



Comparison of Western and Chinese Feminist Manifestations According to Chizuko Ueno's Feminist Liberalism and Beauvoir's Existential Feminism

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Abstract. With the deepening of globalization and multicultural exchanges, the manifestation and development of feminism in different cultural contexts have increasingly attracted the attention of academics. As a social trend and theoretical system, feminism centers on exploring the root causes of gender inequality and its solutions. However, due to the great differences between the social, cultural, and historical backgrounds of China and the West, feminism shows obvious heterogeneity in the two contexts. For example, Chizuko Ueno's theories represent the development of Japanese feminism in the Asian cultural context, while Beauvoir's ideas profoundly reflect the core propositions of Western feminism, especially existential feminism. Exploring the similarities and differences between the two doctrines can not only deepen the understanding of the differences between Chinese and Western feminisms, but also provide insights into the practice of gender equality on a global scale. This project attempts to reveal the differences and commonalities between Chinese and Western feminisms in terms of theoretical logic, historical background, and social practices through a comparative analysis of specific feminist ideas put forward in the works of the two thinkers, so as to provide new perspectives for feminist studies, in order to guide the practice of feminist social activities in the new era.

Keywords: Feminist studies, Eastern and Western cultural contexts, contrasting differences, guided practice

1 Introduction

1.1 Theoretical Background

Feminism, also known as women's rights movement, is both a comprehensive theory of equality and a collective term for a series of social movements aimed at establishing a friendly society where all genders are treated equally. Specific actions include "providing strong support, encouragement, and courage to female victims" and "eliminating gender stereotypes that carry discriminatory connotations," which falls under the category of humanism [1].

Feminist theory is not a unified theory; rather, it is divided into various factions, each with differing perspectives on feminism. However, most discussions frequently mention certain key terms, such as matriarchy, reproductive rights, right to education, household labor distribution, maternity leave, wage equality (the workplace glass ceiling), domestic violence, sexual violence, rape, sexual harassment, abortion rights, incest, objectification (especially in terms of sexual objectification), gender discrimination, the nature of inequality, power relations under gender politics, patriarchy, and representation, among others [2]. These terms are used to awaken women's gender consciousness and provide their own definitions for these concepts.

However, the differences in historical background, cultural traditions, and gender concepts between Eastern and Western societies result in significant heterogeneity in feminist thought within these two contexts. For instance, in the context of Western societies where modernization has progressed earlier, Simone de Beauvoir emphasized achieving gender liberation through individual freedom; whereas in the traditional cultural context of Asia, Chizuko Ueno focuses more on analyzing the structural oppression of women by social systems and cultural norms. These differences reflect the diversity of feminism in the process of globalization and also present important theoretical issues for cross-cultural gender studies.

By conducting a comparative analysis of the thoughts of Beauvoir and Ueno, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the similarities and differences in feminist theory, practical approaches, and social impacts between the East and West, providing new theoretical perspectives and practical directions for the global gender equality movement.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study aims to explore how feminist theories are interpreted and practiced in different cultural contexts through a comparative analysis of Beauvoir's existential feminism and Chizuko Ueno's female libertarian thought. This not only helps to enrich the cross-cultural dimension of feminist theoretical research, but also provides important theoretical support for contemporary gender research and practice. Specifically, the study has the following three implications:

1.2.1 Theoretical Significance.

Through a comparative study of the core ideas of Chinese and Western feminism, it will further deepen the understanding of the causes of gender inequality and reveal the influence of cultural and social factors on the development of feminist theory. The study will also fill the lack of domestic research on Ueno Chizuko's thought and promote the dissemination and development of East Asian feminist theories in the global context.

1.2.2 Practical Significance.

The research results can provide new ideas for the current practice of gender equality, especially in the handling of gender issues in the context of globalization, and

promote exchanges and cooperation between Chinese and Western societies in the field of gender equality.

1.2.3 Cultural Significance.

By comparing feminist ideas from a cross-cultural perspective, the study explores the complex relationship between cultural traditions, social structures and gender concepts, and provides useful insights for promoting cultural exchanges on a global scale.

1.3 Research Methodology

In order to comprehensively reveal the commonalities and differences between the thoughts of Beauvoir and Ueno Chizuko, this study mainly adopts the following three research methods:

Literature Analysis Method: Through reading and analyzing the two scholars' major works (e.g. *The Second Sex*, *Misogyny*) and related academic studies, we summarize their core ideas and reveal their theoretical logic.

Comparative Research Method: Compare and analyze the similarities and differences between the ideas of Beauvoir and Ueno Chizuko in terms of theoretical framework, cultural background and social practice, so as to provide reference for cross-cultural gender research.

Empirical Analysis: In light of current gender issues, such as gender discrimination in the workplace and the transformation of family structure, we will explore the practical applicability of the theories of the two scholars, and provide reference for contemporary gender research and practice.

2 Analyzing the Representation of Feminism in the East and West through the Works of Beauvoir and Chizuko Ueno

2.1 The Ideological Essence of *The Second Sex*

First published in 1949, Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, a seminal work of modern feminism, has a central idea that challenges the assumption of the naturalness of gender identity. She suggests that “a woman is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”), emphasizing that the formation of female status stems from social, cultural, and historical constructed.

According to Beauvoir, women have historically been placed in a male-dominated “subject-other” dichotomy and have lost their independent subjectivity. The male is seen as the universal, representative of humanity, while the female is the “second sex”, defined as the subordinate or complementary to the male. The perpetuation of such definitions not only reinforces gender inequality through religious, literary, and legal discourses, but also shapes women's perceptions of themselves, internalizing their identity as “the other.” Beauvoir calls on women to break out of this passive

situation by rejecting the established roles and pursuing freedom and self-transcendence.

2.2 Chizuko Ueno's Core Perspective: Critique of Family Structure and Gender Division of Labor

Chizuko Ueno's feminist thought centers on the critique of family structure, focusing on how patriarchal culture oppresses women through the gender division of labor. In *Misogyny* (Misogyny), she criticizes the structural discrimination against women in Japanese society and reveals the suppression of female subjectivity through the gender division of labor within the family. She argues that the child-rearing and domestic work that women undertake in the home is not only under-recognized by society, but reinforces their subordination in terms of economic and social status.

Ueno points out that such oppression is not simply a matter of personal choice, but is deeply influenced by the cultural traditions and institutional arrangements of Japanese society. She pays particular attention to the role of Confucianism in gender concepts, arguing that this male-centered ethical system provides legitimacy to patriarchy and leads to women's "double burden" in the family and in society [3].

2.3 Uniqueness in Asian Cultural Contexts

Unlike Beauvoir's theory of feminism based on existentialist philosophy, Ueno's thought is more concerned with the specificity of Asian culture. She pointed out that the shaping of gender concepts by Confucianism is the core problem that Asian feminism must face [4].

For example, Ueno criticizes the traditional cultural conception of women as the "pillars" of the family, arguing that this role expectation is actually a cultural norm constructed by men to consolidate their dominant position in society. She argued that the feminist movement must take into account the specific conditions of Asian societies and gradually promote gender equality rather than copying Western models.

It can be seen that although both Beauvoir and Ueno Chizuko are committed to promoting gender equality, their theoretical focus and practical paths are distinctive due to their different cultural backgrounds. While Beauvoir emphasized the philosophical connotations of individual freedom and subjectivity, Ueno paid more attention to changes in social structure and cultural norms.

3 Analyzes the Constituent Factors in Terms of the Social Era and Context in which Beauvoir Lived

3.1 The writing of *The Second Sex* was in a Period of Transition in Western Society after World War II

The war led to a large number of women entering the labor market and taking up duties traditionally regarded as male. However, after the war, women were forced to

withdraw from the workplace and return to their families. The return of men to power not only suppressed women's social status, but also exacerbated women's self-perceived confusion and questioning of their identity. Against this background, Beauvoir explores the deeper reasons for women's marginalization from a philosophical perspective.

3.2 Influence of Philosophy and Literature

Beauvoir was deeply influenced by Sartre's existentialist philosophy. Existentialism advocates that “existence precedes essence” and believes that individuals construct themselves through free choice, which provides a theoretical basis for Beauvoir to analyze the constructive nature of gender roles. In addition, she was also inspired by Hegel's “subject-other” dichotomy, which she believed was transposed to gender relations, forming a social structure in which men are the subjects and women are the others.

3.3 Personal Experience

Beauvoir's own academic and life experiences profoundly influenced the formation of her thought [5]. As the first woman to pass a philosophy exam in France, she was acutely aware of sexism in a male-dominated academic environment. At the same time, her close relationship with Sartre allowed her to reflect on how women could transcend traditional gender roles and pursue freedom in theory and practice.

4 Analyzing Constituent Factors from the Social Era and Context in which Chizuko Ueno lived

4.1 Socio-historical Background

Chizuko Ueno's theories were formed in the second half of the 20th century during the period of rapid social development in Japan. During Japan's economic take-off after World War II, women were massively integrated into the labor market, but the realization of gender equality lagged far behind. The family system in post-war Japan was still based on patriarchy, and women were under tremendous pressure between the workplace and the family. In addition, Japanese society's promotion of the image of the “good wife and good mother” led women to take on heavy unpaid labor in the home. This social reality became the main target of Ueno's criticism.

4.2 Academic Background and Ideological Sources

Chizuko Ueno was deeply influenced by Western feminist theories. Using Marxism as her theoretical foundation, she analyzed the mechanism of oppression against women in modern Japanese society and supplemented it with Freudian theories. Her core concerns include the relationship between patriarchy, capitalism, the nation-state

and women's emancipation, especially the critique of traditional class-centeredness and the obscuring of women's oppression.

4.3 Personal Experience

As a female pioneer in academia, Chizuko Ueno has faced many challenges in Japan's male-dominated academic environment, which has heightened her focus on the limitations of institutional discrimination on women's development. Her own observations of family and social relations also provided vivid material for her theories [6].

4.4 Uniqueness in Asian Cultural Contexts

Chizuko Ueno's feminist theory particularly emphasizes the uniqueness of Asian culture, arguing that the influence of Confucianism on women's status is particularly prominent in East Asia. She criticized the role modeling of the “good wife and mother”, arguing that it is a cultural tool used by men to assert their power. In addition, she analyzes women's issues in the modernization process in Asia, such as how industrialization and urbanization have changed the traditional gender division of labor, while also creating new challenges for women.

5 Feminism Guides Real-World Social Practice

5.1 Beauvoir's Theories have had a Profound Impact in Post-World War II Western Society, Especially in the following ways

5.1.1 The Impetus to the Female Liberation Movement.

The Second Sex is regarded as one of the ideological sources of second-wave feminism, which directly contributed to the development of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s. Beauvoir's revelation of the status of the “other”, making women aware of the structural problems of gender oppression and motivating them to fight for their rights through political and social actions.

5.1.2 Education and Cultural Change.

Beauvoir emphasized the need for women to break away from their traditional role as “wives and mothers” and to actively participate in the production of knowledge and the creation of culture. This view led to the reform of the education system and the rise of women in the academic, literary and artistic fields.

5.1.3 Individual and Collective Pursuit of Freedom.

Beauvoir's ideas not only provided philosophical guidance for women's individual freedom of choice, but also provided a theoretical basis for women's collective action for equal rights.

5.2 Feminist Practice in the Process of Modernization in Japan

At the practical level, Ueno put forward a number of strategies for gender equality:

Policy reform: promoting the improvement of social security systems such as maternity leave and childcare services to reduce women's family responsibilities.

Educational reform: advocating gender equality education and changing traditional gender concepts.

Social mobilization: encourage women's participation in public affairs and increase the proportion of women at decision-making levels through feminist movements.

By analyzing the ideas and backgrounds of Beauvoir and Chizuko Ueno, it can be seen that they proposed solutions to the problem of gender inequality from Western existentialism and Asian cultural traditions respectively. Beauvoir emphasized emancipation through individual freedom, while Ueno focused on gender equality through institutional change [7].

6 Conclusion

This article conducts a detailed comparative analysis of the theories of two feminist thinkers, Chizuko Ueno and Simone de Beauvoir, starting from the different cultural and social backgrounds of the East and West. By exploring the similarities and differences in their theoretical logic, social practices, and historical contexts, the paper reveals the diversity and uniqueness of feminist thought in different contexts and provides important insights for contemporary global practices of gender equality.

Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex," as a foundational work of modern feminism, articulates the social construction of gender identity and presents the classic proposition that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." Her thoughts are deeply influenced by Sartre's existentialist philosophy, emphasizing that individuals transcend established roles through free choice, pursuing subjectivity and self-liberation. Beauvoir's theoretical background is rooted in the transformative period of Western society after World War II, when women entered the labor market due to the war but were forced to withdraw from the workforce and return to the home after its conclusion. This social reality prompted her to analyze the deep-rooted causes of gender inequality from a philosophical perspective and critique the male-dominated "subject-other" dichotomy. In addition, Beauvoir calls for women to reject traditional gender roles and pursue freedom and equality by revealing the mechanisms that reinforce gender inequality in fields such as religion and literature. Her ideas provided theoretical support for the second wave of feminism in the 20th century and had a profound impact on educational reform and the rise of women's cultural production.

In contrast, Chizuko Ueno's thoughts focus more on gender issues within the Asian cultural context. Centered on family structure and gender division of labor, she critiques the structural discrimination against women in Japanese society, particularly the Confucian notion that positions women as the "pillar" of the family. She emphasizes that patriarchal culture places women in subordinate economic and social positions through gendered division of labor and advocates for improving women's status

through institutional reform and social practice. Ueno's theories emerged during Japan's rapid economic development, where women, despite entering the labor market, faced dual pressures between family and work. She critiques the traditional societal admiration for the "good wife, wise mother" role, viewing it as a cultural tool used by men to consolidate power. Ueno's ideas also draw from Marxism and Western feminist theory, combining them with Japan's social reality to propose a series of specific strategies for gender equality, such as promoting social security system reform, advocating for gender equality education, and enhancing women's public participation.

From a practical perspective, the significance of this paper lies in providing cross-cultural theoretical support and concrete pathways for gender equality actions. Through the analysis of the thoughts of Beauvoir and Ueno, practices for social gender equality can draw on the strengths of both: emphasizing the realization of individual freedom while also promoting institutional-level reforms. Based on this, formulating action plans that incorporate local culture and social realities can more effectively address issues of gender inequality in modern society, offering feasible references for feminist practices globally.

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