

## **Semiotic Interpretation of Female Images in the Novel Shuihu Zhuan**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

The article is a descriptive study on the female images in the novel Shuihu Zhuan. It largely follows Julia Kristeva's semiotic and feminist thoughts and adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Typical examples are selected mainly from the novel Shuihu Zhuan published by Zhonghua Book Company. Through analysis, it's found out that Shi Nai'an's true attitude towards the females in the novel: neither misogyny nor women-hating, or looking-down-upon-women, but paying tribute to women's virtues, and these eternal women lead this novel to a new height. It hopes that the findings may shed some light to the study on women in literary works as well as the study of classic works.

**Keywords:** signs; female images; semiotic interpretation; the novel Shuihu Zhuan

### **Introduction**

In nowadays' global context, a wave of research on classical books is on the rise in China and around the world. As one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature, Shuihu Zhuan (水浒传), also known as The Water Margin or All Men are Brothers, enjoys high prestige. It is warmly welcomed throughout the world that the encyclopedia of many countries such as Britain, America, Germany, France, Japan, Thailand, etc., speak highly of it. It has been translated into many foreign languages such as in English, French, German, Japanese, Hungarian, Latin, Italian, Russian, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai and Polish etc..

Studies on the novel Shuihu Zhuan outside China are mainly conducted from the perspectives of narratology and literary criticism, focusing on its central idea as well as the comparison between the traditional western fictions with it, which usually evaluate the characters from an overall aspect. And it also has a deep influence on the literature of some countries (Wang, 1998, p.64). Nevertheless, only a few scholars have touched the topic related with women in it. C.T. Hsia (1968, p.101) contends that the novel Shuihu Zhuan is a work of misogyny. Phillip S. Y. Sun states that it indicates the hatred of women, claiming that the hatred comes from two origins: 1) disapproval of the tender feelings between men and women; and 2) the idea that women are ominous(i.e. women are a curse; women are

Helen of Troy)(quoted from Xie, 2015,p.49). Yenna Wu(1995) even goes further to argue that the misogynistic view on the women in the novel is due to the men’s fear of the women. Peng Liu (2018) discusses the Mysterious Woman of the Nine Heavens(jiutian xuannv niangniang )’s influence within the novel Shuihu Zhuan in Chapter 1 of his dissertation “The Way of Darkness and Light: Daoist Divine Women in Pre-Modern Chinese Fiction ”, claiming that the Mysterious Woman uses her magic of invisibility to save Song Jiang’s life, which represents her power in an entertainingly dramatic way, thereby reifying the Daoist ritual idea.

In China, scholars have conducted researches on the novel Shuihu Zhuan from the perspectives of politics, economics, narratology, linguistics, literary criticism, culturology, science of edition, translatology, poetics, film and television studies, feminism, reception aesthetics and psychology, etc., focusing on the topics ranging from the construction of feudal society, folk custom in Northern Song, politics and economics in Northern Song, its English versions to the female characterization etc.. According to statistical analysis of Chinese CNKI data by choosing “Shuihu Zhuan“ and“the females” as the title and subject, it’s found that in the past 40 years, the study on the female images in Shuihu Zhuan has been a hot topic. There are as many as 52 researches(see Table 1) in which scholars have paid much attention to the analysis of the female images and the causes of the views on women in it.

**Table 1**

Year	1998	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2007	2008	2009	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of published works (52)	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	3	2	4	1	5	4	6	5	4	1	4	1	2

All these researches put forward three kinds of viewpoints about women in Shuihu Zhuan:

First, great contempt for women. Since Mr. Nie Ganlu (2005) put forward the view that “Shuihu Zhuan is all about contempt for women” in his monograph *Collection of Chinese Classical Novels*(Zhongguo Gudian Xiaoshuo Lunji) (in page 3 of the preface), many scholars have inherited and developed this view. Ma Ruifang (1994, p.22) believes that the theme of Shuihu Zhuan is that “women are a curse or women are Helen of Troy” and women are defamed with the prominent characteristics ( i.e., women are lewd, vulgar and coarse) . Wei Chongxin(1997,p.14) clearly pointed out that “Shi Nai’an, when describing women, his contempt and even hatred can be demonstrated from three aspects: womanising taboo psychology, misogynistic behavior and women’s sorrow” . Some scholars believe that Shuihu Zhuan is a work of misogyny. Obviously, they ignore several important and glorious female images created in the novel, such as the “Womenman” in Liangshan, the Mysterious Woman of the Nine Heavens(jiutian xuannv niangniang ), and the righteous prostitute, Li Shi Shi, who provides a “fast track” to pave the way for peace.

Second, high affirmations for women. Some researchers think that the view on women in *Shuihu Zhuan* has shining merits. Through the comparison and analysis of the external appearance and inner spiritual consciousness of the heroic female images in *Shuihu Zhuan* and the traditional female images in ancient Chinese literature, Tang Bo (2007) claims that the three heroines of Gu Sister-in-law, Sun Erniang and Hu Sanniang reflect the awakening and transformation of female role consciousness. Teng Guihua and Li Na (2009) criticizes those anti-feminists' views and points out that Shi Nai'an has deep feelings for women—respect, or trust or sympathy for women. Hu Qian (2020) argues that the women in the novel with independent personality and rebellious spirit subvert and reshape the traditional female images, which reflects the awakening of female consciousness.

Third, noncommittal attitude to women. Different from the above two viewpoints, some researchers believe that Shi Nai'an's view on women is complex and cannot be generalized. Ma Chengsheng (1994) points out that Shi Nai'an's view on women is that "the essence and the dregs coexist". Yang Fengtai (1998) argues that Shi Nai'an praises and disparages the women, but not all of them are contemptuous. Pan Xingye (2013) claims that *Shuihu Zhuan* not only reveals the traditional old-fashioned views on women that women are a curse or women are Helen of Troy, and the female images in the novel were quite different from what they were in the ancient literature, but also displays the advanced views on women, such as women's consciousness of independence.

With relatively rich achievements in the studies on *Shuihu Zhuan* in and outside China, there are still four problems as follows: Firstly, most of the researches on the novel *Shuihu Zhuan* are full of intertextuality. Secondly, the studies are often perceptual without methodological support, thus lead to inadequate research findings. Thirdly, they attach too much importance to the study of social background and traditional culture, but leave text analysis behind. Lastly, the research on females in this novel is relatively narrow only involving the views of women and thus always controversial, no one has touched the research on female images from the perspective of semiotics.

In view of the limitations of previous studies, this research attempts :

- 1 To study the women in the novel *Shuihu Zhuan* from the perspective of semiotics.
- 2 To find out Shi Nai'an's true attitude towards women in the novel?

This research considers all the women in the novel as signs and sign combinations and discusses their signs' meaning-making to explore the cultural implications behind them so that the readers may acquire new understanding about those females as well as deepening their recognition of this famous classic work. The discussion will mainly focus on the question which awaits solution: what's Shi Nai'an's true attitude towards women in the novel?

According to statistics, there are 787 characters in the novel *Shuihu Zhuan* among which 711 are male and 76 female. And among the 76 females, only 47 have been depicted in details with the other 29 just referred. The population of this study were the 47 females in the novel *Shuihu Zhuan*. Here, the population have the following characteristics: homogeneous; stratified, proportional stratified and grouped by type. The samples in this study were 24 females with focus on five representatives in the novel *Shuihu Zhuan* selected by stratified sampling and cluster sampling based on a comparative approach. Though this research is a semiotic interpretation on the female images in the novel *Shuihu Zhuan*, it is not limited to the

females in the novel. It's involved not only semiotics but also the theory of text analysis and criticism. Hence, it also covers the original works of Shuihu Zhuan and its contemporary and later critics' comments on them especially their views on women in it, and its inspiration for women in nowadays' society. This research will cover the followings for reference: 1) Monographs and doctoral theses on semiotics in and outside China; 2) The original works of Shuihu Zhuan by Shi Ni'an published in 2018 by Zhonghua Shuju (Zhonghua Book Company), one of the most authoritative publishing house in China; 3) Monographs and doctoral theses on text analysis and criticism.

The method adopted in this research is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods embracing induction, deduction and abduction methods. Typical examples will be selected mainly from the novel Shuihu Zhuan published by Zhonghua Book Company. This research is trying to interpret the female images in the novel Shuihu Zhuan in a semiotic approach, and try to find out the author Shi Ni'an's true attitude towards women in the novel, hoping that the findings may shed some light to the study on women in literary works as well as the future study of semiotics.

## **Semiotics**

As Pelc declares, "semiotics can be taken to mean a semiotic method or the sum total of semiotic methods. Speaking generally, these methods call for the treatment of various objects, events or phenomena as signs... we may employ yet another semiotic method, namely the method of formalization" (1981, p.15). This is just the objective that the present section attempts to achieve—to establish a methodology or rationale for the description of the analysis of the signs in and for women in the novel Shuihu Zhuan.

According to Kristeva, the semiotic is associated with the pre-oedipal mother. Semiotic language is derived from the pre-oedipal stage and is associated with the feminine and the maternal. Though the semiotic is associated with the feminine, it is not exclusive to the feminine. It should be noted that the pre-oedipal mother encompasses both masculinity and femininity, for there is no distinction between femininity and masculinity in the pre-oedipal stage. As Terry Eagleton puts it, "The semiotic is by no means a language exclusive to women, for it adses from a pre- oedipal period which recognizes no distinction of borders."(p.214) Even though the semiotic is not exclusive to women, it has a close affinity with Women. For this purpose, Kristeva introduces a concept of chora. Just like the state of chaos before the Genesis, there is no disturbance of human language, the pre-subject lives with its mother in a harmonious way. Kristeva borrows the term "chora" from Plato, and the chora is derived from Plato's work Timaeus. For Plato, the chora is "matrix space, nourishing, unnameable, anterior to the One, to God and, consequently, defying metaphysics."(Moi, p.191) Kristeva's idea of the chora is a metaphor of relationship between the pre-subject and its mother, it functions as a nourishing locus, thus it is associated with the feminine. According to Kristeva, the chora is unnameable and inexpressible, it is a medium through which the semiotic converts into the symbolic. (Moi, p. 94) For Kristeva's understanding of feminism is not in a narrow sense, she disapproves of an absolute binary opposition between the two sexes, which certainly establishes a feminist centralism. Instead, Kristeva thinks that the feminists should establish a kind of discourse that not only possesses but subverts the Law of the Father. She constructs the meaning of the females from the aspects of culture, language and texts. At the same time, she discusses the marginality of females and uses the poetic language to subvert the patriarchal order. As a result,

Kristeva not only broadens the limitations of the traditional feminism, but also finds a better way to deconstruct the dominating authority. She discusses the marginal status of females and the theory of subversive strategy and deliberates over the texts from the historical and cultural perspective, which offers an innovative idea for the feminist criticism. Both poetic language and abjection make it possible for the feminists to study the difference between male writing and female writing from the perspective of anti-essentialism. She puts the emphasis on the individual difference and introduces the terms such as gender, desire and language to the domain of criticism, which broadens the limitation of literary criticism and feminist study. Kristeva's feminist poetics facilitates the diversified development of the feminist literary theory.

## **Interpretation of female images in the novel *Shuihu Zhuan***

Based on Julia Kristeva's semiotic and feminist thoughts, it's valid and reasonable to approach the signs in and for females in the novel *Shuihu Zhuan*. The text is the minimal unit of semiotic analysis. Unlike linguistics, which focuses on the mechanics of combination and selection to make meanings from phonetic sounds, semiotics focuses on the codes organizing meaning production in complete messages. Put differently, linguistics focuses on microstructures, semiotics focuses on macrostructures of meaning. Although macrostructures such as a novel are constructed from language, the text cannot be reduced to its linguistic components. Likewise, poetics concerns the way meanings are organized in poetry by the integration of sound patterns, rhetorical figuration, and the meanings of words. Linguistic structures, such as syllables, form the material of poetry, but are not the specific object of analysis. The boundaries of the text are finite. Semiotic analysis would examine the structure of individual texts, such as chapter narratives or the signs in and for females.

Although grounded in the study of language, semiotic analysis is a trans-linguistic activity (Barthes, 1964, p. 11) that accounts for the systematic organization of culture and society by means of structural codes. It is a multidisciplinary field of inquiry that engages with culture. It would be easy to confuse semiotics with textual analysis or rhetoric. While it is true that semiotics provides tools for analyzing the formal functions of verbal texts, semiotics is essentially a social science and builds upon the formal analysis to understand human behavior. Semiotics seeks to understand how the codes structuring meaning production in sign systems—from ritual behavior to social organization—influence the ways humans behave in their environments. Semiotics deals with meanings and messages in all their forms and in all their contexts. As Umberto Eco has put it in his *A Theory of Semiotics* signification encompasses the whole of cultural life and the subject matter of semiotics is co-extensive with the whole range of cultural phenomena, however pretentious that approach may at first seem.

### ***Sign systems in *Shuihu Zhuan****

Sign systems in and for the women in the novel *Shuihu Zhuan* can be analyzed in terms of their names and discourses etc.. In order to be perceived, or available for analysis at all, sign systems must be available to the senses and so have a material dimension. Next, in order to be understood, sign systems must be codified by conventions that all the women of a group share. Next, sign systems form social discourses whose meaning is modified by the communication context. And finally, sign systems are performative in as much as they engage two or more interlocutors (the author and reader) in a communication event. All of these dimensions are at play in the discourse, where they contribute to women sign recognition, emotional associations, cultural relevance, and the relationship to the novel *Shuihu Zhuan*. The novel is a big “symbol

field”. And it is divided into three texts, including the story and fate of the characters, the characters’ names, appearance or discourses.

Every word and sentence and each person in the novel *Shuihu Zhuan* imply different meanings. Through text analysis, it can be found out that there is intertextuality between symbols and the components inside the symbol, such as the special relationship between the females and their names, appearance or discourses. And this relationship lay the foundation for their status in the entire “symbol field”. The females’ names or appearance or discourses constitute a basic element of the whole literary works, which implied the females’ whole passwords and fate information, which are the basic unit of the works.

For the convenience of discussion, semiotic structural space formed by female images in the novel *Shuihu Zhuan* can mainly be classified into the following three:  $\Lambda$  sign, V sign and  $\odot$  sign.

### ***$\Lambda$ signs: heroines in Mount Liang***

The  $\Lambda$  signs refer to the women who are masculine heroines in *Mount Liang* who are well worth praising for their braveness in battle and boldness to challenge conventional female images. Among all of the one hundred and eight heroes in *Mount Liang*, only three are females. They are respectively Hu Sanniang, Sun Erniang and Gu Sister-in-law. They fight fiercely in the battle just like men. Of these three rebelling heroines, two of them sacrifice their lives together with their husbands in the battle field.

### ***V sign: Women faithless to their husbands***

The V signs refer to the women who are faithless to their husbands, of whom the most typical character is Pan Jinlian. Except for being a seemingly scarlet woman, she is also a daring, straightforward and talkative young woman. After her love pursuit for her brother-in-law Wu Song is met with flat refusal, she argues eloquently with him. But her brave pursuit of love violates the moral standards of feudal society, she is not tolerated at her time.

For all those women faithless to their husbands, such as Pan Jinlian, Pan Qiaoyun and Jiashi, all of them end up with indecent and miserable death, and no one is the exception. They are curiously killed by their husbands or brother-in-laws as a severe punishment to their infidelity, which is really brutal and cruel. It shows that women could be taken or discarded by men as they wanted in feudal society. Presumably “it may be out of appealing for readers’ compassion and sympathy for those brutally abused women. In this sense the female images become “empty signifiers” in male-centric culture.

### ***$\odot$ sign: virtuous and sympathetic weak women***

The  $\odot$  signs refer to the women who are virtuous and sympathetic weak women, good women from the traditional views in feudal society. A typical example is Zhang Zizhen, the virtuous and innocent wife of Ling Chong ruthlessly abandoned by her husband. After their divorce, there wasn’t a single word in the novel telling her following fate. Curious readers ultimately know her destiny only from the chatting of Ling Chong and Lu Da at their meeting on *Mount Liang*. It turns out that when Gao Yalei casts greedy eyes on her beauty and wants to rape her, the hopeless and helpless woman has nothing to do but commit suicide by hanging herself to death, in order to preserve her loyalty to her ex-husband and not to make herself a shame in her family. Beautiful and virtuous as she was, Lady Lin could not escape the tragic end of hanging herself. The so-called good women are eliminated.

These three signs reveal the women's gender roles in the family of the feudal society. They are dominated by males in both family and society. Some of them are beautiful in their looks, but almost all of them are miserable in their fates, marriages and pursuit for love. Their miserable fates are quite different from modern female experiences and maybe even the most radical feminists are hard to imagine the oppression once imposed on them. In feminists' eyes, these women are the representatives of the female images for pursuing true love, equality and freedom in marriages, and rebellion against patriarchy. It may awaken female readers' potential rebellious spirit against rigid hierarchy system.

### ***Females' discourses in the novel Shuihu Zhuan***

Semiotics deals with meanings and messages in all their forms and in all their contexts. No matter what form it takes, a discourse is best regarded as a unit not of form but of meaning. Halliday's insights made the analysis of language one part of a "social semiotic" which was beyond the structure of sentences. Language and discourse describes our initial encounter with all that we do not know. We begin this encounter as children. Aside from the language (as both language and as discourse) in which we are immersed—whether bathed as infants or saturated through extended experience, all of the other forms of expression are learned from the outside in. It is this awareness of the existence of a diagram of experience that produces hesitations in expression and blind-spots in perception.

Compared with men, women usually use standard and polite vocabulary while Euphemism, deictic words, slang and dirty words are inclined to come from men. The female discourses in Shuihu Zhuan will be highlighted in following discussion.

### ***Analysis of female signs' meaning-making in the novel Shuihu Zhuan***

Based on Julia Kristeva's semiotic and feminist thoughts, the female images in the novel Shuihu Zhuan can be analyzed from a new perspective and the readers can reevaluate the degraded female images. Since female characters are rarely found in the novel, coupled with that most of the females are speechless, it may be less easy to collect enough data from the direct portrait of females and their discourses. Therefore some male remarks and expletives which involve female images are also included in the analyses.

### ***Rebellion against patriarchy***

As mentioned above, the V signs refer to the women who are faithless to their husbands, of whom the most typical character is Pan Jinlian. Here is the debut of the female image of Pan Jinlian in the novel Shuihu Zhuan.

(1)那清河县里有一个大户人家，有个使女，小名唤作潘金莲，年方二十余岁，颇有些颜色。因为那个大户要缠他，这女使只是去告主人婆，意下不肯依从。（第二十四回，p. 205）

Now in the county of Qinghe was a great family who had a slave girl whose mother's family was named Pan, and her own name was Golden Lotus. Her age was something over twenty and she was exceedingly beautiful. Because the lord of that house desired her this maid wanted to tell his wife for she would not give in to him.(Chapter 24, p. 205 )

From the materials above, it is known that Pan Jinlian is a woman living in great misfortune. She used to be a maidservant in a wealthy family, living in the bottom of society, but unfortunately, she is sexually harassed by her master because of her beautiful appearance.

She was an oppressed and insulted woman with a humble background, her life is sympathetic. Under the patriarchal culture, ordinary women had no freedom of thought, no control over their marriage, and they may only bear the fate of being manipulated by men and by power. However, through Pan Jinlian's deeds, “这女使只是去告主人婆，意下不肯依从。” (to tell his wife for she would not give in to him.), Pan shows great courage to resist power. Her resistance against the sexual harassment of her master obviously manifests Pan's reluctance to be submissive to her master's demand and her brave rebellion against patriarchy. It well reflects that she is a strong woman, unafraid of violence. It shows the author Shi Nai'an's appreciation and praise on women's bravery and courage, which guides the readers to appreciate women's rebellious spirit.

(2)那娘子听罢，哭将起来，说道：“丈夫！我不曾有半些儿点污，如何把我休了？”(第八回，p. 74)

The woman hearing this, cried out, weeping, “Husband, I have never done you the least ill, and why do you divorce me?” (Chapter 7, p. 74)

As a © sign, the representative one of the virtuous and sympathetic weak women in the novel *Shuihu Zhuan*, Lady Lin (Zhang Zizhen) who is Ling Chong's wife, on the eve of Ling Chong's being exiled to Cangzhou he leaves a paper of divorce to her, and these words are Lady Lin's complaints after seeing the divorce paper. In the patriarchal society, male superiority was deeply rooted. Women had suffered heavy oppression in the long history. Men not only held the whole discourse power, but also regarded women as their own controllable object. They were free to divorce their wives in any way they wanted. According to the old Chinese tradition, in a patriarchy family, there was inequitable marital relationship between men and women. Men never considered women to be the equals of them. “休妻” (“xiu qi”) (“divorce one's wife”) was a privilege of men in old marriage system in ancient China. The husband could legally divorce with his wife if he was unsatisfied with her, whereas women didn't have the same legal right and had to give submission to the men. Such an old tradition is completely different from today's practice of legal divorce, dependent on the mutual agreement of both husband and wife but not the arbitrary decision made by the husband. From Kristeva's feminist thoughts of gender equality, “如何把我休了？” (“why do you divorce me?”), this remark made by Lady Lin is much more intensive in tone to show her indignation towards patriarchy and places the emphasis on women's equality with men in marital relationship. It leaves the readers an impression that Lady Lin wanted to make her voices be heard although she knew that men held the whole discourse power and she was unable to control the beginning and end of a marriage. To some degree, it reflects her rebellion spirit against patriarchy.

### ***Brave pursuit of true love***

As for the love affairs between men and women in the novel, the author Shi Nai'an just put emphasis on the description of their mutual love instead of their pleasure seeking, for example, when it refers to the relationship between Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing. The followings may help well illustrate the point.

(3) 那西门庆听了这话，却似提在冰窖子里，说道：“苦也！我须知景阳冈上打虎的武都头，他是清河县第一个好汉！我如今却和你眷恋日久，情孚意合，却不恁地理会。



如今这等说时，正是怎地好？却是苦也！”(第二十五回，p. 227)

When Ximen Qing heard what had been said it was as though he had fallen into a well of cool water he trembled so and he said, “Ah, bitter, then! Well I know that tiger-killer Wu The Captain! He is the very best fellow in all the County of Qinghe. Now you and I have loved each other no short time and we have been pleased with each other and we did not think of all this.” (Chapter 25, P. 235)

In this scene, based on Julia Kristeva's semiotic and feminist thoughts, Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing are described as intimate lovers rather than the sexual companions. Pan Jinlian and Wu the Elder lacked the basic necessities of a reasonable union between a man and a woman —mutual attraction and love. Their marriage is a business deal between The Lord of House Zhang and Wu the Elder. Pan is the victim of the “forced marriage”. Pan and Wu can be said to be ill-matched. How can such two ill-matched persons live together, and how can they live together harmoniously. While Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing should have true feelings existing, if Pan were just a scarlet woman, why did she refuse to commit herself to The Lord of House Zhang and get revenge instead? Ximen is young and handsome and knows how to please Pan. So the image of Pan Jinlian is not the stereotyped shameful adulteress yearning for sexual desire but a woman who is pursuing true love for Kristeva knows that for women love and attention from their husbands are much more important than sex. It is not their unfulfilled sex that makes. Ximen's love is what Pan mostly desires.

In the novel *Shuihu Zhuan* Yan Poxi is one of the representative V sign. She is married with Song Jiang by the introduction of the matchmaker, but she is neglected after their marriage. So she tries to seek emotional compensation from Song's colleague, Zhang The Third. The following is the description about their first meeting. Both of them impress each other deeply.

(4) 这婆惜是个酒色娼妓，一见张三，心里便喜，倒有意看上他……那张三亦是个酒色之徒，这事如何不晓得。因见这婆娘眉来眼去，十分有情，便记在心里。  
(第二十一回，p.177-178)

Now this Poxi was a wine-drinking lusty female, and the instant she saw Zhang the Third her heart was pleased and she was willing enough to think well of him...That Zhang was also a wine-drinking lusty man, and who did not know it? When he saw the woman their eyebrows moved and their eyes darted looks back and forth, and there was love enough between them, and this they remembered well in their hearts. (Chapter 21, p.177-178)

“一见张三，心里便喜，倒有意看上他” indicates that the instant Poxi saw Zhang The Third her heart was pleased and she was willing enough to think well of him. It is a detailed description of Poxi's inner thoughts. It folly depicts a teenage female's gladness in meeting her ideal lover. “十分有情，便记在心里”(there was love enough between them, and this they remembered well in their hearts) stress the mutual affection between Zhang The Third and her. By emphasizing the mutual love between them, the author Shi Nai'an has created a positive female in pursuit of love bravely.

### ***Expectation for marriage freedom***

Of all the V signs in the novel *Shuihu Zhuan* (referring to unfaithful women created in

the fiction), Poxi is the most daring one. For example:

(5) 婆惜道：“第一件，你可从今日便将原典我的文书来还我，再写一纸任从我改嫁张三，并不敢再来争执的文书。”(第二十一回，p. 185)

Poxi said, “First, from today you can return to me my papers of sale to you and write out others allowing me to give myself freely to Zhang the Third so that there may be no trouble about these papers.” (Chapter 21, p. 185)

Unlike others, she is not merely content with secretly dating with her lover, but also boldly demands Song Jiang to write her a paper of divorce, so she could be legally married to her lover Zhang The Third. “任从我改嫁张三” (“give myself freely to Zhang The Third”) is Poxi’s bold remark to her husband Song Jiang, which well reveals her eagerness to be released from her arranged and loveless marriage and find herself an ideal husband. From this example the author Shi Nai’an puts the emphasis on the confines of arranged marriage imposed on women thus the image of Poxi is portrayed as a victim of loveless marriage, which would arouse sympathy on the readers. In a word, the author Shi Nai’an portrays Poxi as a daring and straightforward young woman who bravely pursues her marriage freedom. The representation of her rebellious spirit subverts the conventional women image, which used to be obedient and submissive. Through Poxi’s bold remarks, Shi Nai’an successfully reveals the heart-felt wishes and deep inner thoughts of Poxi to the readers, that is, to be totally released from her loveless marriage.

(6) 那阎婆惜倒在床上，对着盏孤灯，正在没可寻思处，只等这小张三来。听得娘叫道：“你的心爱的三郎在这里”，那婆娘只道是张三郎，慌忙起来，把手掠一掠云鬓，口里喃喃的骂道：“这短命，等得我苦也！老娘先打两个耳刮子着。”飞也似跑下楼来。就榻子眼里张时，堂前琉璃灯却明亮，照见是宋江，那婆娘复翻身再上楼去，依前倒在床上。(第二十一回，p. 178-179)

Now that Poxi was lying on the bed and was facing the solitary lamp and was dreaming and waiting for Zhang the Third to come. Hearing her mother call thus, “The love of your heart is here!”, the young woman mistook it that Zhang the Third was come and in great haste she arose, and smoothed back the clouds of her hair, and began a clatter of curses, saying, “Your short-lived wretch to make me wait all this time so bitterly! I will slap your cheeks for you!” and as though flying she ran down the stairs, and through a hole in the papered lattice of the window she peeped, and in the room the light of the glazed lantern fell upon Song Jiang. The woman looked at him and then turned and went away and again went upstairs and threw herself on the bed as before. (Chapter 21, p. 178-179)

“对着盏孤灯” (“facing the solitary lamp”) vividly portrays Poxi’s loneliness while bitterly waiting for the coming of her lover. Hearing the news of her lover, her series of actions in a haste, such as “as though flying she ran down the stairs” and the sentence “in great haste she arose” vividly depicts that she can no longer restrain her eagerness to meet her lover after a long period of waiting. Her remarks “这短命，等得我苦也！” (“make me wait all this time so bitterly”) also much better expresses her tender affection and anxious mood in waiting for her lover. While in her another remark, “老娘先打两个耳刮子着” (“I will slap your cheeks for you!”), the word “slap” represents only a mild physical punishment, and it better conveys her tender affection to her lover.

In a word, the author Shi Nai'an had given an exact description of Poxi's experiences to reveal her complex inner feelings. Through her actions and remarks, her solitary mood in waiting for her lover, her eagerness to meet her lover, her tender affection towards her lover, her strong disappointment in failing to see her lover are all well represented by the author. Poxi's rich inner world is exposed to the eyes of the readers, thus the image of Poxi is much more vivid.

### ***Being capable and brave as men***

From the semiotic and feminist perspective, Pan Jinlian as a V sign, her remarks break the readers' stereotyped impression on those shameful scarlet women. The following example is to make the point clear.

(7)那妇人听了这话，被武松说了这一篇，一点红从耳朵边起，紫涨了面皮，指着武大便骂道：“你这个腌臢混沌！有甚么言语在外人处，说来欺负老娘！我是一个不戴头巾男子汉，叮叮当当响的婆娘，拳头上立得人，胳膊上走的马，人面上行的人！不是那等拥不出的鳖老婆！自从嫁了武大，真个蝼蚁也不敢入屋里来，有甚么篱笆不牢，犬儿钻得入来？你胡言乱语，一句句都要下落，丢下砖头瓦儿，一个也要着地。”（第二十四回，p. 212）

When Wu Song had said this to the woman a little red began to creep out from her ears and her face turned a deep scarlet. She pointed at Wu The Elder and began to curse, saying, “You filthy stupid thing! What have you been saying outside to persecute me? I am as good as a man even if I do not wrap a man's kerchief about my head. A good sound female I am — as sound as a cup that rings true I am! A man could stand on my fist and a horse could gallop on my outstretched arm! I am better than the best! I am not one of those that cannot be brought out for others to see, and I am no good-for-naught female. Ever since I was married to Wu The Elder even an ant or a beetle has not dared to crawl into my house. What is all this talk about walls not being strong and dogs coming in? You talk like a barbarian and a fool, and you ought not to say a word that is not true. Every cold and stone you drop should strike the earth.”(Chapter 24, p. 212)

This example is about Pan Jinlian's remarks when her love for Wu Song is met with a flat refusal. It is a proper chance for her to release her anger and sadness in her heart. Ever since she is married with Wu The Elder, she has suffered a lot because of her husband's timidity. These remarks subvert the traditional image of women in the feudal society whose status are very humble. And they can impress the readers that Pan is a capable woman who is as competent as men and who dare challenge the male authority.

One more example is about the A sign Hu Sanniang ( nicknamed as The Green Snake ) (the representative heroine in Mount Liang) as follows :

(8)正行之间，只见一丈青飞马赶来。宋江措手不及，便拍马望东而走。背后一丈青紧追着，八个马蹄翻盏撒钹相似，赶投深村处来。一丈青正赶上宋江，待要下手，只听得山坡上有人大叫道；“那鸟婆娘赶我哥哥那里去！”（第四十八回，p. 444）

Even as Song Jiang went thus he saw The Green Snake coming near on her winged horse and he had no time to withstand her and whipping his horse he escaped to

the east. Behind him in hot pursuit came The Green Snake and their horses' hoofs sounded like bowls rolling on the ground. She pursued him into the very village and even as she was about to capture him and put forth her hand to seize him someone called in a loud voice, saying, "Where is that accused hag driving my elder brother?" (Chapter 48, p. 444 )

The scene above describes the brave female warrior The Green Snake Hu Sanniang's fierce fighting against Song Jiang. Reading between the lines readers can imagine the scene and Hu's braveness. It can be seen that Song is chased closely by Hu on horse. Hu's series of actions such as "pursue" "capture" "seize" form a sharp contrast with Song's "withstand" and "escape". Through the detailed description, Hu's braveness, heroism and Song's awkwardness are successfully revealed.

In the novel, Shi Nai'an depicts three outstanding heroines Sun Erniang, Gu Sister-in-law and Hu, creates the soldierly-looking women image, and reflects the spirit of the ancient women's strong rebellious spirit. The three heroines are as capable and brave as men. Among them, Hu covers most of the pages in the novel, and she is the most charming one. In this scene even the leader of Mount Liang Song Jiang cannot get the slightest advantage over the skillful woman warrior Hu and he would have been defeated and wounded by her, if it were not for the timely help of Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, and Lin Chong. This female warrior image successfully challenges the traditional and stereotyped female image, which is delicate, fragile and weak, which opens a new era of female consciousness awakening.

Through the above example analyses it is easy to find that the author Shi Nai'an's true attitude towards the women: neither misogyny nor women-hating, or looking-down-upon-women, but paying tribute to women's virtues, and these eternal women lead this novel to a new height.

## Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, typical examples have been selected mainly from the novel *Shuihu Zhuan* published by Zhonghua Book Company. Now it comes to the conclusion that it is feasible to apply semiotics and feminism in analyzing the females in literary works and their images. According to Kristeva, the semiotic is associated with the pre-oedipal mother. Semiotic language is derived from the pre-oedipal stage and is associated with the feminine and the maternal. Though the semiotic is associated with the feminine, it is not exclusive to the feminine. Signification encompasses the whole of cultural life and the subject matter of semiotics is co-extensive with the whole range of cultural phenomena. Every word and sentence and each person in the novel *Shuihu Zhuan* imply different meanings. Through text analysis, it can be found out that there is intertextuality between the females and their discourses. Through analysis of the female signs' classification and meaning-making in the novel in a semiotic approach, it's found out that Shi Nai'an's true attitude towards the females in the novel: neither misogyny nor women-hating, or looking-down-upon-women, but paying tribute to women's virtues, and these eternal women lead this novel to a new height.

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