

A Study on the Reshaping of Female Images in Modern Japanese Literature from the Perspective of Others

Hao Ling

School of Foreign Languages, Xidian University, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710126, China.

hling@xidian.edu.cn

Abstract: Over the centuries, Literary works are believed to depict the People's perceptions. It is not only the thoughts of the author but also through back the summary of time. Similarly, the Japanese Literary Works Are also the characteristic facet of thoughts and times. In Japanese Literary Works, the image of women has changed significantly with the passage of times and the Changes of people's perspective about the women. This is because the Status of Japanese Women in the Society has also highly Improved. This Paper Takes the Female Images in Japanese Literature from various time periods of time as the Analysis Point, and Briefly elucidate the reshaping of Female Images in contemporary Japanese Literary Works from the Perspective of others.

Keywords: Female Characters; Modern Japanese Stories; External Perspectives; Personality Of Women; Cultural Impact; Societal Impact

1. INTRODUCTION

Japan is a neighbor of China and its culture is also very much influenced by the Chinese culture. Similarly, the conventional concept of “male and female” also transferred to the Japan. The Meiji revolution is a devastating historical episode in the entire history of Japan, which has pushed the Japan to become a modern society. Consequently, the western culture began to penetrate into the Japanese society (Ren, 2015). This influence of western culture has an unparalleled impact on the people of Japan. The new western concept of equality between the men and the women and their thoughts about the women's freedom, was like a shock to the traditional Japanese culture. But this was gradually accepted by the intellectual Japanese authors, as a result these enlightened authors gradually renovated the status of women in their works. After world war II, Japanese women began to invade the historical arena as an independent literary image (Feng, 2016). The exchange of culture between Japan and other Asian countries specially China has continued since primordial times. There are many similarities and differences between the culture of these countries. However, after the establishment of modern Japanese society, the differences in the socio-economic development between these countries and also the extent of impact of the Western world, the

cultural heritage of Japan and these countries began to have their own paths. This also greatly influenced the art and the attributes of the literature of the time. We cannot separate the literature from the portrayal of characters (Yan Ch. G, 2014). Therefore, in order to study the expression techniques of characters in literature, the background knowledge and characteristics of the times are of great importance (Zhang, 2017). After the World War II, the female images in Japanese literature was on the historical stage. Knowing this marvel is advantageous to us to evaluate the socio-economic background and development of Japan at that time through the social stature and attributes of women in literature, and to understand the mindset of the Japanese people. Through the analysis and comparison of many literary works of different times, it is also helpful for us to clutch the process and future directions of the advancement of Japanese cultural heritage as a whole, and conclude some innovative ideas and writing methodology for reference (Zhao, 2017). With the onrushing surge of globalization and the strengthening of cultural exchanges between the countries, people began to study the country's literary works more frequently, and grasp the nationalities reflected behind a country by analyzing the typical characters portrayed in literary works. Spiritual or epochal characteristics, we can not deny the fact that the female image is more closely related to the social features of that time (Si & Ren, 2014). Therefore, the knowledge of the characteristics and advancement process of the female images in Japanese literature is necessary in order to truly understand Japanese culture and to study Japanese literature in the perspective of others (Wu, 2016).

2. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF FEMALE IMAGES IN JAPANESE LITERATURE

2.1 Female Literature at the Beginning of the War

Defeat in the “military war” directly caused the occupation of Japan by the United states and the reforms in the politics of Japan. The evolution of Japan from dictatorial military rule to democratic republic was the momentous change in the politics of Japan after the war . This type of political reform has also endorsed the change of social climate, which is embodied in the spread of Western gender equality in Japan. However, the effect of gender equality in the dissemination of ideas is not too obvious, because at that time a large number of people had a tough denial of Western gender equality. But all in all, the idea of indiscrimination

between men and women in the West has become a clear stream in the social climate. Many people have been persuaded by this type of indiscrimination and they began to think about the status of orthodox men and women. This kind of thoughts are particularly eminent in Japanese writers and literature after the war. Particularly, some female writers of Japan got inspiration from the western gender equality and used it in their literary works (Azuma, 2009). Songs written by Yumoto Miyamoto is one the most famous classic works. These wonderful songs, through the experience of the heroine, revealed the cruelty of the war, the manipulation of human nature and the injustice with women as the most susceptible group in the war. This type of literary works depict the major disastrous experiences of the war faced by the women and also expresses dissatisfaction and criticism of the authors with the Japanese traditional thinking about the idea of “male respect for females”(Bacon-Smith, 1992). The work from the Japanese writer such as Banana Yoshimoto, Hiromi Kawakami, Kyung Sook Shin, Natsuo Kirino is worth praising in improving the female image in the Japanese literature. Banana Yoshimoto is known for exploring female characters navigating relationships and self-discovery in contemporary Japan. Hiromi Kawakami’s work depicts working-class women finding agency and challenging societal expectations. Kyung Sook Shin delves into themes of motherhood and domesticity while also tackling broader social issues. Natsuo Kirino’s work explores darker aspects of Japanese society, including gender discrimination and violence against women.



Figure 1: Image inspired by the songs written by Yumoto Miyamoto

2.2 Female Literature Around the 1960s

From the end of the second world war to the 20th century, was the time

of rapid development for Japan's economy and a number of jobs began to open for women in the society. Consequently, in the period of 1960s, a huge number of Japanese women began to come forward of their families and started social jobs. This kind of objective is naturally mirrored in the literary works, it was the birth of a new genre (new female literature) in Japanese literature. This genre “new female literature” was unique because writers began to write about the contribution of women in the development of society. In this “new female literature” of Japanese literature, on one hand, the female image is more abundantly represented , on the other hand, the social status of women is also well praised and significantly raised. In the famous work “Rose” of “New female Literature”, the author shows that the woman has the power of reasoning and desires for independence in love, by displaying the heroine's experience of love, marriage and divorce, and urges to become an expert professional woman (Bargen & Shikibu, 1997). The self-expressions of the women’s “Continue to work after marriage” and “Don’t want children” reflects the realization of Japanese women’s pursuit of self-worth. The Japanese women developed such a thinking because some years back, at the end of world war II, many women lost their husbands and beloved ones. As the matter of fact, women must have to take the responsibilities of raising their families. All these facts coupled with the rapidly spreading feminism and democratic consciousness after the second world war. Under all these circumstances, women's independent awareness was enhanced and they had an explicit social role in Japanese society (Barthes, 1977).



Figure 2: Pages of Empowerment: Unveiling New Female Literature



Figure 3: Harmony of Blossoms: A Heroine's Journey in Japanese Elegance

2.3 Female Literature After the 1980s

The Japanese economy had much developed after the decades of economic development. In the 1980s, Japan overtook German economy and became the world's second largest economy. We can say that at that time, Japan had once again become an economic power and started to play a significant role in global affairs. In that fast-growing economy, gender equality and feminism were also rapidly disseminating. During that period of 1980s, Japanese women started to participate in a number of social activities, and the confidence of women was restored and also their social role in the society. The pursuit of gender equality between women and men gained peak after the “The Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (DEDAW)”. Under this course of thinking, Yan Ye Qisheng’s “The Women of the Renaissance” is a combination of rich history and culture, and it outlines the significance of women from the perspective of a woman. The most important thing is Kawabata Yasunari. Kawabata Yasunari wrote a number of books on women's literature during this period and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1968. He was the first Japanese author to receive the award. The attribute of his works is to depict the foundation of women's self-awareness in that era. Kawabata Yasunari prospered in reflecting women by using the technique of daily narrative, and perfectly showcased their inner appetite through the usual trivialities of some women. The serialized fantasy manga *Magic Knight Rayearth* ran in *Nakakyoshi* from November 1993 to February 1995. In order to capitalize on the success of the magical girl series *Sailor Moon*, the magazine's editors hired the fledgling creative team CLAMP, whose debut series *RG Veda* was enjoying a successful run

in a monthly Shinshokan publication called *Wings*, which also targeted an audience of teenage girls (Beauchamp, 1998).



Figure 5: A dōjinshi featuring three of the Sailor Scouts (Moon, Jupiter, and Venus) in explicitly pornographic situations. In such fanworks, the Sailor Scout uniforms become a means of fetishizing the bodies of the female characters.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE EXPRESSION OF FEMALE IMAGES IN JAPANESE LITERARY WORKS

3.1 Female Literature in the Post-War Democratization

After the World War II, Japan ended the dictatorship and Japanese began to reform the domestic disasters left behind after the war and started the progress to become a democratic country. Some authors began to deeply depict the picture post-war Japan, and framed these reflections in their literary works. Among these authors, Miyamoto Yuriko, was a prominent Japanese poet, novelist, essayist, and considered one of the leading literary figures in early Japan. She played a significant role in the development of modern Japanese literature and was associated with the proletarian literature movement (Gosselin, 1999). After that, Hu Jingrong wrote “Twenty-four Eyes”, which promotes Japanese citizens compassion and sympathy towards women. It is considered as the one of the great wartimes works.

3.2 The Birth of Japanese New Literature and the Establishment of Female Consciousness

In 1960s, Japan's economy was developing rapidly and the Japan's social thoughts were also experiencing noticeable changes. Feminist thoughts had begun to flourish, which had led to the advancement of Japanese women's social position and the improvement of working environment. "New female literature" was appeared in the field of literature (Bordo, 2023). The characteristic literary works include the "Party" of Kumiko Yumiko, the "Child Care" by Yohee Kono, and the "Prostitute" by Ohara (Oksman, 2011).



Figure 6 : The Enveloping Shadows: Unraveling Self-Deception

One of Yūko's clients cannot understand that the lies she tells herself, symbolized by a thick black cloud, are paralyzing her. She says, "What? My body..."



Figure 7: Literary Renaissance: Conversations in the 1960s

In this evocative scene, intellectuals and writers, predominantly women,

gather in a warmly lit, cozy literary salon. The ambiance is rich with the aroma of tea, and shelves filled with books line the walls. The figures are engrossed in animated discussions, symbolizing the intellectual ferment of the 1960s in Japan. Women, dressed in the fashion of the era, exude a sense of empowerment, reflecting the transformative impact of feminist thoughts. This image captures the birth of Japanese New Literature as it intertwines with the establishment of female consciousness, portraying a pivotal moment in the social and literary history of the time.

3.3 Gender Equality and Literary Creation

In 1980s, Japan became the second largest economy in the world and had a well sustained and rapidly developing economic; but social problems began to emerge because of the conflicts of interest between different classes of the society. A number of Japanese authors used literature to praise the mass of Japanese women who give chase to gender equality. The examples of such authors include, Yan Ye Qisheng who emphasized the historical role of women through the “Woman of the Renaissance” and Yuji who created “The Grass Place” to depict the pictures of the powerful women of that era (Botting, 2013).

3.4 Establishment of Female Self

Kawabata Yasunari is known as the most representative writer of this period. He first used the daily narrative technique to showcase the picture of women and conveyed women's wishes for life unrestrictedly. One of these famous works is “Thousand Cranes”. The main illustration is the transformation, deformity and sad charm of mature women.

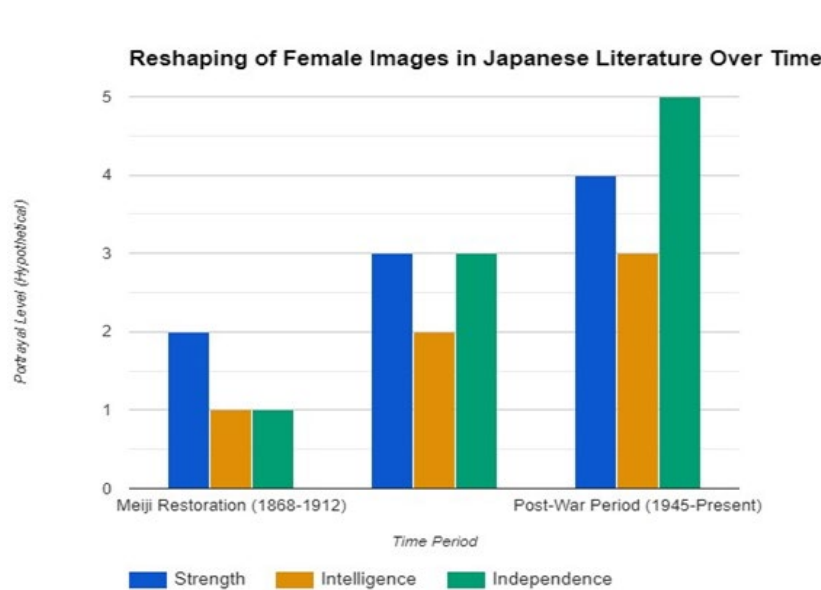


Figure 8: Reshaping of Female Images in Japanese Literature Over Time

4. THE CHANGE OF FEMALE IMAGE IN JAPANESE LITERATURE

4.1 The Independence of Female Images in Contemporary Japanese Literature

In the context of traditional Japanese society, women are completely deprived of their social role in the society. Without any social status for women, it is entirely a male add-on. The nature of female images in this period is distinguished by “the tragic ending”. Implicit obedience, but the number is small and lacks the details. After the entry of Japan in the modern society, the social status of Japanese women has slowly increased, also the feminist awareness and thinking have begun to stimulate. The dependency of Japanese women is no longer present, they become independent individuals in the society, with uniqueness (Bourdagh, 2003)

4.2 Japanese Women Begin to Assume Certain Social Roles

Due to the immeasurable loss of World War II, the men of many families lost their lives and these families fell to the point where they have no one to take care of them, this stimulated the Japanese women to take the responsibility to support their families and Japanese society (Yau, 2008). In the field of Japanese literature, many Japanese writers use their literary works to show the transition of the social status and role of Japanese women in various eras, and around a common subject matter - establishing self and liberating humanity (Bullock, 2010).



Figure 9: Evolving Empowerment: Japanese Women's Post-War Roles

4.3 Japanese Female Image Begins to Be Highly Symbolic

Along with the improvement in the social status Japanese women and continuous collection, some of the unique qualities depicted by Japanese women themselves are also the symbol of hope for the Japanese people,

like peace loving and anxious for a better life (Butler, 1990). When stating these symbolic definitions, Japanese authors sometimes redefine it into some dazzling points in Japanese women, and express the Japanese people's resilience, bravery and bright outlook towards life.



Figure 10: Blossoms of Resilience: The Symbolic Japanese Woman

5. THE REFERENCE SIGNIFICANCE OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN JAPANESE LITERARY WORKS

There are numerous variations in the political systems, economic systems and social fields in the world. These differences have determined that the social origin of literature is very distinct (Byrne & McQuillan, 1999; Caputi, 2004). Although, from the viewpoint of literature and literary creations itself, these differences between nations do not keep apart the imaginary. Particularly, despite of the matter which country's literature, character images and other features will have resemblances. Therefore, Japanese literature also has many references to the construction of female images in Japanese literary works.

5.1 Using the Characteristics of the Times to Highlight the Female Image

The reshaping of female images in Japanese literary works reflects the vibe of the different eras. we can say that the female images in literary works can express the variations in the mainstream thoughts of the society at that particular time. Therefore, we should keenly associate the prevailing thoughts of the society with the literary scholars in the creation of modern literature, specifically in the reshaping of female images.

5.2 The Fusion of the Beauty of Women and the Beauty of Nature

Traditional female images have not been refused in Japanese literary works. In modern literature, they even more spontaneously and

conscientiously express their classical and feminine personality. This point is also notable; do not refuse the women who lived their lives under the concept of "male and female humiliation". They also have a lot of wonderful characteristics worth learning from. They should merge the beauty of women with the beauty of nature. Although, the literary works of each country has its own features, its mental picture can be the same.



Figure 11: A Japanese woman in traditional kimono and hairstyle stands in a serene natural setting, symbolizing the harmonious blend of tradition and nature

1. woman in a red kimono in a peaceful garden embodies the classical female image, bridging tradition and modernity. 2. An intricately adorned woman against mountains symbolizes strength within tradition and the enduring beauty of the Japanese feminine spirit. 3. In a tea ceremony room overlooking a bamboo forest, a woman signifies harmony in ritual and finds beauty in the everyday. 4. Boldly clad on a mountain peak, a woman challenges traditional femininity, empowered by the vast mountainscape.

6. SUMMARY

Under the influence of Western culture in recent times, although there have been many shifts in Japanese literature, it has not entirely spurned the traditional female images, but also reflects the different trends of the times. Japanese literature includes both classical and feminine picture of Japanese women, as well as modern women who follow trail to freedom and promote democracy. With the gain in momentum of the globalization process, the female image in Japanese literary works has also improved. Many modern authors have begun to use the international cultural idea to create a new female image with modern features, but despite of the matter that how it alters the literature, the characters in the literary works will be the epitome of the times.

References

- Azuma, H. (2009). *Otaku: Japan's database animals*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Bacon-Smith, C. (1992). *Enterprising women: Television fandom and the creation of popular myth*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Bargen, D. G., & Shikibu, M. (1997). *A woman's weapon: spirit possession in the tale of Genji*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Barthes, R. (1977). Image-music-text, trans. *Stephen Heath* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 146.
- Beauchamp, E. R. (1998). *Women and women's issues in post World War II Japan* (Vol. 4). Taylor & Francis.
- Bordo, S. (2023). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body*. Univ of California Press.
- Botting, F. (2013). Limits of horror: Technology, bodies, Gothic. In *Limits of horror*. Manchester University Press.
- Bourdaghs, M. (2003). *The dawn that never comes: Shimazaki Toson and Japanese nationalism*. Columbia University Press.
- Bullock, J. C. (2010). *The Other Women's Lib: Gender and Body in Japanese Women's Fiction*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. routledge New York.
- Byrne, E., & McQuillan, M. (1999). *Deconstructing Disney*. Pluto.
- Caputi, J. (2004). *Goddesses and monsters: Women, myth, power, and popular culture*. Popular Press.
- Feng, S. T. (2016). Analysis of Female Images in Japanese Literary Works from the Perspective of Culture. *Talent*, 2, 23-25.
- Gosselin, A. (1999). *Multicultural detective fiction: murder from the "other" side*. Garland Pub.
- Oksman, T. (2011). Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics. 5(3), 258–260. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpr006>
- Ren, Y. H. (2015). Female Image in Japanese Literature. *Wen Chemical Journal*, 12, 10-12.
- Si, Y. Y., & Ren, H. Q. (2014). Research on Female Images in Japanese Literary Works from the Perspective of Culture. *Charisma China*, 5, 14-16.
- Wu, D. D. (2016). Exploration of Female Images in Japanese Literary Works from the Perspective of Culture. *Young Literary*, 4, 25-27.
- Yan Ch. G. (2014). On the changes of women's image in the development of Japanese literature. *Journal of Shandong Agricultural Engineering College*, 4, 153-154.
- Yau, C. (2008). Performing contradictions, performing bad-girlness in Japan. In *Gender and globalization in Asia and the Pacific: method, practice, theory* (pp. 138-158). University of Hawai'i Press.
- Zhang, M. Y. (2017). Analysis of female images in Japanese literature from the perspective of culture. *Young Writers*, 23, 17-19.
- Zhao, X. P. (2017). Analysis of Female Images in Japanese Literary Works from the Perspective of Culture. *Journal of Jiamusi Vocational College*, 8, 76-78.