

Study on *Fang Si-Qi's First Love Paradise* from the Perspective of Feminist Criticism

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Abstract

Fang Si-Qi's First Love Paradise has stirred a strong reaction in the society as soon as it was published. It is because the book not only tells a touching story, but also profoundly reveals the unfair condition that women have suffered for a long time under the traditional and conservative social structure. Under the traditional social structure, women have long been overlooked by the patriarchy and this has perpetuated the subordination of women to men. As a result, women are lack of their social subjectivity and are regarded as the "Other". In such an environment, there is a huge inequality between men and women, and men always demand and oppress women. With the feminist movement emerging and developing, women start to pursue equal rights with men in an organized way. Feminist criticism is a powerful tool to achieve their goals. To analyze *Fang Si-Qi's First Love Paradise* from the perspective of feminist criticism is quite reasonable and can help explore the social factors behind the story.

Keywords

Female; Feminist criticism; *Fang Si-Qi's First Love Paradise*; Patriarchy.

1. Introduction

Women have long been in a suppressed position in society, and the situation in China is no exception. For thousands of years, China's feudal system has suppressed women in almost all aspects, leading to their long and unfair treatment. Since modern times, significant changes have been achieved in China through reforms aiming to change the existing habits and customs; however, due to various reasons, the equality of men and women in social status has not been achieved yet. *Fang Si-Qi's First Love Paradise* (hereinafter referred to as *Fang Si-Qi*) deeply reflects the passive, subordinate state of women in China's society. *Fang Si-Qi* tells an immoral and odious story from the perspective of a little girl, revealing the cruel fact that women are being harmed by men and society. As the feminist movement progresses, activists are committed to freeing women from the appalling situation. As a very powerful "weapon", feminist criticism is compatible in nature to the analysis of *Fang Si-Qi*.

2. Overview of Feminist Criticism

Feminist criticism, originated from feminism, is a literary criticism method that emerged at the end of 1960s. It focuses on female group, attempting to explore female values and seek equality between men and women from literary and other perspectives. Feminist criticism is an important theoretical part of feminism and an indispensable practical method to change women's current status.

2.1. Feminism

Feminism is no longer a strange word to people. It has long been introduced and has undergone a long period of development. The women's movement was a renewal of an old tradition of

thought and action already possessing its classic books which had diagnosed the problem of women's inequality in society, and (in some cases) proposed solutions [1]. Feminism aims at exploring the nature of gender inequality in society and strives for the equality of men and women in politics, economy, and education and so on. It also involves women's reproductive rights and abortion rights.

Generally speaking, there are three stages in the development of feminism. The first one lasted from the Enlightenment in the 18th century to around 1960, which is the emerging stage of the women's movement and mainly strives for social equality for women as well as fights against aristocracy's thoughts of belittling women. The second one started from the 1960s and lasted to the 1970s. With the pursuit of equal political rights for gender at its core, this stage witnessed the emergence of many theoretical studies and schools related to feminism. The third one is after the 1970s. During this stage, the feminist movement mainly focuses on women's self-esteem, self-confidence, self-love, and self-awareness. It has been trying to realize women's social appeals through social activities and organizations, and it has been committed to increasing society's sensitivity to gender [2].

The connotation of feminism has been enriched in its development, and various schools have emerged with their ideas constantly sparking. There are many ideas worth learning from, but there are also extreme ideas that are supposed to be avoided. Feminist schools include ecological feminism, liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, and radical feminism and so on. According to some scholars, the views of some feminists set the two sexes, male and female, against each other, which is undesirable and hinders the realization of the true equality between men and women.

Originated in the West, the impact of feminism on China is no less significant than that of the West. The introduction of feminism into China has sparked idealistic collision, making people the defenders of women's equal social status. It is commonly agreed that feminist theory was introduced to China in the 1980s.

Some scholars divide the development of feminism in China into three stages: introduction by translating, theoretical practice and research innovation. Around 1980, some scholars engaged in foreign literature research introduced Western feminist ideas to China by translating Western literature. After the 1990s, the translation and introduction of feminism could no longer meet the research needs of academia in China. Thus, scholars began to apply relevant theories to interpret the works of Chinese female writers in the new era. After more than 20 years of research and development, feminism has entered a deepening period in China. Thanks to the efforts of many scholars, feminism has realized its localization in China as lots of professional scholars try to research feminism from the specific situations in China [3].

2.2. Feminist Criticism

Feminist criticism came into being along with the feminist movement. It is a literary criticism pattern that emerged in the West in the 1960s when the feminist movement was on the second climax and the women's liberation movement was marching forward. It can be said that feminist criticism is inseparable from the Western women's liberation movement. Feminist criticism is not merely a simple part or derivative of feminism, but an important practical means to influence people's behavior and cognition, to make a change in women's social status.

Feminist criticism is a criticism pattern centered on women and its research subjects include women's images, creations, and readings and so on [4]. The basic opinion of this theory is that Western civilization is male-centered and controlled by men while women are in a subordinate position. Although this theory was born in the West, it is also applicable to the situation in China and that of the countries around the world.

Generally speaking, the practice of feminist criticism mainly involves examining classics, exploring works written by women, re-evaluating women's experiences, examining female

representatives in literature, challenging representations of women as “Other”, as “lack” or as part of “nature”, examining power relationships and seeking to break them and so on [1].

Similar to the development of feminism, feminist criticism has continuously absorbed various academic ideas during its development, resulting in different school systems. The two most influential schools are the Anglo-American version of feminism and the French feminism. The focus of research varies among different schools. For example, the Anglo-American school emphasizes social criticism and the cultural traditions of women themselves, attempts to establish a feminist literary model, and focuses on being realistic and participating in women's movement. The French feminist criticism pays more attention to the language and text of women's writing, and it reflects the characteristics of structuralism [4]. Cheng Xilin and Fang Yazhong [5] have pointed out that the Anglo-American school focuses more on traditional critical concepts, such as themes, motif and characters, and takes careful reading and interpretation of literary texts as the main task of feminist criticism. As for the French school, the advocacy is tinted with strong theoretical speculation, focusing on the language, representation, psychology, and philosophy in literary criticism instead of on the reflection of reality and the recurrence of women's personal experiences in literature.

3. Flower of Pains: Synopsis of Fang Si-Qi

Fang Si-Qi is a novel and an autobiography written by Lin Yihan, a Chinese writer. Lin Yihan was of good family. She had been achieving good academic performance in school since her childhood. But in high school, she began to suffer from depression, and the cause might be that she was sexually assaulted by her high school tutor. She made several attempts to commit suicide but in vain. Later, her depression was getting worse. Early in 2017, she committed suicide right after her maiden work *Fang Si-Qi's First Love Paradise* was published. Whether Lin was enticed into unlawful sexual intercourse was not clear because of the lack of sufficient and valid evidence, thus the matter was leaving unsettled. The suspect, Chen Guoxing, is not subject to legal arbitration but he is morally condemned by many people.

Fang Si-Qi is about women's resistance in this patriarchal society. The book consists of three chapters: Paradise, Paradise Lost, and Paradise Regained. It tells the story of a little girl named Fang Si-Qi who was seduced and raped by her high school tutor and ended up suffering from mental illness.

Fang Si-Qi spent a very happy childhood with her close friend Liu Yiting. However, the happiness was gone when she began her study in middle school. Li Guohua, the newly arrived neighbor next door, planned to rape her after seeing that she was attractive. First, he investigated Fang Si-Qi's family in the name of a good neighbor. In order to get close to Fang Si-Qi, he then offered to be her tutor. After that, he had the chance to be with her in private and so he raped her. For a long time, he maintained an unfair and distorted relationship with Fang Si-Qi.

Fang Si-Qi had thought that it was a toxic relationship and wished to press charges against Li Guohua. But she was too panic to handle such thing as this evil man was her tutor. So, she turned to her mother in a timid and indirect way: “Our family seems to have everything except sex education.” Her mother responded: “Sex education is for those who need sex.” This cold answer made Fang Si-Qi understand that she couldn't talk about this matter with her parents. But she tried to hint to her mother again: “I heard some student at school is in a relationship with her teacher.” “What a slut at such a young age.” was all her mother said. She was surprised that her mother's reaction was to condemn the student instead of the teacher. She was desperate; her two attempts to talk to her mother ended up as being hurt twice, so she gave up the thought of asking for help.

In the following days, Fang Si-Qi faced insults and sexual assaults from Li Guohua on her own. She was tortured physically and mentally, suffered from depression, and was eventually sent to a mental hospital. During her stay in the hospital, her friends Liu Yiting and Xu Yiwen often came to visit.

Lin Yihan infused all her longings in the character Xu Yiwen who was a girl from a better off family, married to Qian Yiwei, a boy from a rich family. However, their married life was filled with domestic violence, and Xu Yiwen was the victim. Her parents-in-law also treated her poorly. One time, Xu Yiwen almost died because Qian Yiwei was drunk and beat her again, which caused her to miscarry. It was not until that moment that Xu Yiwen could keep her head clear. Later she chose to get a divorce and left Qian's family once and for all. In the end, she met her true love Maomao.

4. The Tragedy of Being the "Other"

In a patriarchal society, women are thought to be incomplete and have long been subjected to scrutiny and oppression from men. Men put women at an inferior position and believe that women are subordinate to men for they think men are born to dominate women. As a result, a complete system in patriarchal society has formed to "imprison" and "tame" women, making them the way men like. Thus, women have lost themselves. In such a social environment, women have never been truly recognized and never gained an equal position. Instead, they are just the "Other" who are not accepted in the society. After being the "Other" for a long time, plenty of women are "domesticated" and thus accept the patriarchal system.

As "marginal individuals", women have lost their "subjectivity" and are forced into the social order that conforms to the principles of men in the patriarchal society; women are simply an object and tool for men to prove their power, and an empty signifier of gender slavery in society [6]. Fang Si-Qi depicts such social relationship vividly.

4.1. Prison: "Fang Si-Qi" in Patriarchal Society

What *Fang Si-Qi* tells is more than the tragedy of a little girl. It exposes the physical and mental harm suffered by women and reveals how distorted the relationship between men and women is in the patriarchal society.

4.1.1. Men's condescension over women

The harm done to women by patriarchal society firstly lies in men's condescension over women with their inner contempt for female. There are many examples like this in the book.

Xu Yiwen and Qian Yiwei were thought to get married for love, but the reality was cruel. Qian Yiwei, a rich man who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, made great efforts when pursuing Xu Yiwen. Once, he waited for Xu Yiwen in the pouring rain for a long time and it was this behavior that touched Xu's heart. However, after they got married for less than a year, one time Qian Yiwei went home drunk and beat Xu Yiwen for no reason. This whole thing destroyed Xu Yiwen's personality. "The next evening after work, he pretended like nothing had happened and sought her consent for sexual intercourse." [7] In his eyes, Xu Yiwen was nothing but his tool for sexual desire. When they were in Japan, Qian Yiwei even had sexual intercourse with Xu Yiwen in front of their friend Jimmy; he ignored Xu Yiwen's refusal and Jimmy's presence. For him, Xu Yiwen is an object for sexual pastime without personality.

This is true for Li Guohua as well. In Li Guohua's eyes, women are naked objects for his sexual fantasy. His sexual desire can even be aroused by simply looking at Xu Yiwen's ankles. Teachers around Li Guohua were of the same kind, too. They gathered together now and then to show off the female students they had "conquered" without being ashamed at all. For them, women are born to be "conquered" and satisfy their desires.

4.1.2. The Traditional Concept of Chastity

The patriarchal society uses chastity as a means to control women. The traditional concept of chastity is a poison given to women, and being conservative to and ashamed of sex are catalysts for such poison.

It can be seen from the beginning of *Fang Si-Qi* that the social atmosphere presented in the book holds a conservative attitude towards sex. The book starts with a girl named Liu Yiting vomiting sea cucumbers and she said it was like having oral sex. Hearing this, her mother was very angry and punished her. This story indicates that children lack sex education. After Fang Si-Qi was raped by Li Guohua, she tried to communicate with her mother, saying that their family lacked sex education, but her mother answered that sex education is for those who need sex. Such a conservative environment towards sex made Fang Si-Qi dare not to speak out after being raped as it had something to do with her self-esteem and chastity.

When she mentioned this topic with her mother for the second time, she actually tried to indicate that the student being with the teacher in school was her and hoped that her mother would give her a hand. But her mother said, "What a slut at such a young age." She tried asking for help for twice, but they were all in vain. So, she stopped trying. From this aspect, it was literally the mother who pushed her daughter into the abyss.

Another character, Cookie, was raped by Li Guohua, too. After being raped, she went to her boyfriend for help. Her boyfriend did not sympathize with her or give a hand, nor did he report Li Guohua to police. He chose to break up with Cookie, saying "Why would I be with the dirty Cookie? You are dirty as hell." Chastity undoubtedly oppresses women in spirit. The double standards of chastity in a patriarchal society make sexual assault a symbol of men's power and glory, while it is a physical impurity and a shame on women's personality [8].

4.1.3. The Shackles of Patriarchal Society

On one hand, prosecuting men almost equals to a crime in a patriarchal society. Guo Xiaoqi, another victim girl, fell in love with Li Guohua after being sexually assaulted by him. Later, she exposed what Li Guohua had done online after Li abandoned her. However, her post was filled with people's insulting comments towards her. On the other hand, it is even more scary that some women who have been "domesticated" try to "tame" other women. Both Liu Yiting and Fang Si-Qi's mothers are like this. Another female teacher, Cai Liang, was not only domesticated, but became an executioner, colluding with male teachers and sending female students to their hands.

As the author Lin Yihan said, "The largest massacre in human history is the rape like Fang Si-Qi." The vast majority of men, "domesticated" women, and the entire patriarchal society are all executioners.

4.2. Suppression: Fang Si-Qi's First Love Paradise

Fang Si-Qi is just one of the victims of Li Guohua's sexual assault. Li Guohua dared to rape Fang Si-Qi because men, more or less, have a condescending attitude towards women in that social environment. It was not just that Fang Si-Qi was beautiful. Another reason that made him bold enough to commit rape was he found that the society's taboos on sex were too convenient for rape. After a girl was raped, the whole world would think it was her fault, and even the girl herself would have the feeling that it was her fault [8]. A girl who grew up under such traditional social system will be spiritually influenced and harmed.

As an elder and teacher, Li Guohua had a comprehensive control over Fang Si-Qi. Li Guohua's identity was very typical. He represented the male power: as a man, he possessed the privileges in a patriarchal society; as a teacher, he had the authority over students. The relationship between Fang Si-Qi and Li Guohua was a hierarchical one of old and young, man and woman, and teacher and student. Such relationship means a disparity in their minds, status, and

knowledge, which easily leads to an unequal relationship, and the weak ones are often controlled by the strong ones [8].

Fang Si-Qi loved literature and Li Guohua took advantage of her love to literature to control her mind. He skillfully wove lies about love to deceive Fang Si-Qi: "You can blame me for having gone too far, but can you blame my love? Can you blame your own beauty? What's more, Teachers' Day is just a few days away. You are the best gift of Teachers' Day in the world." As Li spoke of love, he praised Fang Si-Qi's beauty and absolved him of his evil behaviors, as if it was not his fault at all. It was all love's fault. It was Fang Si-Qi's fault because she is too beautiful. He even compared their relationship with those of some famous writers and scholars, making his seduction seem like love.

Li Guohua made Fang Si-Qi suffer from sexual assault and mental anguish. This toxic and distorted relationship between them lasted for five years. It lasted so long that Fang Si-Qi nearly believed there was true love between them. She thought to herself, "Teacher Li really loves me. He is now showing me the most vulnerable side of him." She fell into self-deception.

The only thing Li Guohua has for Fang Si-Qi is sexual desire, not love. Love is just an excuse he found to cover his desire and delude Fang Si-Qi. During the five years, Li Guohua constantly brought her to various hotels to satisfy his sexual desires, which made Fang Si-Qi's depression worse.

The last time Li Guohua brought Fang Si-Qi to a hotel he was refused by Si-Qi with the excuse that she was on her period. At night, Li Guohua got on Fang Si-Qi's bed and found out that she had lied to him, so he tied her up to satisfy his sick sexual needs and raped her again. This time, Fang Si-Qi had a final mental breakdown.

4.3. Rebellion: Xu Yiwen's Breaking Free

Xu Yiwen's life experience was a process of female consciousness awakening from the domestication of the patriarchal society. Xu Yiwen's awakening is also the awakening of Lin Yihan. It is a wish in the author's heart to break the patriarchal shackles.

In the novel, three characters are particularly important: Liu Yiting, Fang Si-Qi, and Xu Yiwen. The three of them can be regarded as three images, all of which are incarnations of Lin Yihan. Liu Yiting is the longing that Lin herself had not been tormented; Fang Si-Qi is the symbol of Lin who were already tormented; Xu Yiwen, who has been tormented but broken free, is a prospect that Lin had dreamed of.

Less than a year after marrying Qian Yiwei, Xu Yiwen was subjected to domestic violence. Qian Yiwei disrespected Xu Yiwen's personality. Despite being in deep distress, Xu Yiwen has endured Qian Yiwei's behaviors for a long time. Even if Qian Yiwei was having sexual intercourse with her in front of their friend, she failed to refuse or rebel. Xu Yiwen was nothing more than a sexual tool for Qian Yiwei.

Xu Yiwen represents the image of many housewives in patriarchal society. They have lost their spiritual world and their bodies. The traditional women's "body consciousness" and body claims are suppressed, passive, and silent. Women's "control" of their bodies appears to be an action done by themselves, but its true nature is an action done by "involuntariness" under traditional moral education [9].

Fang Si-Qi suffered a final mental breakdown after being sexually assaulted for the last time. Xu Yiwen suffered a miscarriage after being beaten by Qian Yiwei for the last time and almost died. However, Xu chose to divorce and left him.

They are all victims of the patriarchal society. Xu Yiwen is a glimmer of hope that breaks the patriarchal society, and a beautiful incarnation of Lin Yihan's dream to break her shackles. Unfortunately, Lin Yihan did not become Xu Yiwen. Instead, she became Fang Si-Qi and eventually committed suicide.

5. Conclusion

The oppression of women in patriarchal society has a long history, resulting in women being marginalized and not accepted by the patriarchal system for a long time. With the awakening of women's self-awareness and the rise and development of feminist movements, various activists strive for women's equal social status with men. These are the essence that a society needs to be equal.

Feminist criticism is an important method that emerged along with the development of feminism to gain rights for women. From the perspective of feminist criticism, the analysis of *Fang Si-Qi* reveals the serious imbalance in gender equality in patriarchal society. Women are suffering from various kinds of oppression. *Fang Si-Qi* not only reflects the painful situation of women in the novel, but also the author's own sufferings in the real life. It can be said that *Fang Si-Qi* is a very successful feminist novel, which represents women's resistance in this unequal patriarchal society.

Pursuing a society of gender equality is necessary for shaping harmonious relationships between men and women. In the book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir believes that only when the meaningful common "transcendence" between the sexes is found, a state of balance between subjects is achieved, the sexes are no longer filled with opposition and subordination, can each individual achieve true "freedom" and "nobility" [10].

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