

On the Characteristics and Analysis of Children's Narratives in Memories of Peking: South Side Stories

Jiayi Cao^{1,a}, Dongyue Liang^{2,b,*}, Yujia Song^{3,c}, Runxuan Zhou^{4,d}

¹College of Humanities, Jinggangshan University, Xueyuan Road, Ji'an City, 343009, China

²College of Liberal Arts, Hubei University of Education, East Lake Hi-Tech Zone, Wuhan, 430205, China

³College of Management, Sichuan Agricultural University, Huimin Road, Chengdu City, 611130, China

⁴School of Humanities, Shenzhen University, Yuehai Street, Shenzhen City, 518060, China

a. 2102103031@jgsu.edu.cn, b. 2021012503@bsu.edu.cn, c. 202103560@stu.sicau.edu.cn, d. 2021010004@email.szu.edu.cn

*corresponding author

Abstract: *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories* is the childhood autobiography of Lin Haiyin, a writer who moved to Taiwan from the mainland, and it is a collection of short stories about growing up and parting. As a prominent representative of Taiwanese women's nostalgic literature, this childhood memoir consists of six parts, in which Yingzi's pure eyes are used to feel the sorrows and joys of the world and experience the bittersweet taste of growing up. This article takes children's point of view as the entry point, discusses the unique narrative art in *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories*, and analyzes and interprets the work in detail from the perspective of narration, language and emotion. The article firstly analyzes clearly and thoroughly the narrative features of polyphony, restriction and childlike in the book, secondly summarizes the language features of simple and clear narration and innocent childishness, and finally dissects the three similar but differentiated sentiments of sadness contained in the work, namely, the inner experience of women's tragic destiny and irreparable parting from childhood, and the deeper nostalgia caused by the political and spatial isolation.

Keywords: *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories*, children's perspective, narrative art, Lin Haiyin

1. Introduction

Lin Haiyin is a representative writer of Taiwan's nostalgic literature who grew up in Peking and created in Taiwan. Her representative work, *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories*, is a literary work with autobiographical colors. The author, Lin Haiyin, combines her own childhood life experience and female life, observes the adult world with children's eyes, and expresses her emotions in children's language. At present, a great breakthrough has been made in Lin Haiyin's works, with the scope of research expanding to themes such as art, nostalgia for the countryside and women. Although the research on cultural connotation is relatively rich, the research on the narrative art in *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories* is very little and mostly analyzes its narrative structure independently, and there is still room for deepening the narrative characteristics of the work.

Therefore, this paper will analyze and systematically elaborate the narrative art features of the novel from three perspectives: narrative perspective, narrative language and narrative emotion, in the hope of supplementing the study of Lin Haiyin and her work *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories*.

2. Narrative Perspective

2.1. The Narrative Characteristics of Polyphony

"Polyphony" is originally a musical term that refers to two or more related but distinct parts that occur simultaneously during the process of music. Bakhtin borrows this term in his research to illustrate the phenomenon of "polyphony" in novel creation. He believes that there are "numerous independent and non-fused voices and consciousness in polyphonic novels" [1], each of which expresses opinions equally and has equal value and importance. At the same time, they are interconnected and mutually influential throughout the entire work, forming an organic whole. In *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories*, the narrative features of polyphony are specifically manifested as the contradiction and collision between the child world and the adult world, as well as the interweaving of the voices of the child narrator and the author.

2.1.1. The Contradiction and Collision between the Children's World and the Adult World

Memories of Peking: South Side Stories is narrated from a children's perspective, presenting readers with a unique and pure ecological life situation unique to children through Yingzi's observations and feelings. In the age stage where thinking has not yet fully transformed from sensibility to rationality and is not bound by moral norms and conventional social norms, children retain the most primitive values and judgment standards and are able to see the essence of things without being influenced by stereotypes. On the contrary, it is the adult world constructed by reason and governed by rules. Adults tend to prioritize judging things based on default social norms rather than "feelings" and develop biases towards those who do not meet the standards. For example, the "crazy" Xiuzhen does not do anything to harm or disturb others; she just misses her lover and children at home every day. However, adults regard Xiuzhen as a risk so much, so that when they see her, they will squeeze Yingzi's hand tightly, preventing Yingzi from even making eye contact with her. However, Yingzi finds that under the label of "madman", Xiuzhen has an indistinguishable nature from ordinary people and becomes good friends with her.

In her interactions with Xiuzhen, Yingzi learns about Xiuzhen's past, discovers similarities between Xiuzhen's child and her partner, Niu'er, and ultimately helps Xiuzhen and her daughter recognize each other and embark on the path of finding her love Sikang. However, adults do not know this truth and still have a biased view of Xiuzhen. In the end, they believe that Xiuzhen kidnaps and takes these two children away. When facing the same thing, children and adults have completely opposite views, reflecting the contradiction of ideas in the world of children and adults. The interweaving of the two voices presents a polyphonic feature in narration.

2.1.2. The Interweaving of Voices between Children Narrator and the Author

As a childhood memory style novel created by an adult author, *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories* has a distinct "retrospective narrative" characteristic, that is, "there exists a voice of an adult narrator, either explicit or implicit" [2]. Although the entire text is presented from the perspective of Yingzi, using childlike language to shape an innocent and pure world for children. Fundamentally, as the "Yingzi" projected by Lin Haiyin in her childhood in the text, everything she sees and experiences has been carefully selected and arranged by the author, which also implies the author's own perspective of observing the world, forming a polyphonic narrative structure in the work. In *Memories*

of *Peking: South Side Stories*, Yingzi experiences many separations during her growth process. In each farewell, Yingzi deepens her initial understanding of the adult world, gradually shedding the innocence and childishness of children. In the last story, "Dad's Flowers Fell", after her father's death, Yingzi bid farewell to her childhood and shouldered the heavy burden of the family. This is not only a change for Yingzi but also a mixture of the author's inner reflection on childhood and the complex emotions of adulthood after experiencing many hardships in the adult world, reflecting the author's strong emotional inclination.

2.2. Restrictive Narrative Features

Restricted perspective is also known as localized narrative, which only presents a certain aspect of the story in the vision of a particular character [3]. The whole work of *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories* adopts the first-person restricted point of view to recognize the external world and different people through what Yingzi knows and feels and tells the fate and growth story of the characters in her eyes.

Due to the restricted perspective, the narrator is bound to have many ambiguities about where the stories of the other characters are going [4], and the blanks need to be reasoned and put together by the reader [3]. Yingzi helps Xiuzhen find her child, and they recognize each other on a rainy night, pack their bags and rush to Tianjin together. Yingzi is left behind because of her fever and can only watch them drift away. As Yingzi falls into a coma, the fate of Xiuzhen and Niu'er becomes unknown, leaving a gap in the story. Readers may guess that the two failed to run away and died under the train while catching the train, as Yingzi's parents talk about the deaths of Xiuzhen and Niu'er. However, there is no way to know what exactly happened.

Yingzi becomes curious about what is hidden in the bushes before she gets to know the thick-lipped man. Due to the limited perspective, readers do not know exactly what is going on at that point. On her second visit, Yingzi meets the honest-looking, thick-lipped man. The secrecy of the place where the man and the tarpaulin bundle appear arouses Yingzi's and readers' curiosity. At the same time, her parents begin to frequently mention the loss of things in the neighborhood in their conversations, which reminds Yingzi of the bronze Buddha she once saw in the bushes and the pained look on the man's face when he talked about his brother, saying it is a matter of necessity for his family. By this moment in the story, the threads of the story are basically clear. Yingzi connects the two seemingly unrelated identities of the thief and the older brother who supports his younger brother's education; then, readers come to a realization. The restricted perspective creates suspense for the story and leads readers to think in the blank section, presenting a more engaging narrative experience.

2.3. Characteristics of Childlike Narration

This work exhibits a typical artistic style of childhood coming-of-age narratives. It is an autobiographical novel by the writer Lin Haiyin, describing her own childhood experiences. The novel consists of five short stories, and the narrator of the entire novel is a child named Yingzi. The narrative style of the novel displays a certain "childlike" quality when viewed from the perspective of a child, which creates a sense of "estrangement" compared to traditional viewpoints. "Estrangement" is a literary theory proposed by Russian formalist critic Shklovsky. It refers to the act of "removing an object from its normal perceptual domain, reconstructing the perception of the object through creative means, and thus expanding the difficulty and breadth of knowledge, continually giving readers a sense of freshness [5]." Each chapter filters out the hypocrisy of the adult world through Yingzi's innocent, simple, and natural child's perspective. It explores the beauty but also the

reality of human nature, presenting scenes of a primitive way of life and experiencing the various aspects of the world, demonstrating a superiority that cannot be compared to an adult perspective.

The understanding of the world and life between adults and children is vastly different. The way children think is distinct from adults, but they are inevitably intertwined with adult life. They often hover in the complex adult world, observing adult social life and its rules with a naive perspective [6]. By approaching the adult world from a unique child's perspective, the effect of estrangement is achieved. It contrasts children with adults, using the innocent and naive eyes of a child to observe, think, and express their perceptions of the world in childlike language. This highlights the uniqueness of the child's perspective, perceiving the world with a sense of initial experience, shedding the pretense and cruelty of society, and presenting the goodness and kindness of human nature. It also expresses the author's contemplation on the essence of life, expressing her longing for home and nostalgia. By using a language that is innocent and vibrant, the novel reveals the complexity of human emotions, providing readers with an extraordinary aesthetic experience and reading experience both visually and psychologically.

3. Narrative Language

"Literature is the use of language to create images, archetypes and characters, and the use of language to reflect the real world, natural scenes and thought processes [7]." In this book, Lin Haiyin's elegant and delicate female tone and the simple and innocent children's voices collide to produce a unique chemical reaction.

3.1. The simple and Clear Narrative

Over the years, Lin Haiyin has an endeavour in her creative work to use shallow words and short phrases to express her meaning and pursue a smooth and comfortable reading experience.

3.1.1. Capture the Characteristics of Characters

Children's narrative language is not gorgeous and complicated. Besides, children's observation of characters is not conventional. They can often focus on the most prominent features of the characters. Moreover, children's descriptions of characters are often based on their instant impressions of the characters and are highly subjective.

Little Yingzi's description of "Uncle Thief" captures the most prominent feature of thick lips. In fact, the article only uses one sentence to point out this feature and Yingzi's association, "Uncle Li, who knows how to read faces, said that a man with thick lips is an honest man". However, it is this short sentence that outlines the character's physical appearance and even points out the character's personality.

Analogies are common in children's thinking. Sung Ma's husband always appears with the donkey. Coupled with Little Yingzi's feelings of disgust for Sung Ma's husband, the characteristics of the ugly donkey migrated to Sung Ma's husband: big, long face, yellow plate teeth, and ugly.

3.1.2. Capturing Character Actions

Children's ability to observe and feel is often beyond people's imagination, and many small children can keenly capture changes in their parents' expressions, emotions, and relationships. Yingzi's narrative language shows that children are keen to capture the subtle movements of their parents.

When her father asks Yingzi to pick out a dress for Aunt Lan, Yingzi notices the change in her mother's face, the micro-expressions of frowning and tensing her face. These small expressions reveal the mother's emotions of anger and aggravation. Also captured are a series of gestures, such as her

father pouring wine, touching his hand to his chest, and shaking his head at the soot as he sends Aunt Lan off, as well as his subtle, despondent mood. This kind of detailed and sensitive observation of the parents and the narrative way of using actions to show the characters' emotions are not only in line with the characteristics of children but also make the story more complete and delicate.

3.2. Innocent and Childlike Language

Due to the special characteristics of children in terms of their psychology, age and cultural level, the language of their literature often presents a vivid, natural and childlike style, which brings the distance between the work and the readers closer. Through children's perspectives and linguistic expressions, Yingzi's unique understanding of the world is demonstrated, highlighting children's rich imagination and curiosity.

The memories of old Beijing begin when Sung Ma comes to Yingzi's bedroom in the morning to dust off, and the little girl focuses on the dust that flutters by the sun's rays. Innocent verbal expression and sensitivity to tiny things made this recollection more real and full of warmth. The innocence and unique observation that children show when they look at the world add richness to the emotional depth of the story and the three-dimensionality of the characters. Following Sung Ma, she would speculate if there is any white rice from her house in Sung Ma's fat pant legs. Such childish language makes people laugh, and Yingzi's image seems more dynamic with the addition of such innocent and simple language.

Innocent children's language can also be reflected in the contrast with adult language. Through the free and spontaneous expression of children's language, Yingzi's unique way of thinking about complex things is presented. When seeing the camel caravan, there is a difference between Yingzi's and her father's explanations of why the camels wear bells. The adult's explanation is more mature and realistic, believing that the ringing of the bells can scare the wolves and protect the camels. Yingzi, however, offers a more emotional and personal explanation, suggesting that it is because people cannot stand the long and lonely journeys and that the bells can add to the pleasure of the journey. Such a description portrays a young child as an imaginative and independent thinker. The difference in the adult's point of view shows the child's naive and unique ideas, which makes the article interesting and childlike.

4. Emotional Narration

4.1. Tragedy of Women's Fate

In *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories*, the depiction of female characters and their living conditions is filled with traditional constraints, carrying an underlying tone of sadness in the narrative. Simone de Beauvoir, adopting an existentialist philosophical stance, studied the existence of women and proposed topics such as "the Other" and "transcendence" in her work *The Second Sex*, providing a way to reflect on gender culture [8]. The background of *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories* is the late 1920s during the rule of warlords in the Northern Expedition period. Feudal ideology still enslaved people, and most Chinese women only lamented the unfairness of their fate, with a weak sense of self-liberation. They obediently accepted the oppression and destruction inflicted upon them by unfair social relations. Men gradually positioned women as "Others" and created a male-centric social culture, which women passively absorbed, internalizing as their own approach to handling life's challenges [9]. The female characters in the novel, such as Xiuzhen, Niu'er, Lan Yiniang, and Sung Ma, were all victims of a male-dominated society at that time, and the author portrays these complex female characters with a compassionate and affectionate tone.

Xiuzhen falls in love with a university student named Sikang and becomes pregnant before marriage. The child in her womb is not recognized by society, and after Xiuzhen's parents abandon

the newborn Niu'er at the foot of the Qihua Gate, Xiuzhen loses her only spiritual support. This fatal blow turns her into a madwoman in the eyes of others. Xiuzhen's mother, Sung Ma, and Xiaoyingzi's mother, who are also women, are unable to experience and sympathize with Xiuzhen's plight personally. They silently accept the social rules of feudal ideology, viewing Xiuzhen's fate with numbness. Xiuzhen finally finds her daughter Niu'er after years of separation, but mother and daughter tragically die together under the wheels of a train while searching for Niu'er's father. Xiuzhen's tragic ending also embodies the inability of women in feudal times to gain respect and exercise the right to choose their own happiness.

Lan Yiniang is also a typical product of the feudal era. She comes from a poor background and has been treated as a commodity for buying and selling since childhood. In the face of constant bullying, she affirms her awareness of female subjectivity, breaking through the shackles of feudal ethics and bravely falling in love with Desun, demonstrating the awakening of self-consciousness and the realization of female subjectivity.

Sung Ma, as a representative of hardworking women in the lower class of society, remains silent and sheds tears when she learns of the tragic deaths of her children abandoned by her husband. In the end, she even follows her husband back and continues to bear children, silently accepting the role society has assigned to her.

By contrast, the protagonist, Yingzi, is somewhat favored by the times. She is seen as a young lady in people's eyes, the apple of her parents' eyes. However, she lives in a world where women face such unfortunate circumstances. Therefore, the childlike perspective adds a touch of melancholy and sorrow.

4.2. The Injury of Childhood Separation

The book *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories* selects five things that Yingzi experienced in her childhood, namely, "Hui-an Hostel", "Let Us Go and See the Sea", "Lan I-niang", "Donkey Rolls", and "Papa's Flowers Have Fallen". These five stories do not have a clear connection in their narrative content, but they use time as a clue to show readers the growth process of Yingzi from the age of six to twelve, from a child to a "precocious and thoughtful youth". At the end of each short story, the protagonist leaves Yingzi without exception, "until the final piece" Daddy's Flowers Fall ", dear Daddy also died, and my childhood comes to an end [10]. Yingzi also grows up passively in the process of being forced to part ways time and time again and finally says goodbye to her childhood, taking on the responsibility of the family as the eldest daughter.

The first separation that young Yingzi experienced was the death of Xiuzhen and her daughter, who died unexpectedly while searching for Sikang. Upon learning of this, Yingzi's heart was filled with fear. When she was in the first grade of elementary school, Yingzi met a young man with thick lips and made an agreement with him to see the sea together. However, before it could be realized, this young man is caught stealing. The third farewell that Yingzi faced was to bid farewell to Lan Yiniang and De Xianshu. She is dissatisfied with the ambiguity between her father and Aunt Lan, so she arranges for Aunt Lan and Uncle Dexian on her own. When bidding farewell to Aunt Lan, who bravely pursued a new life, she wants to cry and laugh. When Yingzi is in third grade, Song's mother returns to her hometown, and the people who hold important positions in Yingzi's life also leave her.

When Yingzi graduated from elementary school, her father fell seriously ill and passed away in the hospital. The departure of her father, who has always sheltered Yingzi and allowed her to have a carefree childhood, causes Yingzi to fall from the paradise called childhood, and her childhood comes to an abrupt end.

"Yingzi's sorrow lies in her lost innocence and the life she must face directly [11]." In the process of separation, Yingzi gradually emerged from her ignorant childhood, facing the unpleasant and even cruel parts of the world and taking on the responsibility of family amidst pain and pressure from all

aspects. Through the farewell between Yingzi and her childhood, the author expresses her nostalgia and nostalgia for her childhood and completes the portrayal of the theme of "separation" in the work.

4.3. Homesickness

In the 1950s and 1960s, a large number of writers who moved to Taiwan were in a state of confusion due to the great changes in Taiwan. A wind of homesickness in literature was stirred up in Taiwan's literary world. Compared to the works of male writers who moved to Taiwan at that time, which fused the era and the home country, the book's children's point of view, female sentiments and autobiographical colours present a unique look.

"Every man has two sets of forces within him" [12]. In terms of the psychological need hierarchy, the first set corresponds to nature and motherhood, which stems from the need for security and belonging; the second set corresponds to society and fatherhood, which comes from the need for respect and self-realisation [12]. Due to the social environment in Taiwan at that time, Lin Haiyin longed for a sense of belonging and security, and she hoped to use this book to complete a spiritual homecoming.

"The unforgettable Peking! Where I have lived for too long, like a tree with roots, that ancient city pours out all my feelings, spring goes and autumn comes, how I am familiar with the seasons there" [13]. The streets, food, nursery rhymes and so on in the book all show the author's childhood memories, hometown attachment and the folk customs of Peking. It is not only the flowers, grass and trees but also the people and things in Peking that touched her feelings. It is the thickly braided Xiuzhen, the fun companion Niu'er, the thick-lipped uncle who agreed to go to the sea, the different Auntie Lan, and the warm-hearted sung Ma.

What Lin Haiyin expresses is not simply nostalgia for old things in her hometown but a cultural attachment to her hometown of Peking from her own point of view and a search for comfort and support in her childhood memories of her present life.

5. Conclusions

Lin Haiyin's *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories* has extremely high aesthetic effects and literary achievements. On the surface, the work is a plain daily story, but in fact, this is a clear and extensive literary work. Lin Haiyin uses children's eyes to make the story clear and strange. At the same time, it is mixed with the adult and the author's own voice, so that the novel presents the literary characteristics of multi-voice. In addition, Lin Haiyin's warm, clear and delicate brush strokes tell sad stories one by one, depicting unique characters one by one, showing a unique aesthetic. The work spans geography, time and space and is based on Taiwan and Peiping. It spreads out children, women, hometowns and times in detail, creating an aesthetic style that belongs to the author.

This paper provides new methods and ideas for the study of *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories*. Firstly, in the study of textual narration, this article summarizes the specific manifestations of narrative art in the text into three aspects: narrative perspective, narrative language, and narrative emotion, and elaborates on them separately, breaking away from the shortcomings of previous studies that only analyzed the narrative structure and ignored other aspects; Secondly, in the analysis of narrative emotions, this article subdivides the emotional clues "faint sadness" that run through the entire text into sadness for women's fate, the pain of separation from childhood, and sorrow of longing for their hometown in specific political and spatial environments, providing a new and more detailed explanation of narrative emotions.

However, at the same time, this thesis still has many shortcomings. First, there is a lack of theoretical application. In the part of *The Narrative Characteristics of Polyphony*, due to the lack of in-depth understanding and study of Bakhtin's theory of polyphonic novels, there are inevitably some

unclear explanations and insufficient discussions in the exposition. Secondly, in the section of *Tragedy of Women's Fate*, Beauvoir's *Second Sex* is quoted to analyse the complexity of the female figure in work, which may have the problem of not quoting appropriately.

Secondly, there is a lack of analysis. Lin Haiyin is a prominent representative of Taiwan's female nostalgia literature, and her works, such as the novel *Aftermath of Memories of Peking* and the collection of essays *Yingzi's Homeland Love*, contain strong feelings of thought. However, due to time constraints, it was not possible to conduct an in-depth study of each of Lin Haiyin's works and develop a comprehensive emotional analysis in conjunction with this book. At the same time, in order to analyse Lin Haiyin's unique feminine nostalgic literary characteristics, it is inevitable to compare and analyse the works of male writers of the same period. However, due to a lack of energy, this part of the discussion is missing.

Future research can further explore Lin Haiyin's literary characteristics, and the emotions expressed in her works. Regarding Lin Haiyin's literature of nostalgia, we can further analyze how she portrays a deep longing and fondness for her hometown through her words. At the same time, by comparing her works with those of male writers from the same period, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of Lin Haiyin's unique position and contributions in the field of nostalgic literature. In terms of theoretical application, more work needs to be done.

In conclusion, although this paper has some limitations, future research will allow us to gain a deeper understanding and analysis of Lin Haiyin's literary characteristics and works. This will help us better understand this outstanding writer and the emotions and ideas conveyed in her works.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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