The Historical Legacy in the Corridor: Reinterpreting Lin Bai's "The Chair in the Corridor"

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Abstract. In the 1990s, as a representative writer of women's personalized writing, Lin Bai's works were often regarded by critics as pioneering symbols of "women's whispers". The novel "The Chair of the Corridor" published in 1993, as one of the representative works of her transitional period between root seeking literature and personalized writing, is in an incomplete state of interpretation due to the vague historical background of the text and the guidance of literary criticism in the 1990s. This article is based on a historical dimension beyond personalized writing, and through careful reading of the text and mutual verification of literature and history, reinterprets the significance and value of "The Chair of the Corridor". Redefine the historical background that the text points to and analyze how Lin Bai integrates personal memories into historical narratives in "The Chair of the Corridor". In addition, by combining the intertextual plot in "Sun Wu" and "One Person's War", the possibility of the isomorphism of personal experience and historical experience narrative in "The Chair of the Corridor" is verified, providing another dimension for the interpretation of female writing.

Keywords: Lin Bai; The Chair of the Corridor; historical narrative; female writing.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on Lin Bai, a representative writer of women's personalized writing in the field of Chinese literary criticism in the 1990s. Her works are often portrayed as cultural symbols that resist grand narratives, especially "The War of One Person" which is widely regarded as a feminist manifesto due to its private body writing. Meanwhile, the contemporary novel "The Chair in the Corridor" has been in an "incomplete" interpretation state for a long time due to its vague historical background and insufficient attention, and criticism is mostly focused on women's theoretical exposition, resulting in a flattened and conceptualized theme.

This study aims to rediscover the overlooked historical narratives in "The Chair of the Corridor" and reveal how Lin Bai's personalized writing transcends the realm of "female whispers" and integrates personal traumatic memories into collective historical experiences, providing another important dimension for understanding women's personalized writing in the 1990s. Starting from a historical perspective, combined with Lin Bai's life and internal clues in the text, this paper redefines the historical background of "The Chair of the Corridor". In addition to same-sex love and sensory writing, the focus is on analyzing the fusion of personal memory and historical narrative in the novel. Through intertextual comparison with "Sun Wu" and "One Person's War", the continuity of the isomorphism between personal experience and historical experience in its creation is verified. Combining text close reading methods to deeply analyze narrative structure and thematic hierarchy is beneficial for research; The ultimate goal of this study is to reinterpret the literary value of "The Chair of the Corridor", clarify how Lin Bai creatively combines personal narrative with grand history in the work, and demonstrate that his personalized writing is not a retreat to private domains, but rather a reconstruction of collective trauma and historical relationships through compassion for historical aphasia and adherence to memory justice.

2. The Necessity of Resolving

In the 1990s, Lin Bai successively created works such as "Water in a Bottle" (1989), "Cannot Break Up with a Lover" (1993), and "One Person's War" (1994). This period was not only a high-

yield period for Lin Bai's creation, but also a time when her works attracted widespread attention and criticism from the academic community. With the convening of the Fourth World Conference on Women by the United Nations, as well as the translation and introduction of feminist theoretical works represented by Simone de Beauvoir. From 1992 to 1995, the feminist movement emerged and developed in the new era of China, gradually pushing the feminist literary trend to a climax. Many female writers and their literature became well-known through this opportunity [1].

However, Lin Bai herself somewhat rejects the external labeling of her writing as 'feminine.' In interviews, she has repeatedly explained the connection between feminism and her own identity.In 2024, Lin Bai stated that she did not have any special background when creating "War of One Person", and answered the question of "Meng Fanfan regards" War of One Person "as a milestone work in Chinese women's literature" by saying, "I feel very honored. Of course, no matter what, when writing" War of One Person ", the issue of women's literature was not specifically considered..." Flower City "was first released in 1994, and the concept of women's literature was only introduced in 1995 when the World Women's Congress was held in Huairou, Beijing [2]."

In fact, before the publication of "A Man's War," the academic community did not pay high attention to Lin Bai's works. In the early 1980s, Lin Bai consciously approached root seeking literature and actively participated in the activities of Guangxi avant-garde literature. Such as her debut works "People in the Soil House" in 1983 and "From the River to the Shore" in 1986, it is evident that she is close to root seeking literature, but there is also a strong sense of consciousness and personal monologue in her personal style. In fact, until the publication of "The Chair in the Corridor" and "Water in the Bottle" in the fourth issue of Zhongshan magazine in 1993, Lin Bai's creation had no obvious connection with female writing.

Critics have also paid relatively little attention to Lin Bai's early works, except for Chen Xiaoming's 1993 joint review of "The Chair in the Corridor" and "Water in the Bottle" titled "Desire as Water: The Myth of Gender - A Brief Discussion on Lin Bai's Novels". This review was the only focus on Lin Bai's works by mainstream critics before "A Man's War" [3]. The narrative style of 'The Chair in the Corridor' is regarded by Chen Xiaoming as a typical example of female writing. Among them, Chen commented on "The Chair in the Corridor": "The desires between women are accompanied by the water of bathing, clear and flowing. The world of men is full of violence, conspiracy, and baseness... Perhaps this is typical female writing, which does not consider the completeness of narrative, but focuses on the expression of desire in discourse... For Lin Bai, tracking women's hidden desires is the center of her writing, and it is her true (as a woman, writing as a desire expression) [4].”

Afterwards, research on the dimensions of "The Chair in the Corridor" mainly focused on two aspects: firstly, combining feminist theory to explore the same-sex emotions between Zhu Liang and the female servants of Qiye in the text. Secondly, analyze narrative characteristics through sensory description. But the author herself does not agree with the above perspective. In her creative discourse,she did not point to "feminism", but emphasized that it is a "story of outsiders and revolution" and a "good and quiet experience". And for the "same-sex love" praised by critics, it is only defined as the "friendship between two women, master and servant" [5].

Therefore, "The Chair of the Corridor" was initially interpreted by critics in the direction of female writing, and later the reputation of "A Man's War" further strengthened its symbolic binding with feminism. Lin Bai herself has repeatedly expressed her confusion about her works being labeled as "feminist", and as a work with obvious intertextuality with "A Man's War", "The Chair of the Corridor" only received more attention after "A Man's War" became famous, and its interpretation has been somewhat delayed and misunderstood. But 'misreading' does not mean that previous research is completely wrong, but rather that in the specific historical context of the feminist criticism wave in the 1990s, the focus of criticism was on the gender dimension, obscuring or weakening the equally important historical dimension in the text. But this is only a deviation and incompleteness of the critical perspective, rather than a complete denial.

3. The Writing of History

The historical background of 'The Chair of the Corridor' has always been defined as the land reform events of the 1950s [6]. After reading through the text, it is not difficult to find that 'land reform' is just a false background. Based on the author's experience, Lin Bai was born in 1958 and did not have the opportunity to personally experience the land reform from 1950 to 1952. However, from July 10, 1975, when she graduated from high school, to December 1977, she was a witness to the aftermath of a special historical period by jumping the queue in Liugan, Beiliu, Guangxi. Secondly, within the text, it is difficult to correspond with the background of land reform through additional details, atmosphere, metaphorical symbols, and character relationship patterns. In 'The Chair of the Corridor', except for the time point in the early 1950s, there are no details related to land reform throughout the text, and it is filled with the historical atmosphere of the special period in the late 1960s and 1970s. Therefore, it can be basically concluded that this article is a retelling of the history of the post special period by Lin Bai from a personalized perspective, using the time of land reform and her personal experience of the times.

Firstly, the handling of the historical background in "The Chair of the Corridor" is relatively vague, such as "post liberation" and "movement". Apart from Chen Nong's analysis of the composition of the families of the eldest and second wives in the text, there are no clearly directional vocabulary with a contemporary color, which is insufficient to reflect the historical event of land reform. Secondly, the description of the struggle between Zhang Mengda and Chen Nong in the article is closer to spiritual violence rather than the cruelty of class struggle.

In multiple conflicts, the plot of "killing pigs" is the most absurd and cruel. During the search led by Chen Nong, who smashed open the four gates of the Zhang family, Chen Nong saw his subordinates taking away taro and sweet potatoes from the Zhang family's cellar without permission. In hesitation, one person said, 'This Zhang Mengda is a counter revolutionary. It's only right to kill his pig, not to mention eating his taro.' Afterwards, people were instantly uplifted by the call of the word 'kill the pig'. Someone responded by saying, 'Kill his pig'. Many voices said, 'Kill his pig, kill the counter revolutionary pig, kill the pig! Kill the pig! Kill the pig!' The common temptation quickly made the voice uniform, powerful, and unified, and this will covered Chen Nong's brain. He couldn't help but say, 'Kill the pig' [7].” The trampling and neglect of the human rights of suspected criminals, as well as the collective and irrational nature of violence, present a frenzy of collective unconscious killing. In Lin Bai's stream of consciousness writing, inhumane behavior has a eerie atmosphere.

Whether it is Chen Nong's power violence, Zhang Mengda's ignorant tragedy, or the fanatical state of the people, Zhu Liang and Qi Ye's silence and helplessness are all microcosms of the special period: widespread suspicion and fear, secret reporting and betrayal, absurd accusations and violence. All of this is depicted in the maze like temporal and spatial transitions and stream of consciousness scenes of Lin Bai's hazy, distant, and melancholic atmosphere, permeated with the eerie atmosphere of seclusion and unique coldness and creativity.

In this historical context, it was previously believed by critics that in Lin Bai's world, women created their own world, becoming the center of this world, and men could only watch and speculate from afar, but could never reach the center of women [8]." The argument that the main theme of the article is a disregard for traditional male discourse and a maintenance of female discourse is the result of a curious speculation about the relationship between two women outside the historical context of the original text. In fact, the fate of the two women is completely influenced by external changes. There is only one scene in the text where Chen Nong's henchmen shout at Zhu Liang during a house raid, 'Auntie is an oppressed class.' The men all hear a different meaning and shout loudly, 'I'm so oppressed that I'm screaming, I'm in pain, I can't get up anymore.'. The attitude of the male world towards the female world is mocking and disrespectful. The silence and quietness of the female world are forced and helpless, and there is no way to resist. The interpretation of "indifference to male discourse" is completely unfounded, let alone "maintenance of female discourse".

Therefore, after redefining "The Chair of the Corridor" as a reflective novel completed through indirect recognition of historical atmosphere and imaginative reconstruction based on personal

experience, Lin Bai redefined "The Chair of the Corridor" as the background of land reform. The two female characters in the text assume another function in the historical dimension - Qiye and Zhu Liang are both witnesses of a special period, and Qiye is a survivor and narrator. Lin Bai uses the indescribable collective trauma of history, through the female perspective of Qiye and Zhu Liang, to create a secluded and maze like private space "Red Chamber" on the border. With delicate sensory experiences, such as Zhu Liang lighting up the aroma of the building after slaughtering pigs, creates a terrifying atmosphere. The oleander is covered in a layer of lead gray color, Qiye saw the pig with stripped fur lying on its back in the dark green courtyard, "very much like a person stripped naked, it's spine chilling". These metaphorical plots are not direct but profound, carrying the deep functions of trauma witness and memory carrier, collectively constituting the construction of memories for special periods.

However, due to the fact that the author herself was in the aftermath of a special period in the 1960s and 1970s, and only had two years of experience jumping the queue, her experience was not extensive. Therefore, the writing of this period of history presents a posture of searching and piecing together, which is also in line with the author's own creative feeling of "being able to quietly gaze outside and isolate oneself from the world". This is the cognitive mode of the post special period - confusion, alienation, and the atmosphere of trying to understand but being separated, but the atmosphere is also enough to make "me" feel scared and afraid that I "cannot escape it". But this is enough to demonstrate that 'The Chair of the Corridor' is not a female novel limited to same-sex love, and after redefining its historical background, its themes become more diverse and rich.

4. The Dilemma of Acceptance

The discussion on women's literature in the 1990s had a certain guiding effect on the interpretation of works. After its completion, Lin Bai's "A Man's War" quickly entered the center of the literary world, and critics elevated her characters and herself from a sense of history and concreteness, abstractly elevating them to an "individual" symbol outside of grand narrative and collective writing, that is, a rebel against patriarchal culture. After works such as "The War of One Person," "The Chair of the Corridor," and "Sun Noon" were labeled as "personal writing" and "feminism," corresponding theories entered Lin Bai's novels, confirming her legitimacy in the 1990s. She became a hero who rebelled against collective and patriarchal discourse [9]. Even the historical background set by Lin Bai in the text has become a representation of male discourse and power under feminist analysis, and has become a target of criticism. This has marginalized and instrumentalized the historical dimension, only serving as a vague background of women's fate, or losing its political critical significance when included in feminist analysis. As a result, the focus of criticism has shifted, and complex issues have been simplified. This interpretive relationship, while pushing its literary significance to the extreme, may also delete or obscure other dimensions of its literary writing, making its literary significance both prominent and inevitably appear flat and narrow [10].”

Lin Bai's narrative style of telling historical experiences through personal experiences has also been presented in other works. The posture depicted in 'Sun Noon' may be gentle and effortless, but its disclosure of historical privacy is resolute. Yao Qiong, as a beautiful woman and a famous model opera actress, could not decide her own fate even after the death of her oppressed uncle. She was treated as a "showcase" by Guo Dayan and ultimately chose to hang herself. If she had not committed suicide, had no male support, had a beautiful appearance, and due to a special historical period, Yao Qiong who did not commit suicide could have been the next "Zhu Liang" to mysteriously disappear. At this point, male behavior is no longer a personal act, but an embodiment of power, a "legitimate" rule exercised by historical subjects over those who have become sacrificial masters of power without any choice. When describing Zhu Liang and Yao Qiong, Lin Bai pieced together scattered fragments. These fragments are the individual's original experience of details, and only details can truly enter history. In 'A Man's War', the bathing plot is completely identical to that in 'The Chair of the Corridor', with almost no changes. Given the unique historical context, 'bathing' cannot be simply understood

as the display and expression of individual life. And it precisely reflects the insecurity of women as a disadvantaged group in a specific historical period, which comes from the panic and helplessness of the "observed" towards the "viewer". Zhu Liang's discomfort in the article echoes the author's personal experience. When female writers contemplate and explore what kind of "history" literature should present, they hope to present a "history" that highlights the "unconscious life" of female subjects without observation. This can be either a retrieval and reconstruction of the "other" history from a female perspective, or a narrative and imagination of the "history" that has not been obscured or distorted and is closer to the "real and objective past" [11].

History has been repeatedly narrated, and the characters "Domi" in "A Man's War", "I" in "Bullets Through Apples", "Zhu Liang" in "The Chair of the Corridor", and "I" in "Cannot Break Up with My Lover" all contain vivid life insights, physical feelings, emotional experiences, and painful experiences of writers. They enter the repeatedly narrated history under Lin Bai's pen. Therefore, in this sense, the desire writing of female writers carries specific historical information and intergenerational experiences, surpassing the binary structure of "women's literature" limited by the perspective of "personalized writing" [12]. Lin Bai's novels still have innovative interpretations beyond their female literary value.

Although the writing style of combining Lin Bai's personal experience with historical experience in "The Chair of the Corridor" and "Sun Noon" is not yet mature. The delicacy of sensory description and frequent switching of narrative perspectives dilute the completeness of historical narration, and the insertion of personal experience to some extent reduces the depth and thickness of exploration of historical trauma.

After entering the 21st century, Lin Bai's writing style of historical narrative became more mature in a personalized way, which is vividly reflected in "Beiliu". Through the description of characters, scenes, behaviors, and customs in her hometown, her views on society, history, and humanity are reflected. Its creation still continues the fragmented narrative mode. Unlike some writers who use clear rationality to guide their views, she allows everything to be attached to her own emotions. Therefore, the entire novel adopts a fragmented narrative, which can be said to be a basic manifestation of Lin Bai's worldview and literary views [13]. In this sense, it also provides a practical basis for the reinterpretation of "The Chair of the Corridor" and a possibility for accepting solutions to the dilemma.

5. Conclusion

This study reinterprets "The Chair of the Corridor" from a historical perspective, revealing how Lin Bai entered her personal experience into historical narratives in fragmented form, starting from his personal memory. Taking "The Chair in the Corridor" as an example, analyze the complexity of its narrative, which is calm, restrained, but separated. Thus, further research conclusions can be drawn that Lin Bai's personalized writing did not retreat to her personal domain, and her creation completed the entry, reconstruction, and healing of history through a unique form of female whispers. In this sense, the significance of her works goes far beyond the avant-garde form of female writing.

There are two main aspects of the significance and value of this study for related research. Firstly, to provide a historical and critical dimension of non whispering and bodily narrative for interpreting the "personalized writing of women" in the 1990s. Secondly, taking 'The Chair in the Corridor' as an example, it provides a path for understanding the relationship between critical thinking and the 'forced interpretation' of the work.

Future research will focus more on the following directions for in-depth exploration: firstly, continuing to explore the isomorphism mechanism between personal narrative and historical trauma in the works of Lin Bai and her contemporaries; The second is to analyze the works of "women's whispers" represented by Lin Bai in the writing lineage of the 1990s, and examine whether there is a two-way interaction and influence between her writing and criticism, thus leading to the forced

interpretation of her works under feminism. The third is to focus on the author's recent works and examine the contemporary evolution of their historical writing consciousness.

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