On Ding Ling's Female Consciousness and Breakthrough in Creation

Bohui Du*

Department of Humanities, Huzhou University, Zhejiang, China

*Corresponding author: dbh2005050101@outlook.com

Abstract. This article aims to explore the female consciousness in Ding Ling's works and its contribution to women's literature. Firstly, this article introduces the development process of Ding Ling's female consciousness, and then analyzes the female images in her works using the text close reading method, such as MengKe in *MengKe*, ShaFei in *Miss Sophia's Diary*, and ZhenZhen in *When I Was in Xia Village.* Then, combined with literature analysis, the expression of female consciousness in Ding Ling's works was elaborated, including attention and sympathy for women's fate, affirmation of women's independent personality, a call for women's liberation, and understanding of the role of women in society. At the end of this article, Ding Ling's contribution to women's consciousness is summarized, expanding the themes and forms of women's literature, proposing the idea of women's liberation to promote the development of women's literature, and exploring its impact on future generations. Through the analysis of this article, the final research conclusion is that Ding Ling has constructed a female consciousness system that unifies individual liberation and social reform, breaking the traditional boundaries between gender and literary expression. Her ideas and creations not only lay the foundation for Chinese women's literature but also provide important historical insights for contemporary gender equality and female creation.

Keywords: Ding Ling; women's literature; female consciousness; ideological emancipation; social reform.

1. Introduction

Ding Ling (1904-1986), originally named Jiang Wei, was an important writer of modern Chinese literature. Her creative career spanned nearly half a century, during which she witnessed the tremendous changes in Chinese society and left a profound impression in the field of literature. Ding Ling's works are known for their in-depth exploration of the fate of women. She not only focuses on the status and role of women in traditional society, but also actively advocates for women's liberation, advocating that women should have the right to independent thinking and independent choice. Ding Ling herself is also a staunch feminist, and her life experiences and literary practices reflect her unique insights into women's issues.

As a core writer in the history of modern Chinese literature who focuses on the fate of women, Ding Ling's creative career spans nearly half a century, and her works witness the dramatic changes in Chinese society. The exploration of female consciousness in the work is rooted in the context of the times and has breakthrough value. This study aims to fill the academic gap in the systematic analysis of Ding Ling's female consciousness in modern women's literature research, and provide historical insights for contemporary gender equality issues and women's literature creation. This article has extraordinary significance in exploring the path of women's self-worth realization. This study mainly focuses on the development process of Ding Ling's female consciousness, the characteristics of typical female images in her works, the core manifestations of female consciousness, and her breakthrough contributions to women's literature. The literature analysis method was used to search and read relevant materials and literature. The advantage of this method is that it can effectively analyze the text of Ding Ling's works, academic research reviews, and historical background information, comprehensively sort out the research context, and explore the core connotations, which is conducive to the progress of the research. The ultimate research objective of this study is to clarify the connotation and breakthrough of female consciousness in Ding Ling's creations, and to reveal the core idea of "the unity of women's participation in social reform and the

realization of self transformation".In order to achieve the goal, this study conducted a detailed textual analysis of representative works such as *MengKe*, *Miss Sophia's Diary*, and *When I Was in Xia Village*, deeply analyzed typical female images, and systematically sorted out the logic of female consciousness development and literary contributions.

2. The Development Process of Ding Ling's Female Consciousness

Since Ding Ling entered the literary world, she has received much attention. In the new era, the study of Ding Ling has become a hot topic in the academic community. In the 1930s and 1940s, researchers often used revolutionary political standards to evaluate and criticize Ding Ling's creations. Mao Dun's evaluation of Ding Ling's works had a significant impact. Mao Dun pointed out that "Sha Fei is a rebellious and defiant young woman who bears the trauma of the times' inner turmoil," and "a representative of the contradictory psychology of sexual love among young women liberated after the May Fourth Movement." [1]. Secondly, in *Ding Ling's Mother*, Mao Dun delved into the internal life of the "previous generation of women" and analyzed Ding Ling's works, believing that "this is how our 'previous generation of women' represented by Man Zhen struggled to break through the encirclement of feudal ideas and feudal forces, and how we longed for a bright future".

This evaluation played a crucial role in later Ding Ling researchers' understanding of the role of mother Man Zhen. During the political struggles of the 1950s and the tumultuous Cultural Revolution that lasted for over twenty years, Ding Ling suffered from both mental and physical pain and suffering, and her works were also banned. Ding Ling's research entered a stagnant state, and for a long time afterwards, many researchers blindly attacked and criticized Ding Ling, distorting and smearing the female images in her works. In 1979, Ding Ling made a comeback, and her research once again sparked a craze in the academic community [2].

3. Female Characters and Female Consciousness in Ding Ling's Works

3.1. Pursuing Equal Status

In the article *Mengke*, Mengke stepped forward after seeing Mr. Red Nose's teasing and bullying of the female model at school. She helped the female model put on her clothes and comforted her that she was not worth being sad. She told the female model that she didn't care about public opinion and sent her out despite the comments of those around her. Ding Ling deeply explores the oppression and injustice that women face in traditional society through her works, using words to speak up for women and calling for more respect and support from society for women. Ding Ling is well aware of the difficulties that women face in traditional society. She sees the silent sacrifices that women make in the family, as well as the various restrictions and constraints they face in society.

Ding Ling once said, "There is never an incompetent person in the world who is qualified to obtain everything. Therefore, in order for women to achieve equality, they must first strengthen themselves." [3]. Women should have the right to choose their own way of life, including marriage, career, etc., rather than being constrained by traditional beliefs. Mengke refused the arranged marriage introduced to her by her father, not wanting to be oppressed by the rules of being a daughter-in-law. She wanted to pursue her own life and decisively left after knowing that her cousin was only pursuing her own beauty and had unclear relationships with other women. She wanted to have an equal and loyal partner relationship. Ding Ling encourages women to bravely pursue their dreams through Mengke, break free from the constraints of traditional society, no longer be confined to marriage, and realize their self-worth. Similarly, Ding Ling did the same thing at that time. In 1922, Ding Ling wanted to go to Shanghai to study, but her uncle stopped her on the grounds of arranged marriage. In order to resist the marriage, she published some of her uncle's misdeeds in the Changde Daily, saying that his uncle appeared to be a righteous man on the surface, but in fact, he was stealing female prostitutes. Ding Ling's ideological approach was quite avant-garde at that time. So much so that her works can provide

women with new perspectives for thinking, and better inspire women's resistance and pursuit of their own destiny [4].

3.2. Independent Consciousness

Ding Ling emphasized that women should have independent personalities and dignity. She opposes women being seen as accessories or tools of men, and believes that women should have their own thoughts, emotions, and pursuits. In 1942, she wrote "Reflections on International Women's Day" in response to two divorce incidents involving women who refused to pursue their disliked senior officials and were reprimanded. She was labeled as "backward" for delaying work due to childbirth and household chores, and even abandoned by her husband on the grounds of being "backward". She bluntly exposed the reality: women who do not get married will be spread rumors, those who get married may be ridiculed, those who have to take on work and raise children alone after giving birth, and those who want to have an abortion are prohibited by policies. A slight mistake can lead to the loss of their job and dignity. These personal experiences made her deeply realize that even in the revolutionary environment of pursuing equality, women's personal dignity has not been truly respected, and "the revolution has not completely eliminated gender oppression"[3]. Therefore, in the article, she urgently calls on women to "use their brains" and "make the determination to endure hardships", emphasizing that only by being strong can they escape the fate of being dominated and underestimated. This also elevates her viewpoint from personal resistance to collective defense of the dignity of the female group.

In Ding Ling's works, Shafei is such a girl with independent choices and unique pursuits. She doesn't look down on Wei Di, who is obedient to her, and believes that he doesn't have his own independent personality. “Is this tasteless jealousy, this selfish possession, what is called love.” [5]. When she met Ling Jishi, although she was attracted by his appearance, she resolutely rejected him after discovering that his beautiful body contained a despicable soul. Shafei has her own independent thinking and will not be blinded by the appearance of love, knowing what she truly wants.

Many female characters such as Meng Ke and Sha Fei are vividly portrayed in Ding Ling's works. They have their own thoughts, emotions, and pursuits, bravely facing the challenges of life and pursuing their dreams. By shaping these images, Ding Ling showcases to readers the independence and strength of women, while also calling for society to give due respect and recognition to women's independent personalities and dignity.

3.3. Definitely Female Desire

Chinese society has long been centered around a male dominated culture, where women have been shackled by the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" and "Three Obediences and Five Virtues". Women are expected to be gentle, submissive, reserved, and restrained, and must maintain chastity before marriage. They must not have desires for love or sex, otherwise they will be labeled as "inappropriate". However, Ding Ling affirmed human desires, especially the normal desires of women, through her novel works, openly expressing the protagonist's love, hate, affection, and hatred, and recognizing normal physiological needs without fear of secular scrutiny.

Although the May Fourth Movement of the same period appeared to be "liberating" and shouted the slogan of "gender equality", society still generally believed that women's desires needed to be restrained and advocated spiritual love. In Ding Ling's works, Sha Fei does not hide her desire for love and sex. She mocks the Platonic love between Yu Fang and Yun Lin, who dare not sleep together, and boldly challenges feudal asceticism. In her diary, she revealed her demands in love, "If one day, his lips and I were tightly closed, my body would be willing to disintegrate from the wild laughter of this heart....”[5]. This bold inner monologue is a rebellion against traditional feudal moral concepts and a mockery of feudal thought [6].

Ding Ling broke the taboo of sexual desire and restored the essence of women as "human beings", allowing women to return from "moral symbols" and "reproductive tools" to "real people", and pointing out the core direction for women's liberation.

3.4. Showcasing Social Role

Ding Ling believes that women play important roles in society. She believes that women should not only have their own careers and pursuits, but also make significant contributions to society. In the article *When I Was in Xia Village* Zhenzhen passed on intelligence to the anti Japanese forces and became a participant in the hidden front. She said, “I saw the Japanese devils lose battles after I started playing tricks, and the guerrilla forces were active everywhere. People's hearts are getting better day by day. I think if I have to endure some hardships, it's worth it. I have to find a way out and live an interesting life, unless absolutely necessary. So they said they want to treat me, and I think it's better if I get cured.” Zhenzhen did not sink into despair but achieved self transcendence through active choice. Zhenzhen broke the single positioning of women as "passive victims" in traditional narratives. Although she was abducted by the Japanese and became a sex slave, she became an intelligence transmitter for the anti Japanese forces in dire straits. The image of Zhenzhen proves that women will also step forward in the face of national crisis, demonstrating a sense of social responsibility and a spirit of sacrifice [7].

Ding Ling's description of Zhenzhen proves that the role of women in war is not limited to being "protected" or "sacrificial". They can also participate in revolutionary struggles with their own wisdom and courage, making great contributions to society. This writing emphasizes the subjectivity and irreplaceability of women in the historical process, triggering profound reflections on the value of women in war [8].

4. Ding Ling's Contribution to Women's Consciousness

Ding Ling is an outstanding female writer in the history of modern Chinese literature, and her contributions to women's consciousness are mainly reflected in the following aspects.

4.1. Expansion of Themes and Forms of Expression in Women's Literature

Ding Ling extensively touches on female themes in her works, exploring women's issues from different perspectives and levels, and expanding the themes and forms of expression in women's literature. She not only focuses on the plight and oppression of women in traditional society, but also explores the role and status of women in modern society. Her works are renowned for their profound social insights and delicate psychological depictions, paving a new path for the development of women's literature. Previously, women's literature often focused on personal emotions and trivial matters in love or family. Nowadays, women's literature has social intervention power, reflecting society through the fate of women. Her literature is a carrier for promoting women's liberation. Ding Ling's works not only attracted widespread attention and discussion at the time, but also inspired and influenced later female writers. Her literature is good at using psychological descriptions to make it easier for readers to focus on the inner world of women. Miss Sophia’ s Diary uses the form of a diary to present Shafei's rich and delicate inner world, providing new ideas and directions for the development of women's literature and promoting the diversification of women's literature [9].

4.2. The Shaping of Female Images

Ding Ling has created a series of distinct female characters through her works, which possess strong personalities and independent spirits. Her female characters are no longer passive and weak images in traditional literature, but modern women with initiative, strength, and courage. Readers no longer judge women from the traditional feudal moral perspective, there is no binary opposition between "chastity" and "debauchery", and they no longer attribute women's difficulties to their personal faults. They realize that their essence is a social problem, providing readers with a new perspective to understand women. Ding Ling's female characters are vividly portrayed in her works, with their own thoughts, emotions, and pursuits, unwilling to be bound by traditional concepts. They bravely face the challenges of life and pursue their dreams. Through the shaping of these images,

Ding Ling showcases to readers the independence and strength of women, while also calling for society to give due respect and recognition to women's independent personalities and dignity [10].

4.3. Propose the Idea of Women's Liberation

Ding Ling is one of the pioneers of modern Chinese feminist literature. She actively advocates for women's liberation and advocates that women should have equal rights and opportunities to participate in social life. She believes that women's liberation is one of the important symbols of social progress, and only when women are able to freely develop their talents and potential can society truly achieve equality and prosperity. She not only calls on women to bravely stand up and fight for their rights and interests, break free from the constraints and oppression of the old society through her works, but also put them into action. In the 1930s, Ding Ling founded the Beidou magazine, which specialized in publishing works by female writers and articles on women's issues. It included a large number of real stories of grassroots female workers and rural women, such as reporting on the experiences of Shanghai female workers who were "paid differently for equal work" and "arbitrarily fired". Through media exposure, it promoted social attention to women's rights and made women's plight visible and discussed. Ding Ling's women's liberation of thought had a positive impact on society at that time and also inspired later female writers and activists. The exploration of women's liberation in her works is not only a profound reflection on women's issues, but also a call for social progress.

4.4. Promoted the Development of Women's Literature

Ding Ling's creative practice and theoretical exploration have had a profound impact on the development of Chinese women's literature. Her works not only attracted widespread attention and discussion at the time, but also inspired and influenced later female writers. Her literary philosophy and creative methods have provided new ideas and directions for the development of women's literature, promoting the diversification and internationalization of women's literature.Ding Ling's works and ideas not only occupy an important position in the history of Chinese literature, but also have a certain influence in the history of world literature. Her works have been translated into over twenty languages including English, Russian, Japanese, German, and French. It has also been recognized and praised internationally. Ding Ling's attitude towards life and literary pursuits have inspired generation after generation of female writers and readers, becoming an important legacy of Chinese women's literature.

5. Conclusion

Ding Ling's works are not only a precious heritage of modern Chinese literature, but also important documents for the awakening of women's consciousness and the women's liberation movement. The research results of this study are to sort out the development process of Ding Ling's female consciousness from focusing on individual emotions to advocating social participation, analyze the core connotations of equality pursuit, independent personality, desire awakening, and social values carried by typical female images such as Meng Ke, Sha Fei, and Zhen Zhen, clarify her breakthrough contributions in the expansion of female literary themes, innovation of female images, and dissemination of liberated thoughts, and further draw the research conclusion that Ding Ling's creation has constructed a female consciousness system that "unifies individual liberation and social reform", broken the traditional gender shackles and literary expression boundaries, and laid the ideological and practical foundation for Chinese women's literature. This study provides valuable reference for future research in this direction, mainly influencing the understanding of the transformation logic of modern women's literature, the interpretation of multiple dimensions of female consciousness, and the exploration of the interactive relationship between literature and social change. Future research should focus more on the differences in the acceptance of Ding Ling's female

consciousness in different historical contexts, the dialogue and connection between her creation and Western feminist theory, and the realistic mapping of contemporary women's literature creation.

References

[1] Mao D. Female Writer Ding Ling, 1933. 199–202.

[2] Chen S.-B. A Brief Discussion on Ding Ling's Early Novel Creation. Young Literary Figure, 2023: 154–157.

[3] Ding L. Reflections on the March 8th Festival. Liberation Daily, 1942.

[4] Xiong Q. Gentleman and Revolution: An Interpretation of Ding Ling's Family and History. Modern Chinese Journal, 2023: 26–32.

[5] Ding L. Ms. Safi's Diary. 1928.

[6] He T.-T. On the Female Consciousness in Ding Ling's Novels. Famous Works by Renowned Artists, 2022: 31–33.

[7] Xiao Y.-Y. A Study of the Relationship between Women and Revolution in Ding Ling's Novels. Shenzhen University, 2022.

[8] Wang Z. On the Historical Presentation of Female Consciousness and Revolutionary Consciousness in Ding Ling's Novels. Chongqing Normal University, 2017.

[9] Zhang X. Ding Ling's Female Consciousness and Its Evolution. Qingdao University, 2023.

[10] Zhang L. The Evolution of Ding Ling's Female Consciousness. Anhui University, 2007.