

A STUDY ON FEMINIST AWARENESS IN THE NOVELS OF FANG FANG

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Abstract: This essay explores aspirations and expectations of women's rights, the sympathy for and reasons for women's destinies by analyzing the forms of expression and tracing the ideas of feminist awareness in Fang Fang's novels in terms of feminist wishes in survival predicaments, struggles in literature fields, and feminists' pursuits in daily life, with highlighting the standout points of a number of feminist researchers, Bourdieu's Literature Field theory and Otto Weininger's Sex and Character theory.

As a prominent Chinese writer, Fang Fang has always been renowned for her meaningful and substantial literary creations. Her novels have depicted various social phenomena and have exposed current problems and people's attitudes. From the early *White Dream*, *White Smog* to *Scenery*, *My Start is Also My End*, *Splendid Peach Blossoms*, *Implication*, *My Grandfather in My Father's Heart*, to *A Heart Penetrated by Thousands of Arrows*, *Personal Sorrow of Tu Ziqiang*: In this series of outstanding works about the inner worlds of unimportant figures, she has revealed the impacts and changes which time imposes on women's destinies and life courses.

Fang Fang has depicted very distinctive female images in her novels with feminist ideals such as independence, self-esteem and self-reliance. Much of their resistance and struggles failed at last, but the difficulty and desperation depicted made their dreams extremely valuable and the novels brilliant.

We may take *One Person's War*, by Lin Bai, and *Personal Life*, by Chen Ran, as representative works for women to comprehend and explore their female identities. Fang Fang's novels have not only portrayed women recognizing their objective social statuses, but also have displayed their self-transcendence and self-fulfillment.

In China, Feminism was first termed 'feminine ideology,' the evolution of which is meaningful. Zhang Jingyuan explained, in *Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism*, "I think that feminism and feminine ideology reflected two phases of the women's liberation movement. The early feminist political struggles focused on objectives of winning fundamental rights and complete entities that men had obtained. Struggles of women involved combating legal, educational, cultural and productive injustice against them. These struggles continue up to now. In the literary field, it involves efforts to make their voices heard by the public, and make works from female writers and critics read by people. Female struggles also involve acquiring works for women's education and rights for feminist critics. In this sense, it is a 'doctrine for women's rights,' a cause of struggles for women to acquire equal rights. If we emphasize 'Sex' in feminism, we enter the post-structuralism of gender theories. The translated works we collected are

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mainly post-structuralism articles. Therefore, the 'women's right doctrine' is more suitable, which combines sex and rights, or has incorporated new meanings." (Zhang 1992)

The reason this essay still uses *feminism* is that the sympathy and sorrow expressed in Fang Fang's novels for women's destinies haven't exceeded the definition of Zhang Jingyuan – "struggles of women to acquire equal rights." In the following narrative, we will discuss three aspects of feminist awareness as portrayed in Fang Fang's works.

I. Feminist Cries in Surviving Dilemmas

Otto Weininger, a genius Austrian philosopher, wrote in his book, *Sex and Character*, "Further, the emancipation that I have in mind is not a woman's desire for external *equality* with a man. The *problem* that I wish to solve in my search for clarity in the question of feminism is that of a woman's *will to become internally equal* to a man, to attain his intellectual and moral freedom, his interests and creative power." (Weininger 2005, 58)

Fang Fang develops the female desires explored by Weininger into feminist cries in surviving dilemmas with a series of female images for feminist ideals.

Yingzhi, the heroine in *The Running Fire*, a novel written by Fang Fang in 2001, was born with a good voice. She strived unremittingly for a rich and beautiful life, but she had to marry Guiqing for a premarital pregnancy, which ever after threw her life into tragedy. After marriage, Yingzhi didn't get necessary care or love but was scorned due to her early indiscretion. Insults from her parents-in-law and laziness from her husband made Yingzhi undertake the burden to support the family after the baby's delivery. She had a firm determination that nobody around her dared to imagine - she would make money and build a house for her family of three. For this goal, she rushed about performing as a singer at marriage and funeral ceremonies. For more money, she pulled off her clothes in performance, and subsequently was terribly beaten by her husband. At last, she got the money for a new house. "The construction of the new house started on March 8, which was chosen by Yingzhi." Guiqing asked, "Why March 8th? Is it a lucky day?" Yingzhi replied, "I wouldn't choose another day." Yingzhi thought, "This is the day for women. It may change my fate to build the house on this day." (Fang 2015a, 67) Villagers commented, "We have never seen any women like Yingzhi, who could make so much money for a new house." In the whole Old Temple village, whenever a man was incapable, his wife would have to live in a shabby house. But Yingzhi was different; she would change life by herself. (Ibid, 73-74) However diligent and ambitious Yingzhi was, her husband lost all of the money in gambling when the house was half built. The dream came so close to being true, by Yingzhi's enormous pain and suffering, but failed at last.

Marion Reid, a feminist and author of *A Plea for Women*, published in 1843, noticed, "But a married woman - living in a 'shackled condition' - has no rights over her own property; even the produce of her own labour is at the disposal of her husband, who can, if he chooses, take and 'waste it in dissipation and excess.' Moreover, 'her children, as well as her fortune, are the property of her husband.'" Yingzhi's fate coincides completely with Reid's description. Reid stated, "In a sense, women were born for men. But in a higher level of sense, women were also born for themselves." (Walters 2014, 42-43)

It was a conscious feminist awareness which gradually led Yingzhi to tragedy through her continuous confrontation with multi-patriarchal suppression.

As a woman, Yingzhi had been suppressed both by marital and patriarchal rights. After the terrible domestic violence, Yingzhi returned to her father's house. Her father told her, "You were wrong, and you should go back and say you are sorry to Guiqing. We can't raise you forever. As a woman, you should observe a rule, knowing what you can do and what you can't do." (Fang 2015a, 64) Her mother said, "You are a woman, and you should remember that your task is to serve your husband well, but don't combat him. You can't win." (Ibid, 64-65) Yingzhi "wanted to cry, to strike the wall with her head, to tear =at her chest, and to challenge the sky as to why it was so unfair to women." (Ibid, 64) At last, Yingzhi's plan to divorce was firmly rejected by her father, who thought it was a shame and an immense disgrace to his family.

"In her book, *Sexual Politics* (1970), Kate Millett set out to analyze 'patriarchy as a politics institution.' Politics, she insists, refers to all 'power structured relationships,' and the one between the sexes is a 'relationship of dominance and subordination' which has been largely unexamined." (Walters 2014, 105) This is prominent in the Chinese countryside which is more traditional and conservative. Under the patriarchal suppression, Yingzhi's awareness of reformation and resistance was prohibited. Finally, Yingzhi became a victim under the dual suppression of marital and patriarchal rights. Under desperation and insult, Yingzhi killed her husband by setting a fire, and all resistance ended with destruction, including herself. Yingzhi was unyielding but destroyed by fate. She believed, "To a woman, marriage can be either heaven or hell. Marrying a good man takes you to heaven, marrying a bad man brings you to hell." (Fang 2015a, 69) Yingzhi ascribed her tragedy to a failing marriage, but the fact is not so simple. Marital tragedy is just a presentation, but the truth is a massive curtain of traditional customs and feudal habits, and the subordinate fate of women that can't be easily overcome.

Fang Fang expressed her feminist cries in surviving dilemma through Yingzhi who was full of defending awareness. These cries were heartbreaking, but faded into silence, and feminist resistance led to the woman's destruction. This tragic paradox makes people sigh on one hand, and drives readers to contemplate the dilemmas that women meet in defending themselves. How can they exercise their rights under the tight siege and suppression of marital, patriarchal and traditional concepts? Is their resistance weak and meaningless?

Fang Fang didn't stop her exploration of feminism after depicting Yingzhi, a countryside woman under the suppression of traditional concepts. She turned to a common city woman, who struggled in surviving hardships against fate and bravely overturned failing situations. With this, she wanted to write a eulogy for a feminist heroine.

In 2007, Fang Fang wrote her famous novel, *A Heart Penetrated with Thousands of Arrows*. The novel is full of plots with prophecy. Li Baoli met a series of misfortunes after she moved into the house that her husband Ma Xuewu got from his factory. For the first time, seeing the new house, Baoli's father said, "Here is a dead angle, and all roads turn around the traffic island in front of your door. Each road is like an arrow, directly shooting at your house. This is like a heart penetrated with thousands of arrows, the worst in Fengshui." (Fang 2013, 19) But her mother comforted Baoli, "I didn't see thousands of arrows, but I saw

endless brilliance. ...Who can really see Fengshui? A person with good luck sees endless brilliance, while a person with bad luck will see thousands of arrows shooting at the heart.” (Ibid, 20) These two sentences became the main thread of the novel and the key of the story. Since then, the life of Li Baoli evolved into a painful game between thousands of arrows shooting at her heart and endless brilliance. In the first part of the novel, Fang Fang focused on portraying Li Baoli's tough and aggressive image with a kind heart but a sharp mouth. At home, she was self-centered. Ma Xuewu said, “This house doesn't need reasons, as Baoli decides everything. If she is right, I follow her; if she isn't right, I also follow her.” (Ibid, 32) When dealing with her husband, parents-in-law, and the child, she often yelled and scolded loudly. Unconsciously, she had accumulated hatred toward her family. However, in inner merits, Li Baoli agreed very much, in her heart, with her mother that a woman should be reserved, kind, hardship bearing, and should keep virtues even in a poor family. “Li Baoli respects her mother most. ...A person like my mother, whether poor or rich, will be a piece of gold wherever she is placed.” (Ibid, 15) This has prepared for plots when Baoli stuck to these virtues and bravely faced surviving hardships.

Later, she found that her husband dated his lover in a small hotel. In a rage, she reported to the police anonymously that there was prostitution in the hotel. Therefore, her husband was caught, deposed and defamed, and was listed as one of those to be dismissed in the next round. In despair, Ma Xuewu was told by his lover that he was reported by his wife. Losing all hope, Ma Xuewu ended his life by jumping into the river. The climax of the novel began after Ma Xuewu's suicide. After he died, Li Baoli assumed the burden to raise the whole family. She thought, “In this world, men don't know their duties, but we women should know.” (Ibid, 77) “Men are unreliable, but it's Okay. We women can maintain the world.” (Ibid, 94) Inheriting her mother's virtues, Li Baoli picked up a shoulder pole and went to the streets carrying goods for others. She carried goods with her shoulders for 13 years, and raised her son and the whole family. However, when her son was admitted to a university with brilliant scores, he refused to accept her as he knew. From his father's lover, that Baoli had reported his father to the police. “If you ask Baoli what her biggest wish was, in her life, she would always give one same answer, raising her son to be a good person. It was like a gamble; Li Baoli has placed her future, enjoyment, happiness, and all other things onto Xiaobao. Her own life is the stake on this gamble.” (Ibid, 56) However, this biggest wish fails at last. The struggle of Li Baoli, in surviving hardships, made her an image with endless brilliance, and won readers' deep esteem. Facing life tragedies, she didn't yield, and she spent her prime years to change a life penetrated with thousands of arrows into a success with endless brilliance. The drastic failure made her ideal even more valuable and brilliant. With a resolute attitude, she was proud, optimistic, sunny and positive while implementing her mother's teaching that, “A woman shouldn't fear poverty but willpower. If you have a firm backbone, a poor life will not give you a tragic life.” (Ibid, 97)

Juliet Mitchell, the author of *Women's Estate*, published in 1971, commented on the women's movement: “Women come into the movement from the unspecific frustration of their own private lives, [and] find what they thought was an individual dilemma is a social predicament.” (Walters 2014, 112)

As a laid-off worker, Li Baoli has met a tragedy with contemporary features. A paragraph from a book by Dai Jinhua can best illustrate Li Baoli, “She has

always been contributing and sacrificing, and she got her glory with a character as a mother and beyond a mother. The colorful story ended with a deprivation, a deprivation by a mother of her children on a life choice, and a deprivation by the society of a mother's right.” (Dai 2010, 330-331)

The two characters above are both married women who represent feminist cries in surviving hardships. Under Fang Fang's depiction, they have the same spirit to continuously struggle in surviving the environment and to utter their cries under unfair treatment. However, due to specific identities, they have different results and idea development courses. Yingzhi, from the countryside, failed and was destroyed in her struggle; while the laid-off worker, Li Baoli, was unyielding and persistent in her struggle. Fang Fang has succeeded in exploring struggle and the efforts of different women facing surviving hardships, and has contemplated and investigated possible solutions for them.

II. Feminist Struggles in Literary Field

The feminist awareness in Fang Fang's works is not only represented in the description and excavation of the inner world of underclass laboring women, but also in the efforts of intellectual women in the fields of art, which is effectively displayed in her two early works, *White Dream* and *White Smog*.

White Dream is a novel, created in 1986, where Jiahua and Weier are two intellectual women in the literary field. On the surface, they are good friends, but due to different characters, personalities, outlooks on life and a system of values, their fates take different tracks. Pierre Bourdieu wrote, in *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, “The number of the practices and representations of artists and writers (for example, their ambivalence as much towards the ‘people’ as towards the ‘bourgeois’) can only be explained by reference to the field of power, inside of which the literary (etc.) field is itself in a dominated position. The field of power is the space of relations of force between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy the dominant positions in different fields (notably economic or cultural). It is the site of struggles between holders of different powers (or kinds of capital) which, like the symbolic struggles between artists and the ‘bourgeois’ in the nineteenth century, have at stake the transformation or conservation of the relative value of different kinds of capital, which itself determines, at any moment, the forces liable to be engaged in these struggles.” (Bourdieu 1996, 192)

Jiahua is hardworking, honest and kind; she cultivates and realizes her literary ideal with a down-to-earth attitude which is slow but sound. Weier seems eager for a quick success; she is artificial, hypocritical, and busy clinging to literature celebrities and searching for successful shortcuts. She fishes and angles for fame and compliments and is extremely lucky for her success in the field. The literary power field is clearly displayed by the two female writers who have the seemingly same starting point, and the effect is more and more noticeable. Their circumstances get more and more different, and become completely opposite at last.

Under the effect of the literary power field, Jiahua, who was honest and practical, was commonplace; while Weier, who was aggressive in self-expression, advanced rapidly. “Why Jiahua respects Weier most is that she is so simple, naive

and charmingly ignorant, like a panda in front of famous writers....Jiahuo felt doing that must need a lot of courage. On several occasions, she wanted to practice it, but gave up. ...Famous writers often patted Weier's head affectionately and said, 'This girl is really plain and lovely.' Then, they lavishly praised Weier's novels as being fresh, bright, sincere and touching." (Fang 2015c, 7) "Weier gained a big prize, and went to Beijing with a reward of 300 yuan and several feasts. She has visited some senior hotels and most famous celebrities. After her return, her ego got even more inflated. She would tell anyone she met who toasted her, who signed and underwrote for her. All of them were literary magnates or giants, and all the audiences were scared, thinking that Weier would be one of them soon." (Ibid, 7) Relying on the powerful voice of the literary field, Weier sent herself onto a fast track of success in the literary field, leaving Jiahuo far behind.

Due to differences in career achievement, personal value orientation and temperament, in the marriage field where women are often passively selected, the fates of the two girls are also opposite. Weier, who was rather common in appearance, met her prince charming. "The first was an overseas student, who studied in the USA. In this period, she selected boyfriends like buying things at a marketplace. She held one in her left hand, and continued looking for another with her right hand. After she took another one up, she dropped the first one in the left hand. It was said that Weier's present boyfriend was also an eminent figure." (Ibid, 51) However, Jiahuo, who was really brilliant, had a poor "selling". She had to rely on introductions from friends and relatives, and had to reduce her requirements. She even seems to use her financial advantages to promote herself: "Lao Wu (Jiahuo's colleague) introduced a boyfriend to Jiahuo...When seeing her off, Lao Wu told her, time and again, that 'the man got divorced but had no kids. He had a rather spacious house. It's your good luck to find such a man. Of course, you should not be self-abased.' Jiahuo remembered that Sigua (her friend) also persuaded her not to belittle herself. She had never heard this before. Now, she felt that she was just like a hard to sell product. Lao Wu reminded her that she must tell the man she had thousands of yuan as a royalty fee each year to subdue him." (Ibid, 51)

The completely different fates of Weier and Jiahuo, the two young writers in the same literary field, have once again confirmed the statement of Bourdieu: "It is thus that, at the core of the *subfield of restricted production* (which, being dedicated in an exclusive manner to production for producers, recognizes only the principle of specific legitimation), those who are assured of recognition by their peers, a presumed index of a durable conservation (the consecrated avant-garde), are opposed to those who have not reached the same degree of recognition from the standpoint of specific criteria." (Bourdieu 1996, 218-219)

Weier, who was extremely favored by literary magnates, became a successful person in the literary field after gaining advantages. With all possible resources, she was a "winner" in all worldly respects. During this period, Weier was in a state of selection and struggle; even in the career and marriage fields, where women were traditionally passive, she was in a superior position for active selection and domination. With the comparison and contrast between Jiahuo and Weier, the original pair of good friends, Fang Fang made a treacherous and eye-catching description of the feminist struggle in the literary field.

Weier was born in a poor family, but she was successful with all possible

means, speculations and tact. Jiahua said, "Look, if you continue like this, you won't dare to step on the cobbled roads at your hometown." Weier replied, "Exactly, the shabby roads don't deserve my leather shoes." (Fang 2015c, 26) With twisting words, Fang Fang created a feminist image in the literary field. She incorporated criticism into this image, but Weier's success in the worldly society and her moral insufficiency formed an effective contrast that made the image more meaningful and valuable for discussion.

Li Ya, in *White Smog* by Fang Fang, is also a feminist figure in the literary field. As a commentator of an exhibition center, Li Ya had always dreamed of standing on a higher branch like a phoenix. Her former boyfriend was Beibei, an officer of an aviation school. Beibei was handsome, but in one demonstration class, he pushed down a forbidden button and was thrown out of the plane and died. Li Ya got the inheritance of her former boyfriend, and began to search for the next target. Finally, at a marriage ceremony, she met Ma Yiguang, whose father "was one of the top 5 officials in the province." When Ma Yiguang sat next to her, Li Ya didn't feel anything special. (Fang 2015d, 236) "Ma Yiguang wasn't outstanding in appearance, and there was no flirting shine in his eyes. Li Ya looked at all the handsome boys at the ceremony, inquiring their names and home background, except Ma Yiguang." (Ibid, 236) Li Ya didn't notice him until Ma Yiguang praised her beautiful skirt, and the bridegroom came to introduce Ma Yiguang. With the warm help of the bridegroom, Li Ya and Ma Yiguang became friends. As he had been infected meningitis Ma Yiguang couldn't remember present things but had memories of things in the past. He was a man with physiological defects. However, "Li Ya said the encounter with Yiguang was the turning point of her life. Therefore, Li Ya fell in such a deep love with Yiguang that she would die if she was separated from him." (Ibid, 238)

Li Ya marched on the road designed by herself for fame and gain at the cost of her life happiness. Gradually, she became successful. "Li Ya stated, on social occasions, women that drew the most attention and favor were those with senior family backgrounds, beautiful appearances, and brilliant talents. A woman possessing status, appearance and talent could conquer the world. Yiguang gave her the first asset of such a woman. Li Ya had the second asset as she was rather beautiful after applying makeup. Therefore, if she wanted to conquer the world, displaying her talent became her most pressing issue." (Ibid, 238)

It is just like what Bourdieu has said, "Because of the hierarchy established in the relations among the different kinds of capital and among their holders, the fields of cultural production occupy a dominated position, temporally, within the field of power. As liberated as they may be from external constraints and demands, they are traversed by the necessity of the fields which encompass them: the need for profit, whether economic or political." (Bourdieu 1996, 216)

Under the multiple impact of political, economic and interest fields on the cultural production field, Li Ya successfully obtained sponsorship with the influence of Ma Yiguang's father. She also became a vice director for a television play. She said to Ma Yiguang's father, "I will go my way with my own design... I will make an adventure, and give you a big surprise with my achievements." (Fang 2015d, 243) With the direct interference of the political field represented by the power of Yiguang's father, Li Ya left the exhibition center and was transferred into the play department of the local TV station. Li Ya received great success on her feminist course. A new page was turned for her life. Li Ya told

Yiguang confidently, “The world is a stage for people just like me.” (Ibid, 244) However, professionals commented on the TV play she was involved with as a vice director: “Oh, oh, oh...It embarrassed me so much to mention that the director would say buttocks....Director Ye said, ‘Will she really work here?’ Director Wu replied, ‘We have to accept her as it is an organizational decision.’” (Ibid, 244)

On Li Ya's feminist ideal road, politics has exerted critical effects on the cultural production field. “The degree of autonomy of the field may be measured by the importance of the effort of the translation or of *refraction* which its specific logic imposes on external influences or commissions, and by the transforming, even transfiguring, effect it has on religious or political representations and the constraints of temporal powers. (The mechanical metaphor of refraction, obviously very inexact, is valid here only negatively, in order to banish from the mind the even more inappropriate model of reflection.)” (Bourdieu 1996, 220)

By placing feminist struggles under the interaction of multiple fields, Fang Fang makes characters in her novels into rich social projections. Therefore, her narration is full of complex social relations, and feminist struggles under these backgrounds are full of independence, selfishness, desire and ambition.... Her description ultimately approaches Beauvoir Conception. Simone de Beauvoir “conjures up an image of the ‘the independent woman ‘who’...wants to be active, a taker, and refuses the passivity man means to impose on her. The modern woman accepts masculine values; she prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating on the same terms as man.” (Walters 2014, 98)

Weier and Li Ya, created by Fang Fang, conform to all features of Beauvoir Conception, therefore their feminist struggles are very representative. Fang Fang places feminist struggles in the literary field, and the restrictions and impacts of other fields such as politics, economy and interests are displayed through fates of novel characters. In turn, some moral defects of the characters become their inner motives for feminist struggles. Behind the strange logics is the profound understanding, distinction and alertness of Fang Fang on feminist struggles.

III. Feminist Pursuit in Daily Life

Weininger stated, in *Sex and Character*, “I would not have dared to aspire to such a high goal in the narrow space in which the different opinions about women and women’s feminism have clashed so far. However, the problem involves all the most profound mysteries of existence. It can be resolved, practically and theoretically, morally or metaphysically, only with the firm guidance of a *weltanschauung*.” (Weininger 2005, 4)

Unforgettable With or Without Love was created in 2002. It described how a woman, after a life accident, made her inner breakthroughs and tried to accept new and normal family life. Yang Jingguo, Yaoqin's fiance, died in a traffic accident when he rescued Yaoqin. In the same accident, a woman Yaoqin didn't know was also injured and became paralyzed. The woman's husband, like Yaoqin, held his beloved and was heartbroken.

As Yaoqin loved her fiance very much, and he died from rescuing her, in the next ten years, she lived reclusively, cherishing the memory of their past emotion. No matter how hard her relatives and friends persuaded her to get married and have a normal life, she insisted on living in the love illusion with her dead fiance.

After ten years, friends introduced a man named Chen Fumin to her. By chance, they found their intended spouses were involved in the same accident - one died and the other injured. Immediately, the two hearts got closer. The biggest obstacle between them was that Yaoqin couldn't forget her fiancé, and his photograph appeared in every corner of her new home. In a rage, Chen Fumin broke the glass frame of Yang Jingguo's picture into pieces, and Yaoqin hit him in the head with a stick, which made him into a human vegetable. As the case was special, Yaoqin was released from the court. Under her tender care, Chen Fumin woke up finally, while Yaoqin parted with the past and sincerely accepted the new love and home.

In the peaceful ten years after her fiancé's death, Yaoqin didn't yield to the requirements of social opinion, and persisted in her inner emotions. This is a special form of feminist claim. Study shows, feminist Mary Astell said: "Her great contribution to feminism was the way she urged women to take themselves seriously, to trust in their own judgement, to make their own choices in life by developing and educating themselves." (Walters 2014, 98)

Yaoqin followed this concept. With this psychological condition and intense self-awareness as a woman, she had always been loyal to her inner emotions, and had never yielded to worldly rules. She even used violence to defend her inner emotions and said farewell to the past. Yaoqin reached perfection outside and inside, in form and in heart. The course was tortuous, but she had never given up her feminist pursuit in daily life.

Opposite to the unyieldingness of Yaoqin is a common city woman who also explored feminist rights in daily life but compromised at last, and willingly became a housewife. He Hanqing was such a woman in *Seeking Suicide by Leaving Home*, created by Fang Fang in 2003. He Hanqing suffered all hardships and pains in daily life for the family. She had multiple family identities as a good wife, a good mother, a good daughter-in-law, and a good sister-in-law, so the image was very typical. Her struggles were displayed mainly on a consciousness level rather than by actions. She had never thought of terminating her life until fate pushed her into a situation which she could no longer tolerate. She expected to get her freedom and rights as a woman, and shook off surviving hardships through self-destruction. This character is close to real life and social truth, and its exploration is more meaningful.

He Hanqing worked day and night doing housework and took care of the whole family. Her parents-in-law were old, her husband was laid-off, her son was in college, and her sister-in-law was soon to be married. All were under her concern, and the whole family was supported by her as an hourly worker. In order to buy a computer her son liked, she went to donate blood. However, she was pushed onto the bed by her husband because she missed preparing lunch one day. In despair, she said that maybe she should just die. Her husband didn't comfort her but urged that she should commit suicide. The whole family mocked her that she dared not die. She thought, in sorrow, "Here is my home, but I have never found its love." After she left home, the neighbors treated her like a relative. She could not understand why. In anger, He Hanqing would think, "Do they believe that I am their servant? Am I so humble?" (Fang 2015b, 32)

After she left home, seeking death, He Hanqing was first stopped by her neighbor Grandma Zhu for ear-picking, and then she was asked to look after another neighbor Wen Sanhua's children. Next, she protected a little girl at the bus station by fighting a scoundrel. At last, she saved Wen Sanhua who was trying to

jump off a big bridge.

In the closely linked narration, in each postponement of seeking death, Fang Fang vividly depicted images of women with Chinese traditional virtues. This sad but beautiful description emphasized her important role in her family and among the community. At last, He Hanqing was found by her husband and employer without any suspense. Through her husband's description, she knew that her house was in a mess without her. The employer said, "Sister He, you are really great to raise the large family. You are the prime minister of the house, and you don't have the right to die. You can leave the world after all family members die. At that time, nobody would stop you." (Ibid, 71) Through the employer's mouth, Fang Fang expresses the social rules imposed on a housewife. At the end of the novel, she contemplates He Hanqing's tragedy.

With black humor, Fang Fang staged a play taking place over several days. She puts forth her thoughts and observations with each scenario - even the death right of a woman is limited by societal and family expectation. Therefore, it is evident how hard and hopeless is the feminist cause. He Hanqing changed from death determination, with intolerable humiliation, to a willingness to undertake her family duties which society imposed on her. Therefore, she calmly accepted her original life tracks, guaranteeing that the whole family ran normally and would survive. "He Hanqing thought, a person may not die until she had suffered all her pains in a life. Only at that time, a person may calmly die, and would not hesitate, like me today. Thinking of this, she felt quite happy, and believed that this should be life." (Ibid, 74)

Reid, a feminist we mentioned earlier, stated her opinion at the beginning of the 19th century on the self-sacrifice of women in household life, "Reid offers a cool and damning analysis of the way her contemporaries - and, she admits, they are mainly other women - talk so confidently about a 'woman's sphere,' and equate womanliness with the renunciation of self. 'Womanly' behavior, in practice, means 'good humour and attention to her husband, keeping her children neat and clean, and attending to domestic arrangements.' But Reid insists, more forcibly than anyone else in the period, that this apparently noble and virtuous 'self-renunciation,' in practice, usually involves 'a most criminal self-extinction'." (Walters 2014, 41-42)

"Any symptom of independent thought is quickly repressed...the majority of girls are subdued into more automatons." "Most girls are brought up to 'a mechanical performance of duty...their own minds all the while lying barren and unfruitful'." (Ibid, 42)

In 1825, William Thompson focused on the status of married women in his book *Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them in Political and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery*. He thought married women would be reduced to "movable property and an ever-obedient servant to the bidding of man." (Ibid, 44)

"In 1869 John Stuart Mill published *The Subjection of Women*, which also argued the subordination of women was both wrong and 'one of the chief hindrances to human improvement.'" (Ibid, 45)

The issues that feminists have appealed and reiterated for more than one century still exist and happen every day without any substantial changes. He Hanqing is such a typical image that feminists discussed thoroughly. At the end of the novel, we can feel helpless sighs and profound reflection from Fang Fang on

feminist rights of married women.

Under Fang Fang's pen, He Hanqing would carry through her self-contribution and self-sacrifice, and her feminist exploration in daily life ended with her active termination and withdrawal directed by social and ethical rules. Furthermore, this thorough and firm compromise was established on the basis of her awareness of feminist rights and her determination to find solutions. The novel has effectively pointed out the extreme difficulty and vague hope for feminist exploration in endless and repetitive daily life.

Conclusion

A common view was reached in international meetings held by UN in 1975-1985, "There is and must be a diversity of feminisms, responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women, and defined by them for themselves." (Ibid, 97)

The feminist awareness in Fang Fang's works has been displayed in specific scenario arrangements and character depictions, which best interpret the diversity of feminism. The above are just several examples as she has created numerous brilliant female images with feminist awareness. Mary Wollstonecraft, a feminist founder, wrote a letter collected in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a book recognized as the foundation of modern feminism, to Catherine Macaulay, a British historian and radical political writer: "You are the only female writer who I coincide in opinion with respecting the rank our sex ought to endeavour to attain in the world". (Ibid, 30-31)

Undoubtedly, Fang Fang has composed a series of eulogistic and mournful songs for feminist struggles, into which social, historical, traditional and field elements are incorporated for even vast and extensive life scenarios. Han Shaogong commented, "Excellent novels are so much like real life with unquestionably richness, completeness and power that offer dramatic psychological experience to readers." (Han 1993, 2) Undoubtedly, Fang Fang also deserves this comment. Fang Fang wrote in her book *Free Expression*, "I don't know how much I understand, but what I know best is that you can't raise too many critical requirements to them. You'd better live with them in peace, without interfering in their normal life, and have some happy moments without being noticed by others. In this way, your love story can be staged for many, many years. When they are lonely, you should comfort them; when they are happy, you should keep away from them. You are just like a taxi, coming for service and leaving without interference at their bidding. You are also like a set of tools, being handy when needed and waiting quietly at corners when not needed. In this way, they will be very satisfied with you. They look at you affectionately, saying you are a good person, sensible, considerate and extremely important for them. They will have intimate moments with you satisfactorily and remove your love thirst. However, they never ask if women expect these." (Fang 1996, 45)

Due to their rich and profound expression, the special and colorful scenery of feminist awareness in Fang Fang's works have become thought provoking and profound in the study of feminist awareness.

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