

# **A Comparative Study of Female Images in Chinese and Korean Novels**

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**Abstract:** In the early twentieth century, the thought Western women's liberation movement entered China and South Korea. Numerous women were gradually affected by the new style of education, and their consciousness began to sprout. On account of the similarities between China and South Korea concerning social background and the writer's life experience, there remain quite amounts of commonalities in their creative works. It was during this period that Zhang Ailing and Cui Zhenxi embarked on writing. With abundant emotion, they created in their works various images of women, incisively and vividly reflecting the social environment, as well as the social reality of contemporary men's oppression, domination and exploitation towards women. By comparing the female images in Zhang Ailing and Cui Zhenxi's works, this essay aims to seek the similarities and differences, and explores the self-recovery nature of women as human beings, searching a direction for women to regain their homologous social status.

## **1. Introduction**

Zhang Ailing and Cui Zhenxi, who lived both in the 20th century, are respectively one of the most important female writers in China and South Korea. Through plenty of female images portrayed in the works, the two writers attempt to exhibit their respective explorations of human nature, attitudes towards marriage and love. In addition, these women images are produced under the influence of the writers' social backgrounds and life experiences, for instance, the childhood experiences resemblance, the lack of parental affection in the family, the ups and downs of emotional marriage, contributing to the dismal and gloomy writing manner, and their deficiencies of love in the marriage, especially lead to the tragic images under the suppression of the background of the times. This essay primarily takes Zhang Ailing and Cui Zhenxi as examples to make a comparative study of female images in Chinese and Korean novels and to explore their views on women as well.

## **2. Comparison of Female Images in Zhang Ailing and Cui Zhenxi's Novels**

There exists a strong similarity in the two writers' social backgrounds and life experiences, which is embodied in the vivid display of the tragic living environment and bumpy mental journeys of women in China and South Korea. The female images predominantly created in their works are derived from their personal experience, amply revealing through various forms of the human world and incorporating their own views on women. The major female images in the works of the two writers are listed below.<sup>[1]</sup>

### **2.1 The One in the Suppression of the Feudal Family.**

Influenced by Chinese traditional culture, Zhang Ailing's works principally portray numerous women who are bound by feudal thoughts under the background of the patriarchal system. Take Bai Liusu in "Love in a Fallen City" as an example. Although Bai Liusu, with her beloved one, can be the married concomitance, the new-style education still is incapable of assisting her to obtain an equal status in a marriage under the background of this patriarchal system. In traditional feudal families, women tend to be educated with antiquated ideas, while women owning novel thoughts choose to escape from the families by marrying, seemingly the only method to survive, to improve their social position, and to escape the embarrassment of life. There remain considerable amount of such images in Zhang Ailing's novels, as Duan Lingqing in the "Heart Sutra" and Guo Feng in "Traces of Love", etc. Zhang Ailing depicts women in the novels as those who reluctantly are forced to marry in the constraint of feudal convention and lose their freedom of marriage for the sake of money. Through the portrayal of these images, Zhang Ailing criticized women's unconscious servility awareness and satirized the suppression and exploitation of women in the patriarchal social system at that time. In Cui Zhenxi's novel "Connections", a married woman, who falls in love with another man, attempts to acquire a divorce. However, suppressed by various difficulties, especially from her parents, the woman consequently fails to resist feudal society and remains back to her family. Feudal moral and ethical thoughts can be observed all around the dialogue between the characters in the novel, and even the divorce of women has been elevated to the level of family reputation. Under the background of the feudal system, divorced women were unkindly treated, and women suffered constant restriction and suppression about their personality with good wives and mothers and respecting Confucian moral injunctions, confining women to the family and leading to the abnormal phenomenon in which men can divorce but women cannot.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **2.2 The One with Morbid Psychology**

By creating the image of the protagonist Cao Qiqiao in "Golden Lock", Zhang Ailing demonstrates thoroughly the personality disorder in the human subconscious.

Cao Qiqiao is born relatively ordinary, but she has an abnormal desire for money and lust, which in consequence cause strictly and severely distorted and

psychologically abnormal during a long period of repression, an image of madness. Her lunatic behavior has twofold manifestations. On the one hand, she has contorted feelings towards her son Changbai for being unsatisfied with money and offsetting against the lack of love, and moreover, suppresses her daughter-in-law employing family authority, which forms a twisted environment in the family. Meantime, there exists similarly the extreme affective distortion towards her daughter, whose happiness of marriage is an intolerable factor to the mad mother, and the mere soothing method for Cao Qiqiao is to sabotage it with scheming plans.<sup>[3]</sup>

Most of images of mother produced by Zhang Ailing are those who appear shameless enough to abandon their children for money, fame, and status. The reason can be inferred from the author's own life, when she was discarded by her biological mother as a child, causing an extreme perception of the female parent. Compared to Cui Zhenxi's family, the unhappy marriage hasn't been reflected in the writing, as long as her mother kept her company. In spite of little description of the acerbic mother in her works, there still exist some pathological and hysterical female images, for instance, the single mother in "The Murderer" burdening the child with her own suffering, the mother in "Billbug" venting her wrath against the husband's incompetence and decadence on her innocent son, punching and kicking him.<sup>[4]</sup>

### **3. Perspectives of Women Reflected in the Two Writers' Creation of Women Images**

The reflection of Zhang Ailing and Cui Zhenxi's views on women is demonstrated through the various female images portrayed in their works. The prior one is the positive exploration for human nature. In Zhang Ailing's novels, on account of her own life experience and the impact of the social background, it constantly exhibits the ugliness of human nature, of the heart as well as the gloom of the soul. In addition, numerous creations, particularly female images, symbolize those of wretched appearance, who tend to end in self-abandonment for material, emotional, and sexual temptations, instead of behaving simple and kind-hearted. While Cui Zhenxi's works primarily portray the truth of the world, human nature, etc. We can observe from her novels the instincts of human nature, life, and love, and the women she describes often struggle to avoid difficulties and poverty.<sup>[5]</sup>

Zhang Ailing depicts the people and society in her novels full of hideous forms that make the readers tremble with fear, and employing the sensitiveness she offers the presentation of how people under the suppression of feudal culture move toward a distorted and deformed life under the optimization of lust and material desire. Cui Zhenxi's works predominately show the actual human nature, and through his works, it reflects women's instinctive pursuit of life under the fateful trend. In the process of pursuing love, these images are under pressure from poverty and children, suppressing their pain in the complex psychological contradictions, which are female tragedy caused by the patriarchal system.

It reveals in the works of the two writers that women desire and yearn for love and marriage at that time. They remain sophisticated of exploring human nature by taking advantage of trivial matters and real feelings between people. However, diverse path of bilateral marriage results in different attitudes and concepts towards love and marriage, different female images as well as the thoughts of the characters in their works. Marriage and love in Zhang Ailing's works are usually unhappy, impure, arranged ones driven by interests and full of corruption, desolation, emptiness, etc., which is a feudal marriage without sex and love under the suppression of the feudal system. Marriage in Zhang Ailing's works appears quite purposeful. It is a kind of extreme resistance or false submission, such as for revenge, raising children, etc. In the suppression of these external shackles, women at that time cannot perceive the beauty and happiness of marriage. In Cui Zhenxi's novels, the attitude of women towards love and marriage is a way of compromising with feudal families in society. It is concluded that the diversity of life experiences gives rise to the tremendous difference of attitudes towards marriage and love in the two writers' works.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Overall, in the early 20th century, China and South Korea were influenced by Western women's liberation ideological trend. Considerable amount of women received a new-style education and began to gradually awaken at the level of consciousness, which led to certain intercommunity of living environment and social background in writers of the bilateral countries. In the suppression of the patriarchal system, female problems are settled in Zhang Ailing's works, through the diffusion of abilities and maternal love. Zhang Ailing principally portrays the image of a silent woman, screaming for freedom, in the patriarchal society. From the perspective of feminism, they all call on women to search themselves as human beings, to restore female subjectivity, and to make women a member of human beings.

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