

The Theme of Family in Russian and Chinese Women's Literature: Comparative Aspect

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Abstract

In the article, based on the creative work of representatives of Russian and Chinese literature of the second half of the twentieth century: Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, Zhang Ailin (Eileen Chang) and Zhang Jie - the author defines the features of women's prose of the period under consideration. The purpose of the work is to identify the specifics of the reflection of the family theme in the works of these authors. The article argues that the attitude of Chinese women writers to the family was largely determined by traditional ideas, the influence of which on public life did not weaken in the twentieth century. In the works of Russian authors, the family theme is revealed in a broad literary and cultural context. In the course of comparing the works, it is established that Lyudmila Petrushevskaya and Lyudmila Ulitskaya, in contrast to the Chinese writers, comprehend the lives of their heroines in the perspective of broader historical and cultural generalizations. In the works we are considering, Ulitskaya and Petrushevskaya turn to myth in search of the reasons for the distortion of female nature. The Chinese women's narrative emphasizes a close connection with national issues, so the fate of the heroines of the novels of Eileen Chang and Zhang Jie are inseparable from the issues that have been brewing in Chinese society since the emergence of the May Fourth movement. In Chinese women's health, the problem of women's lack of the rights that men have in Chinese society, despite all the achievements of the twentieth century, has become central.

Keywords: women's prose, Petrushevskaya, Ulitskaya, Eileen Chang, Zhang Jie, comparison, family theme.

1. Introduction

In modern literary studies, issues related to the functioning of women's prose, are raised in the works of both domestic and foreign researchers (N. L. Leiderman, M. N. Lipovetsky, T. N. Breeva, A.S. Afanasyev, I. M. Popova, E. V. Lubeznaya, Zhang Jianhua, Yu Zhengrong, and others). In particular, I. M. Popova, E. V. Lubeznaya in the article "the phenomenon of the contemporary "women's prose" talking about the fact, that "the phenomenon of an important branch of modern literature called "women's prose", is due to the unique combination of peculiar view of the world from the standpoint of folklore and biblical archetypes and "intelligence" of the style, including special psychological, metaphorical, poetic and household accuracy of descriptions" (Popova & Lubeznaya, 2008).

Yu Zhengrong, in his article "The subject matter and style of contemporary women's literature" notes that "some women writers, such as L. A. Petrushevskaya T. Tolstaya, L. Ulitskaya, V. Tokareva, V. Narbikova et al., present a "preoccupied view of the problem of small people and those who live on the edge of society" (Zheng sheng, 2006). Considering the main themes of Russian and Chinese women's literature, the researcher states that **the concept of family** is one of the most significant in Russian women's prose ("the concept of family is the main aspect of Russian literature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, especially in women's literature" (Zheng sheng, 2006)).

For the analysis, we selected the works "Little Grozny" by L. A. Petrushevskaya, "Medea and her children" by L. Ulitskaya, "Love that destroys cities" and "Golden Shackles" by Eileen Chang, "The Emerald" by Zhang Jie, in which the theme of family is one of the central places.

The purpose of the article is to reveal the specifics of the interpretation of the family theme in the works of Russian and Chinese writers of the second half of the twentieth century.

2. Methods

To achieve this goal, the work uses methods of modern comparativeness and hermeneutics, as well as theoretical positions of receptive aesthetics.

The comparative method in literary studies is designed to identify differences in national phenomena. It is during comparison that we describe the literature in those categories that correspond to the nature of the national object. It is based on "preserving the uniqueness of each of the literature included in the research circle" (Safiullin, 2010).

The hermeneutical approach applied to the study of works of Chinese literature involves identifying "an endless renewal of meanings in ever-new contexts" (Bakhtin, 1979). The "context of understanding" of Russian women's prose in this study is the context of "other" literature – Chinese, which is a kind of dialogizing background for the perception of distinctive features of Russian literature. At the same time, understanding is not limited only to the rational sphere and logical operations, it allows the participation of intuitive aspects of perception, the "grasping" of the object of knowledge as a whole, followed by the rationalization of the "grasped" one.

Of great importance in the development of our concept were the works of domestic and foreign scientists devoted to the receptive aspects of dialogue, the objective participant of which

is the reader (Iser, 1978; Iser, 1988; Jauss, 1995), as well as the problems of national identity (Nabiullina et al., 2017; Amineva & Yuzmukhametova, 2017; Bekmetov et al., 2017).

3. Results and Обсуждение

In classical Chinese philosophy, the family is understood as a place where harmony and love reign: "If there is peace in the family, then everything flourishes", "The family is a bay full of love and warmth" (Chinese proverbs). Therefore, in Chinese literature, the theme of the family of individuals has been significant since ancient times. However, the position of women in traditional Chinese society was disenfranchised. In one of the texts of Confucianism 仪礼 Yǐlǐ ("Model rules of ceremony and decorum") the policy, in accordance with which was supported by the family in order: "Three obedience and four virtues" ("三从四德"): submissive in his youth, father, marriage to her husband, in old age, the son and 4 virtues (virtue, modesty in speech, femininity, hard work) (Titarenko, 2006). Therefore, the ancient culture of China forbade a woman to engage in literature. It was believed that it fosters the bad in a woman and distracts her from the "right" behavior. However, it is known that during the Qing era (1644-1911), more than three thousand poetesses were engaged in creative work. "The May Fourth Movement (1919) was the beginning not only of social reform and the cultural revolution, but also of feminization, which led to the fact that Chinese women began to realize their individual dignity and value, to strive for liberation and active self-realization" (Zhao Xue, 2017).

"Women's literature" (女性文学), which appeared in China in 1920–1930, became a literary phenomenon in 1984–1988. The participants touched upon important issues of the family, home, children and the relationship between men and women.

Modern Chinese researchers who have studied Russian women's prose, emphasize that there are points of contact between Russian and Chinese literature in the disclosure of family themes. So, talking about the specifics of L. Ulitskaya, Duan Lijun writes: "The family depicted by Ulitskaya is always blessed and happy. The family protects a person's spiritual freedom in an unstable society and helps people to live a happy life" (Duan Lijun, 2003).

Comparing the way how the family theme is revealed in the works of Russian and Chinese writers of the second half of the twentieth century, it allows to highlight the points of attraction between Russian and Chinese prose, as well as the unique features in each of the literatures. Undoubtedly, the greatest differences are revealed between the works which the authors rely on the religious and cultural traditions of their peoples.

One of the brightest representatives of women's literature in China in the second half of the twentieth century – Eileen Chang - in her novels and novellas, she usually depicts the gray everyday life of the old Chinese urban society, while the theme of the destruction of family values occupies a significant place in her books. It shows how simple family relationships collapse under the influence of money, and how cold calculation gradually penetrates the relationship between a man and a woman.

Family in the novel "Love that destroys cities" appears as a social institution that has lost all value: the heroine is literally ready to sell her mother and brothers, who assess the importance of a woman in terms of the amount of material benefits that she brings to the family. When Bai Lusu tries to find solace in her family, but everyone turns away from her. "Everyone had taken refuge in their own little world, and even if she smashed her head, she still wouldn't be able to reach them. The mother she dreamed of and her real mother were as

different as heaven and earth" (Translated by O. P. Rodionova) (Masterpieces of Chinese women's prose of the mid-twentieth century / Translated from Chinese. Moscow: IVL Publ., 2018).

Bai Lusu remains alone, and she can only establish herself in society at the expense of a man, so the heroine leaves the house to Fan Liaoyuan. And in a new relationship, the main thing for her is the money of the man who is next to her ("Lusu acknowledged that Fan Liaoyuan was cute, giving her magical experiences while her goal was material well-being. She knew that she could be calm about the latter" (Masterpieces of Chinese women's prose of the mid-twentieth century / Translated from Chinese. Moscow: IVL Publ., 2018)).

The works of Chinese writers describe different variants of family relationships, but even if, at first glance, they correspond to the norms, under their influence the inner world of a woman is destroyed. For example, in the story "心经" ("Heart Sutras", the main character Mrs. Han lives according to an old Chinese commandment. She lowers her head, endures the shame and humiliation without a murmur. Even when Mrs. Han notices her daughter's (Xiao Han) strange attraction to her husband, despite her worries, she does everything so that others do not suspect anything. She tries to instill in her daughter the idea that it is not necessary to marry without love, but Xiao Han replies, "A marriage that has love is an unhappy one. You know that!" (Suiyue Ruge, 2011)

Heroines of Eileen Chang and in the twentieth century continue to live in the captivity of prejudices, "slave psychology" is firmly embedded in them.

To determine the originality of the creative work of representatives of Chinese literature, let us turn to the key works of Russian women's literature of the second half of the twentieth century: the novel by L. A. Ulitskaya "Medea and her Children" and the novella by L. Petrushevskaya "Little Grozny".

Comparison of the novellas "Little Grozny" by L. A. Petrushevskaya and the "Golden Shackles" by Eileen Chang suggests that in the modern world, family ideals are undergoing transformation. Love of Grozny and Cao Qiqiao to their children conditional. Internal distortions of these two images are caused by different reasons: Cao Qiqiao's essence was deformed by the conditions of life in her husband's family, where she completely lost all the qualities that made her a woman who has a deeper problem. No wonder that L. Petrushevskaya gives her heroine the features of Ivan Grozny. Little Grozny is a type of masculine woman: she manages her husband, children, students at the institute, and numerous relatives. At the same time, she is obsessed with the idea of house, but the house can only be handed over through the female line (a manifestation of the matriarchal component): "She achieved the goal of her life and left her daughter a luxury apartment of one hundred square meters, and even in the center – a fantastic thing by Moscow standards. Only my daughter and granddaughter, but no one else! In fact, this was the leitmotif of her whole life, to leave this saved family hearth to them" (Petrushevskaya, 2007).

In the story "Golden Shackles" Eileen Chang's heroine, on the contrary, tries in every possible way to leave all her wealth to her son (in traditional China, there is a concept of: "when a daughter marries, it's like pouring out water"). Cao Qiqiao's attitude towards his children is based on this concept. She believes that spending money on her daughter is useless, and the decision to leave everything to her son is her own business. But the good treatment of their son brought them both griefs. She forces her son to take opium to stay with

her, and her fear of losing him has ruined his marriage. Cao Qiqiao's perverse attempts to maintain power over the children were caused by living in a large feudal family, which deprived her of all freedom. She did not want to see the happiness of others, because she was deprived of it, so she deprived everyone around her, including her children.

The reasons for this portrayal of the family in works of art by Eileen Chang lie not only in the writers' belief that even a progressive Western education did not make a Chinese woman free from prejudice, from centuries - old "slave psychology", but also in her personal experience: a joyless childhood, failures in her personal life. Lyudmila Petrushevskaya has a similar view of family and relationships between close people. However, unlike the characters of the works of the Chinese writer, the images created in the story "Little Grozny" are more complex. When considering the image of the main character and her relationship with others, we focused on it as mythological (in terms of strength of character, it is akin to ancient Greek Medea), and on the historical (reminds Ivan IV) and ideologically (she teaches students the basics of Marxism-Leninism, the party has left a deep mark on the structure of her own family) contexts.

The theme of the family is revealed in a completely different way in the novel by L. A. Ulitskaya "Medea and her children". According to the researchers, "Medea's family is a traditional family in the sense that it preserves family traditions and rules, patterns of behavior. This family is in some sense antisocial, it does not change from what society it lives in, and its behavioral patterns are determined by its internal laws. It does not give the state the role of ensuring its security, these functions remain in the family, so it should meet such monumental figures as Medea. The women of this family feel a kinship with the ancient Greek queens" (Berezina, 2005). The main character of the novel, who did not know the happiness of motherhood herself, gathers all her relatives and their friends in her house in the Crimea. She becomes a symbol of virtue and holiness in the high Christian sense of the word, but also in her character there are features of masculinity: she is strong, courageous, responsible, her nephew George acts as her masculine counterpart.

The image created by the contemporary Chinese writer Zhang Jie in the story "The Emerald", can be compared to Medea Ulitskaya. Zeng Ling'er, the main character of the work, wants to love and be loved, and love, despite the lack of response, fills her life with deep meaning. We are looking at the image of a strong woman who, despite the fact that she could not realize her inner potential, did not lose the ability to live and help people. Zeng Ling'er, unlike the heroine Eileen Chang, does not live in a world of prejudice, she is independent of men and builds her own life like Western women.

4. Summary

As can be seen from the study, the creativity of many representatives of Chinese literature demonstrates the desire to recreate the value model of Chinese society. In the Chinese women's perspective of the period under review, one of the central problems is the lack of cardinal changes in Chinese society in the mid-twentieth century, despite the destruction of patriarchal principles of life. A woman is still deprived of the rights that a man has in Chinese society, so she still feels enslaved and unhappy. However, already in the works of the 1980s (Zhang Jie's novella "The Emerald"), the voice of a strong woman began to sound, able to realize her inner potential, express freedom of choice. She was able to rise above everyday life, the circumstances of life and realize the significance of the highest principle in human life.

The heroine of the novel "Love That Destroys Cities" by Eileen Chang, Bai Lusu believed in love and found happiness in her relationship with Fan Liaoyuan, however, she is completely living life, unlike the heroine of Zhang Jie. The heroine of Ulitskaya, Medea Sinoply follows the concepts of Christian virtue, her home is the universe of a huge family.

The family theme in the novels "Golden Shackles" by Eileen Chang and "Little Grozny" by L. Petrushevskaya is realized in a completely different way. Their heroines contain a demonic element that destroys the happiness of loved ones.

5. Conclusions

The women's theme in twentieth century of Chinese literature cannot be considered in isolation from the processes of social modernization after the Cultural Revolution. The writers, having declared themselves after the emergence of the movement Fourth of May, try to find new forms of dialogue with the world, overcome opposition "male - female". The Chinese women's narrative is closely related to the problems of the Chinese nation and state, so the fate of the heroine of the novels of Eileen Chang and Zhang Jie is inseparable from the contradictions in the life of society that permeate family relations.

In Russian women's prose, in particular in the works of Ulitskaya and Petrushevskaya of the 1990s, more complex forms of women's connection with the world around them are revealed. When discussing family themes, Russian authors refer to the mythological, religious, and historical context. In the works we are considering, Ulitskaya and Petrushevskaya, in search of answers to the question of the female naturee, return to the source, the myth.

Acknowledgements

This paper is performed as part of the implementation of the Kazan Federal University Strategic Academic Leadership Program.

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