc. were all produced during this period. These masterpieces are in no way inferior to male literary works. From these works, we can see the shining points of female humanity.

In British and American women's literature, most heroines have a common characteristic, which is independence, simplicity, and the courage to fight for their own rights. In "The Bluest Eye" [11] by the famous writer Toni Morrison, a large number of detailed descriptions are used to reflect the values of a little black girl Picoia Breedlowa's pursuit of independence. The novel takes place around 1940. The novel is written in the first person voice, that is, Kfontia McTeer in the text is Piccola's only friend. She is two years younger than Piccola. In a society where white people are absolutely dominant, Piccola, who is black, began to imagine that if she had a pair of eyes like Lesser and her skin was white, then her life would be better. She witnessed her father transform from a normal person into a thug as his dream was shattered. Her mother Pauline, who loved her dearly, entered an ordinary white family as a servant due to livelihood reasons. As the storyline progressed, the protagonist Piccola Breedlova also suffered many inhuman treatments. All these encounters caused Piccola to completely lose contact with reality and she went crazy. Piccola even believed that she did have a pair of blue eyes that were different from others, and she also imagined that she had a close friend who cherished her very much and always stayed by her side. The novel uses a lot of symbolism to reveal the twisted minds of people under the social system at that time, and also reveals the pursuit of independence and freedom of an ordinary girl.

Furthermore, most British and American female literary works emphasize that women should play an absolute dominant role in their own lives. Take "Gone with the Wind" [12] as an example. The setting of this novel is on the eve of the outbreak of the American Civil War. In a manor called Tara in Georgia, the protagonist Scarlett fell in love with Ashley, but Ashley chose his cousin. Melanie, Scarlett confessed her love to her, but was rejected by Ashley Wilkes. Later, the heroine Scarlett entered the wounded barracks and met the hero Rhett. The story revolves around the relationship between the two and the changes in the environment. The young Scarlett is willful and contented. During her three marriages, her inner world and spiritual life have also undergone a qualitative leap. By the end of the novel, she finally understands what she is pursuing in her life, but Scarlett also She has an unyielding character. Whether she is facing the death of her mother and father, the difficulties of life, or her daughter's fate, she is the strongest and most tenacious among those who have endured the same pain and hardship as her. The first to come out of pain and hardship. When Scarlett faced the scarred Tara Manor, her tenacity and strength allowed her, the eldest daughter in the family, to shoulder the burden of being a parent. At the end of the novel, the protagonist smiled and said: Tomorrow is another new day. It is not difficult to see that, unlike Chinese women's literature, the

main cultural contribution of Western women's literature is to portray the image of independent and freedom-seeking women, which has also become the goal pursued by women.

3.1.3. The social role of women's literature

Overall, women's literature has made society more aware of and concerned about feminism. However, they still have limitations. However, Feminism, published 20 years ago, did not think of female consciousness beyond gender. Instead, the author Li Yinhe believes that fighting for gender equality is to hope that the relationship between the sexes will become more harmonious and less conflicted, and that the world will become a better place. Despite their diversity, feminist theories remain highly consistent on one point: masculinity is neither "natural" nor eternal, it is man-made and can be changed. Only by truly recognizing the object of disintegration can feminist discussions be on the same wavelength and deepening the consensus among women and between men and women become possible. Many modern women are worried about "whether it is useful to learn feminism", and this book shows the history of the collision between feminism and practical problems without exception. Sexual freedom, pornography, prostitution and other issues are closely related to women's objectification and commercialization, while epistemological and methodological issues are closely related to how to arm women's thoughts. Unfortunately, these questions are not yet settled, and different schools and groups can give different answers to the same situation; On the other hand, surrogacy, trafficking and other social phenomena emerge in an endless stream, and oppression makes women fall into the vortex again with another face. Therefore, there is still a great need for communication and discussion between different women to find a common way out. To save every one of her is to save every one of me.

4. Future Challenges and Prospects

As a philosophical thought, as Engels said, "Without the investigation and analysis of the history of primitive society, it is impossible for the theory of historical materialism to fully cover human history" [13], and a view of history that cannot cover the overall development of human history and is limited to reflecting the historical process of class society is an imperfect and immature theory. In addition, if the overall development of human history cannot be covered, the guidance of the working class movement and the criticism of the capitalist system by historical materialism cannot be complete, because if the origin of the capitalist system and the cellular units that constitute the capitalist system - monogamy, patriarchal family and private property - cannot be explained, it is difficult to deconstruct the capitalist system at the theoretical level. Thus providing theoretical support for the class struggle and the workers' movement. It is undeniable that the development of feminism and feminism has produced many internal contradictions and differences that are difficult to solve. One of them is the different attitude towards "housewife" and "prostitute". Because this issue not only affects the depiction of the social development picture proposed by the feminist movement, but also effectively divides the female group in the way of practice. The second feminist movement in the United States in the 1970s was a vivid political manifestation of this tear. At that time, the conservative female politician Phyllis led 40 million housewives in the United States to successfully block the passage of the Affirmative Action by writing letters to lawmakers (which has not been passed yet), completely extinguished the second feminist movement in the United States, and profoundly affected the process of American political culture. This contradiction also profoundly affects today's women's rights. "The modern individual family is founded on the domestic slavery of women openly or secretly, while the modern society is a whole composed purely of individual families as elements." The deepening of the movement.

In Engels's exposition, we can easily find his attack on the profession of "housewife". Since housewives are the representatives of women's work from public affairs to private fields, because domestic labor has lost its public nature and is no longer relevant to society, it has become a "private service", and housewives have no independent capital accumulation. In Engels's works, the state of capital dependency is likened to "female slave" and "servant", which actually represents the social value and family status, and the loss of power in both public and private fields. Engels once confessed in the book: Therefore, if women cannot get rid of the imprisonment of housewives, or if society cannot regard the housework provided by housewives as the labor creation of the public domain, there is no basis for women's liberation. Because "in the family, the husband is the bourgeoisie and the wife is the proletariat".

Therefore, if the contemporary feminist movement cannot clearly criticize the housewife, the representative of the male gaze under the monogamous system, [14] the feminist movement cannot actually promote the progress of women's rights and interests as it should. The prerequisite for women's liberation is the return of women to public service. And this leads to another contradiction, namely, that if society fails to properly assign the labor and dedication of the family to the public domain, this revolution will be extremely difficult to establish. The labor needed for domestic work will not disappear with the return of women to the public sector, and forcing men to return to the private sector by seizing the public sphere is tantamount to playing blindfolded chess on a chessboard that opponents have already taken advantage of, and is no viable guide to the social reforms that need to be implemented.

If the contemporary feminist movement cannot overcome this dilemma and rescue the social definition of housework from the private sphere, it will be extremely difficult to deepen the feminist movement and promote the society. There is no distinction between high and low jobs, and the distinction between the public and private sectors is clear. In this era of social definition of individuals, people without social status and social identity are tantamount to vassals, without independent personal attributes, and such hierarchical vulnerable groups are doomed to their nature of exploitation. "To become a woman, one must first become an adulteress, and this was the most severe sentence imposed on an Athenian family." In my opinion, the real future of women's rights lies in the development of social productivity, and there is no future for women's rights to cut leeks and collect IQ taxes. The economic base determines the superstructure, which means that the level of productive forces and production relations determine the ideology of society. There are two outcomes to this development. First, a fundamentally changed feminism continues to proliferate and fertility rates continue to plummet. Some people have forgotten the original purpose of the feminist movement, and have not a deep understanding of how to fight for their rights. The second outcome, of course, is that society reinvigorates correct feminist thought and punishes attempts to distort the truth.

In China, However, *Feminism*, published 20 years ago, did not think of female consciousness beyond gender. Instead, the author Li Yinhe believes that fighting for gender equality is to hope that the relationship between the sexes will become more harmonious and less conflicted, and that the world will become a better place. Despite their diversity, feminist theories remain highly consistent on one point: masculinity is neither "natural" nor eternal, it is man-made and can be changed. Only by truly recognizing the object of disintegration can feminist discussions be on the same wavelength and deepening the consensus among women and between men and women become possible. Many modern women are worried about "whether it is useful to learn feminism", and this book shows the history of the collision between feminism and practical problems without exception. Sexual freedom, pornography, prostitution and other issues are closely related to women's objectification and commercialization, while epistemological and methodological issues are closely related to how to arm women's thoughts. Unfortunately, these questions are not yet settled, and different schools and groups can give different answers to the same situation; On the other hand, surrogacy, trafficking and

other social phenomena emerge in an endless stream, and oppression makes women fall into the vortex again with another face. Therefore, there is still a great need for communication and discussion between different women to find a common way out. To save every one of her is to save everyone.

5. Conclusion

In this exploration of the multifaceted evolution of feminism and its intersection with women's literature, we have delved into the dynamic and intricate tapestry of women's experiences across different cultures and eras. Our analysis has highlighted the transformative power of feminist thought and women's literary contributions, showcasing their pivotal role in challenging established norms and inspiring gender equality. From the pages of classic Western novels to the nuanced portrayals of Chinese heroines, women's literature has served as a reflective canvas for the struggles, aspirations, and determination of women. These literary works have not only enriched our understanding of women's roles in society but have also emboldened generations of readers to advocate for change. Nonetheless, our inquiry has also illuminated internal tensions and unresolved dilemmas within the feminist movement, particularly regarding the redefinition of domestic labor and its equitable distribution. The future of feminism must grapple with these challenges, forging a path toward a society where women can define their roles autonomously and where gender equality remains an enduring pursuit.

In this scholarly journey, we have witnessed the ongoing evolution of feminism and women's literature, offering a profound insight into the ongoing narrative of women's rights. These endeavors continue to shape the discourse surrounding gender equality and provide a promising trajectory towards a more just and equitable future.

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