



Gender Perspective in Modern Chinese Literature: Language and Social Construction of Female Characters

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Abstract. The gender perspective in modern Chinese literature, particularly the language and social construction of female characters, represents a research field of profound depth and breadth. During this period, female characters, through their unique modes of linguistic expression, not only revealed their authentic social presence but also profoundly influenced the construction of social gender roles. The linguistic characteristics of female characters, social expectations, stereotypes, and their manifestations in various contexts collectively constitute the rich content of this research field. This paper aims to explore the linguistic features of female characters in modern Chinese literature and how they reflect and shape social gender roles, seeking to provide new perspectives for understanding the relationship between gender, language, and society.

Keywords: Chinese literature; gender perspective; female characters; language; social structure

1 Introduction

In modern Chinese language and literature, looking at social reform and cultural progress through a gender perspective is important. Female characters have a key role in literary creation. Their ways of speaking and the ideas they represent show how people of the time understood gender roles. They also reveal changes in women's positions and experiences in society. The language of female characters shows their emotions and reflects how social norms and gender roles appear in literature. Through clear and detailed language, we can see how women, caught between tradition and modern ideas, struggle and slowly grow and change. These expressions are not just used for communication. They also help challenge old gender ideas. At the same time, they support the growing awareness of gender equality.

2 Analysis of Female Characters' Linguistic Features in Modern Chinese Literature

2.1 Language Style and Expression Methods of Female Characters

In modern and contemporary Chinese literature, the language features and expression methods of female images have distinctive characteristics. Women's unique personalities, such as delicacy and gentleness, are demonstrated in these traits, and at the same time, they also reflect their ways of survival and inner worlds in specific social environments. Women's language often reveals the dual qualities of elegance and introversion [1].

For example, in Lu Xun's "The True Story of Ah Q", after Ah Q was executed, although his wife was filled with endless grief in her heart, her words showed an unusually calm and self-restrained manner. When narrating her misfortunes, she didn't raise her voice to cry or utter curses. Instead, she chose an almost indifferent tone to tell her experiences slowly. The gentleness and introversion contained in her language reflected the vulnerable status of women in social occasions and also the psychological self-defense strategy she initiated when encountering misfortunes. She used this language style to express her feelings, which was both a concession to the social reality due to her powerlessness and a maintenance of her personal emotions.

In addition, in terms of language expression, female characters usually prefer to use words rich in emotional color and are good at expressing their inner worlds by means of emotional outpouring.

2.2 Female Characters' Language and Identity Construction

Language is not only a medium of communication but also plays a crucial role in confirming an individual's sense of belonging. In modern and contemporary Chinese literature, the language features used by female images are usually closely linked to their social identities and personal identifications. In specific social contexts, the language characteristics of female characters reflect the gender roles they play [2]. In the traditional cultural background where men are accustomed to taking the dominant position, women generally face an expectation to show behaviors that are gentle, demure and docile, and similar expectations are also revealed in women's language expressions.

For example, in "A Dream of Red Mansions", female characters like Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai usually appear in situations where they are weak, helpless, sensitive, sentimental and frequently hurt. Their speech and demeanor reveal the qualities of being refined, introverted and obedient. This language pattern not only conforms to the society's expectations of women but also demonstrates their identification with their identities in specific social environments. On the path of self-identification, women's language expressions show a certain instability, which precisely reflects the contradictions and struggles in their role positioning.

With the transformation and development of society, women's social status has been improved, which enables women to seek the confirmation and recognition of

their own identities more actively. For example, in Mao Dun's "Midnight", the female protagonist Sun Yao is portrayed as a typical figure who is tenacious and self-reliant. In both the family domain and the professional stage, she shows firm beliefs and a strong will. She not only manages her personal business affairs properly but also devotes herself enthusiastically to various social activities, which reflects her characteristics of being confident, decisive and powerful.

2.3 Female Characters' Language and Power Relations

Women are in a relatively inferior position in society, which is reflected in their language expressions. Under the traditional patriarchal system, women were often marginalized and lost the opportunity to express themselves. Their language was usually ignored or suppressed. Women's inferiority in terms of power is also mirrored in the characteristics of their language.

For example, in "Tales of Hulan River", Xiao Hong depicted numerous female characters. When faced with the heavy pressures from family and society, they generally adopted a silent or submissive attitude. Their language revealed the weakness of obedience as well as the characteristics of being powerless and having nowhere to turn for help. This language pattern reflects women's weak power status in society and also embodies their living circumstances in a unique social environment.

During times of social change, as women's roles improved, they became more active in standing up for their rights. Their speech began to show their struggles and determination. In Qian Zhongshu's *Fortress Besieged*, Miss Sun, Fang Hongjian's wife, is a complex character. Her speech reflects both her hopes and disappointments in marriage. Pressured by family and society, her confusion is clear in her words. Yet, her speech also reveals her strength and self-respect as an independent woman. Through her words, we see her struggles and resistance to gain power and status. This analysis shows that female characters use speech not just to communicate but also to navigate power struggles and express their identity in a changing society[3].

3 Analysis of Social Construction of Female Characters in Modern Chinese Literature

3.1 Social Expectations and Norms for Female Characters

Under feudal society, women were typically confined to domestic spheres, expected to exemplify the role of dutiful wives and mothers, maintaining their prescribed feminine duties centered around family harmony[4]. For instance, in "Dream of the Red Chamber," many female characters' life paths are inextricably linked to their families, reflecting the social constraints on women's roles at that time. With social progress, women's status improved, and societal expectations for female roles underwent transformation. Entering the modern era, particularly under the influence of the May Fourth New Culture Movement, social expectations for women transcended familial

limitations, encouraging them to enter society, participate in various activities, and pursue personal value.

In Lu Xun's "Regret for the Past," the character Zijun is portrayed as boldly pursuing personal happiness and freedom, disregarding family obstacles and social prejudices to live with Juansheng, attempting to achieve spiritual liberation and independence through love and marriage. Although Zijun's fate is tragic, her displayed courage and determination reflect the changing social positioning of women, who were no longer confined to domestic roles but began pursuing individual value with the right and power to realize self-worth. It can be seen that with the evolution of society, there has gradually been a flexible expansion of the norms for female roles. In the context of feudal society, women were subject to extremely strict moral and behavioral constraints. They were expected to follow the ancient dogma of "Three Obediences and Four Virtues". However, many of these norms have gradually faced doubts and been phased out in modern times. Literary works are gradually presenting numerous female images who have broken free from the old frameworks, showing the traits of boldness and self-reliance, daring to challenge customs, and actively pursuing personal happiness and freedom. And in the real world, the shaping of female images has also been influenced by such changes [5].

3.2 Social Functions and Role Positioning of Female Characters

In the context of traditional times, women were assigned life roles centered around the family and shouldered multiple important responsibilities such as giving birth to offspring, raising children, and managing household affairs. As the evolution of society continued to progress, women's social status was also steadily rising, which led to the gradual transformation and reshaping of the social functions and social images that women undertook. Since modern times, women have gradually broken free from the shackles of the family, engaged in social affairs, and played increasingly important roles. Women played a crucial role in the revolutionary wave. They wholeheartedly threw themselves into the great struggle for national independence and ethnic freedom, thus achieving brilliant results. For example, Qiu Jin, as a leading advocate for women's liberation in modern history, subverted the traditional images of wife and mother and became a challenger to the established order. In the process of creation, she demonstrated a strong will for revolution, subverted the inherent privacy of female literature, and thus injected new vitality into the inherent characteristics of traditional female literature. The image of this woman symbolizes the transformation of female roles since modern times, meaning that they are no longer confined to the family realm but instead have the qualifications and strength to pursue personal values and participate in social affairs [6].

3.3 Social Transformation and Linguistic Evolution of Female Characters

In modern and contemporary Chinese language, the changes in female characters are closely related to the progress of social language. With the development of society

and the improvement of women's social status, the transformation of female characters in literary creation can be depicted in a detailed manner, and this change is reflected in the renewal of women's language expression methods. In the traditional social context, women were often portrayed as the embodiments of gentleness and dependence on others, and their language styles also reflected these traits. For example, the women depicted in "The Book of Songs" were generally known for their softness, modesty, wisdom, and propriety, and their language was filled with tender affection and delicacy. Meanwhile, the development of society and the gradual improvement of women's social status have made literary works begin to reflect the historical changes of female characters. In modern and contemporary Chinese literary works, the images of female characters have gradually broken free from the previous patterns of meekness and dependence and instead have presented a new stance of being independent, self-reliant, proactive, and fearless in facing challenges. The evolution of female characters is also reflected in their language, which has become straightforward and without concealment, revealing their strong sense of confidence and power [7]. In Ding Ling's novel "Miss Sophia's Diary", the expression methods of the protagonist Sophia reflect the traits of tenacity, self-assertion, and courage, and she is brave enough to state her inner feelings and desires, fearless of conventional concepts and ethical restrictions.

4 Interactive Relationship Between Language and Social Construction of Female Characters in Modern Chinese Literature

4.1 The Shaping Role of Language in Social Construction of Female Characters

Language is a key tool for group interaction. It's not just about sharing information. It also helps shape social identity and views on gender. In modern Chinese literature, how female characters speak plays a big role in shaping their social image. In modern and contemporary Chinese, the language of female characters is of great significance in shaping their social images. Most of women's language expressions are elegant, implicit, and feature delicate emotional expressions. To some extent, this deepens society's perception of female images. However, it also provides opportunities for the diverse presentation of female images [8].

For example, in Lao She's *Dragon Beard Ditch*, the female character Xie Jing highlighted the unique language characteristics of women during her conversation with He Shun. When pleading with He Shun to drive, Xie Jing addressed him with the honorific "Master He" and tactfully said, "Please make this trip." This not only reflects the elegant demeanor of women in social situations, but also mirrors the expectations of female roles in that era - being gentle and obedient. When faced with He Shun's unreasonable request, instead of immediately refusing, Xie Jing "said nothing, turned around, got on the bike and rode away." This evasive behavior reveals the characteristic docility of women, as well as their sense of powerlessness and resistance will

when facing unfair treatment. This way of language expression and social interaction not only shapes the social impression of the female character Xie Jing, but also reflects the broad expectations and limitations of female roles in society at that time.

4.2 The Influence of Social Construction on Female Characters' Language

Language is important in shaping women's roles in society. In different times and social settings, women's speech has been shaped and limited by social rules, cultural traditions, and fixed ideas about gender.

Society influences women's linguistic expression while constructing their roles and hierarchical positioning in interpersonal interactions. Under feudal society, women occupied lower positions in both family and social hierarchies, facing strict constraints and limitations in their linguistic expression. For instance, in literary works like "Precepts for Women" and "Biographies of Exemplary Women," women were taught to be "cautious in every move" and careful in speech. Social norms made women appear reserved in their words and shy in conversation. However, this phenomenon's other aspect enhanced their skills in emotional expression. They became highly attentive to others' emotional changes during conversations, constantly evaluating situations to ensure their words were appropriate and met various standards. The linguistic characteristics of female characters shaped in literary works represent both their absorption of social rules and their means of living and communicating within specific social contexts. Entering contemporary society, as women's social status gradually improved and gender equality concepts became deeply rooted, women's linguistic expression styles have shown diversifying trends. However, in specific environments, women still tend to prefer using gentle and respectful language to avoid conflicts and create harmonious atmospheres.

This evolution shows the complex relationship between social progress and language. Traditional influences still persist, even as new ways of expression develop. The ongoing preference for harmonious communication highlights how deeply social norms shape language use. This remains true even in a time of growing gender equality.

4.3 Interactive Mechanism Between Language and Social Construction

The link between language and society is a two-way exchange. They affect each other all the time. In modern Chinese literature, women's language both reflects and shapes social structures. This drives big changes in gender roles and relationships.

In the works of contemporary female literature, with the strengthening of women's self-awareness and the deepening of the concept of gender equality, the language expression methods used by women are gradually showing a tendency towards "rigidity". This transformation in language style is not only a subversion of traditional female language habits but also symbolizes the reshaping of women's positioning in society. For example, in the works of female authors such as Liu Suola and Can Xue, the language of the female characters they created has broken free from the shackles

of traditional gracefulness and propriety, and instead shows a distinct, frank and powerful style. Women, taking language as a vehicle, demonstrate independent thinking and a proactive consciousness, thus challenging the fixed perception of female images in traditional society. The transformation of language expression methods, on the one hand, reflects the profound changes in female images, and on the other hand, can also contribute to the positive development of the social structure.

Women are active in all aspects of society and spare no effort to contribute their own strength. Meanwhile, society's expectations and affirmation of the roles played by women are constantly changing. It can be seen that female images have broken free from the traditional single definition and are no longer the stereotyped images of being meek, fragile and dependent on others. Instead, they show a brand-new look of being independent, autonomous and full of creativity.

5 Conclusion

In modern and contemporary Chinese literary works, the social shaping of female images is a complex and multi - dimensional process. It includes the expectations and norms for the social roles of women, the definition of the functions and statuses that society assigns to female roles, as well as the changes in female characters' language expressions and social contexts as the times change. By exploring these aspects, we can understand the characteristics of the social shaping of female images in modern and contemporary Chinese literature and the process of their evolution.

In modern and contemporary Chinese literature, the language expressions of female characters are not only influenced and shaped by the social structure, but also, in turn, have an impact on it. This dynamic promotes the transformation of gender identities and the reconstruction of social bonds. This interactive model reflects the profound changes in female roles and the trend of social development, opening up new ways to understand and re - evaluate gender - related topics.

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