



On the Feminism of Ichiyo Higuchi in *Jyusanya*

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Abstract. Ichiyo Higuchi enjoys a variety of reputations such as *Meiji Zishibu* and *the last woman of ancient Japan*. Most of the descriptions are sad and woe-begone female stories. This paper focuses on the typical female experience in the book. Through their fate or encounter, this paper analyzes the problems of female survival, life and values behind Ichiyo Higuchi's works. The story is more or less based on the real life of Ichiyo Higuchi, which can objectively and dialectically depict the livelihood problems and emotional entanglements of Ichiyo Higuchi's life. Although the novel follows the tragic theme, it can be seen that Higuchi is trying to explore early feminism. In particular, the realistic writing style of "Jyusanya" and "Yokinohi" standing on the female position has begun to emerge, which means the early feminist awakening in about thirty years from the Meiji period to the Taisho period, so as to build a social structure that adheres to the harmony and comfort of women's self and family and the harmonious development of the world.

Keywords: Ichiyo Higuchi · feminism · Jyusanya

1 Introduction

The book *Jyusanya* opens with a quote from Ichiyo Higuchi, "I was born into the world to soothe the suffering and disappointment of women." [1] The Meiji Restoration brought new ideas and social customs to Japan on the surface, but in fact, the remaining feudal forces still had a certain influence. Higuchi was living in an era of great conflict between the old and the new. She stood at the end of the ancient Japanese era and revealed the profound and dark social reality with the sensitivity and delicacy of women, so as to arouse people's thinking on the concept of gender equality and pursue the balance of an ethical world. The novels of *Jyusanya* mostly take love stories as the main line and end with tragedy. Through these stories, we can find that the author not only speaks for women, but also contains a "change" expectation, which is an important manifestation of the ideological progress of an ancient Japanese woman writer.

2 From Pre-marriage to Post-marriage—Family Environment Constrains Women's Freedom

Japanese women in the last century, the status quo of harmony and harmony within and outside a family is mostly based on the bitter and sad fate of women. After women get married, more experience is bound and pain, unwilling and helpless. Many stories in the

book generally reflect the inequality of gender status. Taking the family environment as the background, “Jyusanya” and “My Son” are typical representative works.

2.1 The Inevitability of the Return of Aguan

Aguan, the heroine of “Jyusanya” was born in a common people’s family, which is not matching with her husband’s family. Although there is no worry about food and clothing, Aguan and her husband are not loving after marriage, and is often taunted and coldly violent by her husband. Disheartened Aguan decided to divorce, so there was a story of Aguan returning to his mother’s home on the night of September 13th. Going home is an act dominated by women’s independent consciousness. In the seven years since she became “Mrs. Harad”, the greatest credit was to give birth to Taro Harada. After confiding her bitterness with her parents, Aguan decided to return to the “devil” family, and the main factor for her to change her mind was “child”. One of the three elements of a complete family—children, for housewives in the Meiji period, brought them the emotion of hope and drag. Babies tend to have a sense of intimacy and dependence on people who meet more frequently, and this person is usually the mother. As children grow up, “mother” and “father” will become the ideological relatives of children. Harada Taro is now about six years old, and children aged five or six will have the concept of “parent family” under normal circumstances, but now Harada Taro’s performance is only dependent on his mother. This means that “fatherly love” is missing in his growth, which in disguised form illustrates the failure of Aguan’s role as “wife”. Aguan did not make a change, but took care of his own flesh and blood. Taro Harada is the hope of Aguan, saving her body and mind; at the same time, it is also the weakness and pain point of Aguan, limiting her freedom. After writing the return of Aguan, Higuchi also explained a small episode, that is, the help of her first love record. The material abundance defeats the spiritual needs and directly destroys Aguan’s resistance. It can be seen that the struggling women living in the cracks are poor images of being imprisoned in the collusion of “patriarchy” and “husbandhood” [2] and in the possibility of zero communication.

2.2 Maternal Love is the Natural Nature of Women

In “My Son”, what we read is that after a depressed wife gave birth to a baby, she is moved by this innocent and pure little life, and then reflected on the past and regained her enthusiasm for life. The family member of “children” has become a woman’s salvation and light. So is Higuchi really singing the praises of the new life? Not really. Because of the discord between husband and wife after marriage, the wife will lose confidence in maintaining the family, and will easily abandon herself. The postpartum wife was touched by the baby and determined to cheer up. The postpartum mother was bound by the fetters of “blood”. After marriage, women will laugh in front of people for the face of their parents’ family. Because of their husband’s cold and warm, they have suffered from gain and loss, and are troubled by their children’s joy or worry. They have not lived for themselves and laughed to themselves. What does “freedom” mean? Many countries in the West advocate “freedom first” [3], because no matter what you do, it is a personal

choice, without any pressure in your heart, to make the most real choice, which is real freedom.

The above-mentioned wives are not free. Even if they listen to their hearts and want to make a decision for themselves, they lost to the “family” fetters. Higuchi’s description of Aguan’s experience euphemistically conveys the call for women’s freedom and women’s living for themselves. Women in ancient Japan should break away from the shackles of unequal marital relations. Aguan should leave or stay, and the decision-making power should be given to his own feelings, rather than living for children, becoming the original field family’s fertility tool; the mother in “my son” should not be the child who heals her heart, but the self who re-accepts the appearance of marriage and stands up.

3 From the True Feelings to the Ethics—Social Concepts Imprison Women’s Thought

3.1 There is no End of the Young Love

Higuchi’s debut novel “yorusakura” depicts a pure and imperfect love. Girl Chishiro has a love for the help of their neighbor brother Ryonosuke, who is accompanied by the day and night, but she was ashamed to speak. Therefore, the feelings become a heart disease over time, resulting in becoming haggard and melancholy death. Behind this sad love affair lies society’s imprisonment of women and opposition to free love. Ryonosuke on the other side but only blindly blamed themselves and guilt, and did not comfort Chishiro through practical actions. This self-moving redemption and apology are worrisome. It is through the description of such a simple to untrue love that Higuchi sympathizes with the pair of teenagers and contains criticism of the society’s abnormal concept of women. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir said: “A person is not born a woman, she becomes a woman.”^[4] This sentence is very appropriate on Chishiro. The book says that her appearance is “Jasper flower.” Before she got the heart disease, she was a pure and true girl. For more than ten years, her feelings for Ryonosuke have long become impure, Chishiro discarded to her own desires and gave up. Why do women dare not face up to their desires? Why does society suppress women’s true feelings and desires? Why can’t she even open up to her closest parents, even if Chishiro can’t challenge the social repression of free love? When her heart affirms the fact that she likes good help, she also negates any practice of expressing feelings externally. Can Chishiro save herself? Of course, the way is to open her heart and admit her own love. Moreover, both parents and Ryonosuke themselves have acquiesced emotionally. Chishiro ultimately due to the old-fashioned etiquette, became the victim of social asceticism.

3.2 Love but not Powerless

The character who is slightly better than Chishiro is the heroine Medenley. Medenley’s elder sister is the queen of the “Big Black House”(whorehouse). Under her sister’s shelter, Medenley carefree and free. The dark line in the novel is the love between Maidley and Shinru of Longhua Temple who secretly love each other, subject to Confucianism, neither of them has taken the initiative to express their feelings. In her vision, she

“admired her sister for supporting her parents so much” and “there was nothing terrible about men. She did not find the godde”ss at all contemptible.”[5] However, day after day, when Medenley took over her sister’s business, Medenley gradually learned her fate. She realizes the difference between herself and the people around her. She is no longer the carefree innocent girl, but the dusty girl who will eventually be contaminated. Medenley herself into the “prostitute” identity, while permanently sealed the love of Shinru. What was once her approved status as a glamorous prostitute became the beginning of her nightmare. Medenley’s change of thought was caused by the pathological society, or in other words, she abandoned her own identity, was oppressed and suffocated, and thus gave up her desire for happiness and her own power.” Medengly’s beauty and sorrow are expressed through Higuchi’s delicate writing.” [6] Like Chishiro, love brings them more pain than happiness. On the one hand, she pays close attention to each other carefully. On the other hand, she is self-closed and cannot find the outlet and way of expression. Their love circle is the embodiment of the incomplete liberation of people’s ideas in the late Meiji Restoration. We will feel the injustice of society and the misfortune of destiny, and we can also feel Higuchi’s shallow appeal to the liberation of women’s freedom and the liberation of ideas.

4 From Girls to Women—“Self-denial” Inhibits Female Development

“self-denial” is a kind of weak psychology, which can easily lead to depression, anxiety, inferiority and other derivative emotions. Women in the late Meiji Restoration generally had this kind of psychology. They dare to look at their own desires straightforwardly, depended on others, and gave the decision to their parents, husbands or social concepts. This was the result of both external conceptual factors and women’s own cautious psychology.

Taking the heroine of “Yokinohi” as an example, when examining this article, the novel tells the story of Pearl in the depths of the mountains, and she has a secret love with her teacher, Mr. Katsuragi. Pearl eloped with her teacher, but her wishful thinking has not been cherished or valued. Throughout were Pearl’s confessions of youth—guilt at her aunt’s upbringing, regret at her own misjudgment. Pearl’s “self-denial” comes from the “consequence theory”, the teacher Katsuragi’s unfeeling and aunt’s indirect death double resulting in Pearl’s self-abasement and guilt. The villagers attach importance to the chastity of women. Rumors are ruthless to the two. The vigilant aunt’s reason was that “we Usui family have rules and do not marry foreigners” [7]. Pearl felt aggrieved and she had a sense of resistance for the first time. From this perspective, the elder or outside rumors, the practice of denial of free love, has led to the unfortunate Pearl. So in a snowy day, she leaving home to pursue love. However, she focused on the results, after being abandoned by Katsuragi Ichiro, she became disillusioned, living only in the past and regret. Pearl denied her courage to pursue love, denied her determination to challenge the concept of consolidation, and turned to the abyss of regret. If a person always lives in the past, he will cut off his own future and miss many opportunities and fates. If Pearl does not rely on others to survive, she can completely find true love and happiness, but she does not realize that she is the failure of love and the victim of family

ethics. Ichiyo Higuchi here secretly expressed the difficulties of women's ideological independence and the helpless situation of striving for self-rights.

As mentioned above, Aguan also has a "self-denial" mentality. Is what her husband says correct and objective? As the "label effect" in psychology shows, "once people are labeled with a certain label, they will become the kind of people labeled by the label." [8] Aguan couldn't stand the ridicule of her husband, and subconsciously recognized his evaluation of his own "waste". If a person begins to deny himself, he will tend to pay attention to the outside world's views and evaluations of himself. Over time, he will be influenced by others' remarks and be classified into negative and negative emotions.

In the story of "fork road", it tells the process from love to separation of the peaceful Akin and her admiring Jisan. Akin compromises to money and is willing to become a concubine of people with better economic conditions. At the end of the novel, Ji San is disappointed. The sentence "Akin, please let me go" shows the helplessness of the emotional destination of a small person at the bottom. However, before the concept of male superiority has not been completely subverted, she can not find a way to seek the independent liberation of female economic identity. Poverty will limit a person's potential and motivation, and introduce a person into a fragile thought that bows to the fate of poverty. In order to survive, Akin sacrificed her most precious things—chastity and truth. This is the author's obscure and implicit accusation against the dark society. It can be seen that women's self-denial, on the one hand, inhibits their own potential development, on the other hand, it also hurts people who really care about them. Disappointment with oneself does not mean that only one person is suffering, and the people involved are equally innocent and pitiful.

The deep repentance in Pearl's heart denies her qualification to pursue a new life in the future. Aguan admits the "boring" self in her husband's eyes and denies the possibility of the two men re-establishing love and two-way going. Akin's compromise on money has hit the pursuers' infatuation and denied the potential of his hands to create wealth. If women are in self-denial for a long time, it shows that there is an emotional self-control disorder. It is necessary to learn to liberate from the disorder of emotional self-control in order to complete the growth and realization of self, and this process of self-help, no one can replace women themselves.

5 Conclusion

To sum up, the whole book of *Jyusanya* can be used as a reference book for all living beings under the incomplete social outlook of the Meiji Restoration. The novel ends with tragedy and writes the elegy of ancient Japanese women in a plain and meaningful tone. Jumping out of the tragic story itself to the level of value and thought, it is not difficult for us to find a leaf in the ups and downs, carefully explore the possibility of gender equality, write sad stories with the most compassionate eyes, and show women's self-liberation and ideological struggle. Xiao Hong once said, "The sky of women is low, the wings are thin, and the burdens around them are heavy!" [9] The female sky in Higuchi's works is also thin and dark under the suppression of husband power and patriarchy. The social concept is deep-rooted. If women gain social status, in addition to external innovation, they must break through the ideological shackles of living for their families, not daring

to face their own desires, and avoiding self-denial. Face themselves, have independent thoughts, have the courage to be constant and not easily broken; At the same time, we should learn actively, enrich themselves with knowledge, shape themselves, and realize themselves, so as to usher in true gender equality.

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