

# Highlighting Women's Life—Analysis of Distinguishing Feature of Contemporary Feminine Prose

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## Abstract

Feminine prose is a kind of relative existence which is derived from the scope of Feminine literature. It usually refers to such prose works with a certain feminine consciousness and discourse self-consciousness that are written by female writers. Feminine prose is characterized by their consciously highlighting women's "life". The distinguishing feature in writing is the combination of autobiographical characteristics of the subject matters with the female consciousness and aesthetic psychology of women, which results in strengthened inward-looking spiritual images of feminine prose.

**Keywords:** Feminine prose, Contemporary, Distinguishing feature, Autobiographical, Introversion

Prose ought to be a style of writing to the letter and the difference of prose with novel, poetry and drama lies in that the former lays particular emphasis on expressing writers' actual feelings and emotion, not allowing for a little bit affectation. According to Lin Fei, "Writing of prose is a kind of literature pattern which lays special emphasis on expressing the inner experience and inner feelings. Its reproduction of the objective social life or natural scenery can usually reflect or be integrated into the expression of the subjective emotion. Prose arouses feelings of readers mainly through the actual feeling and emotion that bursts out from the inner heart." (Lin Fei, 2008)

The natural relationship between prose and women has been widely known for a long time. Since prose is a sort of unconstrained and uncontrolled style of writing, writers may use all kinds of forms and methods to express their actual feeling and emotion and to disclose the spiritual world filled with personality, even if "their prose is full of defects, it doesn't matter at all". (Lu Xun, 1981) However, in the society with a long history in which male discourse is the center, men have been the writers, while women are usually regarded as the target of their writing. "Freedom of the art of composing a prose can enable women in a marginal culture to effectively resist the logic of Phallogocentric discourse hegemony, while the repressed spirit can alleviate the inner anxiety by means of arbitrary talking." (Ke, Ling, 1993) The prose critics Lou Zhaoming pointed out in "Social Role of Women, Imagination of Women and Thought of Witches", "Female prose should satisfy the following three conditions: (1) Thought on the social role of women; (2) This thought is based on the experiences of one. In other words, this thinking takes one's own experience and the psychological characteristics of women as the perspective and tentacle to observe the social life and historical nature; (3) The imagination means has the psychological characteristics of women, which shows preference for or is skilled in insight, intuition and synesthesia, etc.

Generally speaking, feminine prose is a kind of relative existence which is derived from the scope of Feminine literature. It usually refers to such prose works with a certain feminine consciousness and discourse self-consciousness that are written by female writers. The writing subject of prose is women and its speech vision of field is exploration and establishment by women for their own position as the subject. These female prose writers are with them the perspective of observation, experience and thinking on the social life that is particular to women, and realize the effect of combination of the realistic life, intuitive feeling, spiritual inspiration and life experience in terms of the content of writing with an open and liberal feminine consciousness. Xu Kun says, "Women are faced directly up with the life from the feminine perspective, so their writing is more vigorous and when they express their feelings, they are more outspoken and bold, with more force of penetration in their grasp of the "rule of game" in the commercialized society. The posture of women in their individual conversation with the history is more inflexible. Almost all female writers tap into the most secret inner world of women and find out that part that has been sheltered by the history." (Xu, Kun, 1999)

Characteristics of feminine prose is that women highlight "life" of women with consciousness.

### 1. Clear-cut autobiographical tendency and strong consciousness of the subject

This is an important characteristics of contemporary feminine prose, which is manifested as their thinking on the value and significance of women's life. In "Selected Works of Contemporary Artistic Prose", Liu Xiqing and Cai Yujia put forward the five expression levels of their knowledge in "human" and "humanity" in 1996, namely, the level of realistic life, the level of emotion, the level of spirit, the level of soul and the level of life experience. They also proposed the three aesthetic characteristics of artistic prose, namely, selfness, introversion and nakedness. All these statements grasp the essence of prose. Both of these two writers believed that prose "is a history of emotion and soul of the subject of writing and is a form for the writers to discuss the life" and prose "is full of awareness of the misery of survival of 'human', consciousness of worry and ultimate concern and is the spiritual homeland of the subject of writing and the habitat of the soul". (Liu Xiqing & Cai Yujia, 1996) They emphasized that writers should place the shot of artistic view directly towards the spiritual world of one. Feminine prose is especially obvious in terms of selfness.

"Female writers regard prose as the summon of the life and the pull of the fate because this kind of literature style is more suitable for them to talk out." (Liu Meng, 1997) Their writing goes from "observation of others" to "inner feeling", that is, to switch from the external world to the internal world. Earlier, "Flowers of Girl" by Tang Min and "Stars of Women" by Dan Ya indicated in-depth exploration into the spiritual circumstance and the historical fate of women. Later, "I Dance because I Am Sad" by Feng Qiuzi and "Only Women Understand Women" by Zhang Nian indicated pursuit of women for feminine independence and freedom. All these works presented the complicated relation between women and women, between women and men and between women and oneself. The writers not only wrote about the misery and misfortune of women, but also had experienced estrangement and indifference among human being and undergone the agonise of the era and loss of culture caused by "banishing of spirit. Loneliness, drift and death --- proposition with a modern meaning, can also be frequently seen in texts of women writers, which indicates their keen and inflexible pursuit, such as, "Why I Feel Lonely" by Si Yu, "I Have Something to Say to You" by Han Xiaohui, "Drifting of the Life" by Lu Zi, "I Can't Catch up with the Life" by Zhang Liqin, "Behind the Story" by Hei Hai, "Homeless Return" by Xiao Min, "Flowers of Girl" by Tang Min, "Seeking for Dream in Xiangxi" by Ye Meng, "What I Have Lost" by Wang Yingqi, "Empty Alley", "Shouting", and "Dream or Not Dream" by Zhou Peihong and "Letters of Women" by Su Su, etc. It is exactly in fission of the thinking that feminine prose at a new period go towards modernization and maturity. They have lost themselves in the metropolis, but in the meanwhile, they have discovered themselves in the target of literature. They may leave the reality to their body and leave their ideal to their soul, becoming a double person who drifts away in the experience of the ideal and the reality. (Liu Meng, 1997, p.67)

There are various reasons that this kind of autographical color is formed. Firstly, the autographical color is a necessity for female writers to seek for a kind of confirmation for their own value. The most direct cause for their writing is usually out of the strong will to give full play to their own value. Undertaking prose writing become a means and method for them to release their life potential, manifest the feminine independent consciousness and prove the value of survival. This causes their surrounding happenings and their internal emotion to naturally come into their visual area of writing at the earliest. Prose writing is not only an internal motive to drive their artistic inspiration, but also is a subject matter and content for their writing with high proficiency. Secondly, strong autographical feature has close relationship with the physiological and psychological characteristics of women. The natural instinct of women is sensible, delicate in thinking, which enables them to pay more attention to love, kinship and friendship and lay special emphasis on the self individual and on thinking the surrounding life. Women are not as good as men at a master narrative to the impartial world. The focus of women's writing is finally to state the feelings towards the mortal world, which is always shrouded with strong emotional appeal and color of self appealing.

The autographical tendency of the subject matter, on one hand, may lead to extreme display of writers' feminine consciousness as the subject, and, on the other hand, can not escape from being trapped in some disadvantages, which constitute the particular gender weakness of women and are directly reflected in feminine prose writing characterized by direct manifestation of oneself and nakedness of the soul: affectation, narcissism and secularity. In feminine prose, it is rare to find lots of articles that overlook ups and downs of the human world and inspirit human life in an alternation of time and space. Generally speaking, feminine prose is inferior to male prose in terms of embodying times spirit and presenting depth of thinking progress, with enough femininity and insufficient masculinity.

## 2. Writing about life experience of women

Ye Meng, with the title of “Xiaoxiang Witch”, is an influential explorer in feminine life consciousness prose. In “Change of Feminine Prose Creation in a New Period”, Li Hong entitled Ye Meng as “an explorer who started earliest and went furthest in the secret of women and secret of humanity in feminine prose in a new period”. Her fame-setting piece “Xiunv Mountain” rinsed all sorts of man power consciousness covered on Xiunv Mountain and imprisoned on feminine and encouraged the brilliance of feminine physical life. She delicately described the process of growth of the double life of female physical body and soul and wrote really significant events for individuals, such as “Purple and Warm Nest --- Romantic Recollection on My Birth” for birth, “I Can’ Go without the Moon” for menarche, “Kiss of the Moon” for the first kiss, “Tonight, I Am Your Bride” for the virgin night, “The Brilliant Moment of the Life” for becoming pregnant, “Exsanguine Flesh Is as White as Paper” for abortion, and “The Series One, Two Three of Creation” for gestation, delivery, lactation and mothering. In addition, with “Silent Chestnut Hill” and “Capsella Bursa-pastoris” which respectively described her childhood and the senium and death of her grandmother, Ye Meng wrote out the whole process of female body from the birth to the death and also answered the question where I came and where I would go. (Liu Siqian, 2008) The Works of “The Series of Creation” either presented the life evolving history of feminine growth, or described the life creation history of women, which both expressed apperception and reflection on the feminine life and human life and had the historical, cultural, philosophical or noumenal implication. In “Don’t Touch Me”, she didn’t evade the taboo of “sex” and “physical body”, but this prose gave a pure feeling from the aesthetic perspective. In addition, all the following proses sufficiently conveyed the enriched experience: “Sound of the Life” by Li Weihong, “It’s Never Enough to Love You” by Chi Li, and “Female Bible --- Garrulity of a Women with Pregnancy for Ten Months”, etc. Prose by Ye Meng, et al, indicate that women have had more profound exploration in human kind and female, with the meaning just as what Tie Ning said, “Here, what is important is not to debate on whether the birth place of the works is the mind or the womb, but that we have no necessary to negate that we are women. And only if we face up with ourselves, can we develop ourselves and can we acquire new discovery on the world when we develop ourselves each time.” (Guo Haiying, 2000)

Feminine prose is calm and unrestrained in terms of expressing the maternity of women. However, after being involved in social content, it seems to be at a loose end. Especially in face of men, feminine prose has no way to escape from the shrouded shadow as being the weak. Thus, although women doggedly pursue expression of an independent personality, the instable feeling of losing weight is still obvious. The long-lasting and remote “insecurity feeling” in female mind is often translated into feeling of inconfidence in the external reality or inconfidence in themselves, so they become lonely, anxious and uneasy. Generally speaking, in terms of the narrative attitude of feminine prose, although demand and expression of personality independence of women vigorously brush the male-centered dam that has been consolidated for thousands of years, after all, feminine prose has no way to fundamentally change the situation, considering the realistic social condition. The double chorus of self-confidence and inconfidence, calmness and anxiety, courage and pray in text narration comes into conflict and whirlpool, which is exactly the echo of the times of female liberation in the period of the reform. The narrative attitude of feminine prose in a new period embodies the difficult reform and reconstruction of the style of writing in calm and unrestrained self-confidence and anxious and disappointed inconfidence.

## 3. To look up and reflect on the objective world with an introvertive method

Combination of the autobiographical feature of a subject matter and the feminine consciousness and feminine aesthetic psychology lead to inward-looking intensification of the soul image of feminine prose. Whether writers write about themselves or write about others, they always pay attention to delicate internal emotional changes. They tend to sketch the contours of the trace of emotional flow. In terms of artistic expression, their explorations are also diversified. They either narrate in a complicated way or highlight monologue, and often employ the various techniques of expression of “absurd”, “argot”, “irony” and “illusion”, etc. They keep the traditional realistic writing structure means in pace with the open liberalstyle structure means. The traditional realistic writing structure has many clue concepts, in which writing of people, narration of events and scenic painting all are particular in suspense, foreshadowing, and correspondence and are in pursuit of the completeness of structure forms and external order and logics. Compared with the realistic writing structure, prose with the open liberalstyle structure means tends to avoid inflexible narration of time lapse and place conversion, achieves the intended conversion or changes of pattern through attempting to write about changes of objective things or sketching the track of emotional fluctuation of characters, highlights the freedom of leaping conception of poetry and builds a sort of poetic framework.

When some feminine proses are determined to “come down to the earth from poetry and literary grace”, the upgrading of the thinking mode and lyric structure of feminine prose arouse exclamation of critics. Sun

Shaozhen highly praised the delicateness and distinctiveness of the feeling” of prose by Tang Min and “enriched and changeable factors of emotional structure” in “A Star of Hope within the Field of Prose --- Discussion on Prose of Tang Min. In “Voyage of Cultural Integration”, Lou Zhaoming endowed prose of Cao Minghua, Si Yu, Ye Meng and Hu Xiaomeng et al, the various titles of “witch thought”, “divergent thinking” and “mythical thought”. (Guo Haiying, 2000, p.87) What people highly praise is that these proeses break through obsolete lyric modes and present lively, fresh and varied characteristics in narrative skill, prose structure and emotional operation, etc. Some new female writers borrow a variety of techniques of expression from western modernism literature. And the most commonly seen is a lot of explorations in free cutting of time and space, grasp and reproduction of instant illusion, symbolization and transformation of language and disclosure and expression of absurdness (Si Yu, 1993). The purpose of Si Yu was to “express the misery of the soul, reveal absurdness of the life and manifest the rich and complicated human nature.” (Si Yu, 1993) The prose is full of exaggeration, deformation, nightmare and chilling and weird images. However, Ye Meng and Zhao Mei used more poetic language to express particular changeful state of mind and subconsciousness of women. Modernism is a kind of arts about anxiety. It is obvious that female writers were deeply aware that old technique of expression was not able to appropriately express modern emotion, so they intentionally used consciousness flow, internal monologue and rational and irrational means in the hope of effectively expressing such strong feelings as anxiety, loneliness and speechless desperation.

Si Yu is a sensitive and contemplative writer with strong introversion. Professor Liu Xiqing from the Beijing Normal University called Si Yu an acute perceiver of the core spirit of the times and an expresser of conscience and fierce emotion of the intellectuals, and she had created the first-class works. “Nightmare” expressed the spiritual pressure of contemporary intellectuals from several aspects; “Form of the Heart” was also expression of conscience and keen-edged emotion of the intellectuals; “At the Seaside” was her feeling under the original and great shock of the nature; “Meditation on the Dusk” was her crystallization of reflections. It is exactly a kind of non self-deceptive rational spirit reflection that Si Yu used to express the subsistence consciousness of human being in a modern meaning. She disclosed to the world non-individual grief in the human life and the destiny of human being with particular feminine cutting edge and acuity.

In writing of “self fondling” and “individualization” in feminine prose at the end of the Twentieth Century and in either heavy or relaxed narration of self role, women expressed the self identity of feminine role, pursued feminine charm and feminine value and revealed strong consciousness of feminine subject. They realized self discovery in self interrogation and beating on self soul, explored the significance of self security and individual existence and embodied the ultimate concern with the human life. However, at the same time, their hopeless subordinate status and the role of “being watched” enabled them to more cherish their value, be more concerned with a transverse comparison and pursue more sensorial sharing and material satisfaction. Yet, all sorts of pressure from the life, the society, the morality and from men often made them have to withdraw back to the secret and feculent inner heart. (Gu Si, 2006) All the above made some feminine prose mean, trivial, narcissistic, peacockish and contentious.

Firstly, some female subjects have a narrow understanding in characteristics of “selfness” of prose. Indeed, prose is a direct reflection or internal evaluation on life of oneself, but this doesn’t means that prose breaks away from and is isolated from the group and the society. On one hand, the life activity of female is for self affirmation and self fulfillment, and on the other hand, it ought to be pointed directly to the level of the society and the history. An excellent prose text is always originated from an individual and finally reaches to the public and the society through the self soul and emotional fermentation of the free subject. Because feminine prose is limited to self experience and doesn’t concern with others or the scope of the social existence of others, the meaning of the discourse system applied by some contemporary female subjects has no means to acquire the text thickness or text weight constituted by participation of corresponding social connotation of the era. This is also one major reason why feminine prose is appealing yet lacking in force of penetration and force of shock. Secondly, there exists a certain misleading in criticism of feminism. Ever since it was introduced to China in the 80s of the Twentieth Century, western feminism theory has been rapidly applied into the field of literary criticism. The famous French Feminist Ellena Sisu affirmed the enormous significance of writing by women like this, “Women have to take part in writing, have to write about oneself and have to write about women.” However, it has to be admitted that women have no means to break away from the history and the society to write another history and a pure feminine consciousness that is confirmed to break away from a particular historical culture. Writing of women has no way to claim a place in the literary history by merely resorting to the excuse of “female”. It has to depend on communication and integration with the social consciousness and human consciousness to achieve a spiritual depth in a global sense.

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