

History of Feminist Criticism in Japan*

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Abstract—With the democratic process of postwar Japan, the economic status and social status of Japanese women have been unprecedented improvement, the unprecedented prosperity of contemporary female literature is its concentrated expression in the literary world. The study of the background, stage and characteristics of the generation and development of contemporary Japanese female literature can provide rich and valuable research materials for the study of the survival status of contemporary Japanese women, as well as an important reference for the study of Chinese female literature.

Keywords—female literature; contemporary literature; Japanese women

I. INTRODUCTION

Feminist criticism emerged in the 1960s from the surging women's liberation movement in Europe and America. It focuses on the independence and autonomy of women in all fields of society, pays attention to the inequality of existing gender relations, and tries to find a new way to achieve the harmonious development of both sexes. Diversity is one of the characteristics of feminist criticism. In the process of its formation and development, it combines with many disciplines or schools, and forms various propositions and schools. In general, it can be divided into two schools: the Anglo-American school and the French school. Deeply influenced by the theories of philosophers such as Lacan and Foucault, the French school focuses on the linguistic, psychological and philosophical that issues in literary criticism. The Anglo-American school focuses on the practice of critical theory and holds that the main task of feminist criticism is the close reading and interpretation of the text. Because the two schools are from Europe and the United States, Europe and America occupy the center in the field of feminist criticism. The related research in the field of other countries has to go forward difficultly to explore the localization of feminist criticism theory from copy and imitation.

Japan is far from the birthplace of feminist criticism geographically and culturally, so people do not pay enough attention to the research. As a matter of fact, the feminist critical thought in Japan formed in the long process of the women's liberation movement, and ushered in the historical

opportunity of vigorous development in the mid-1970s. After nearly four decades of development, it has become the most dynamic criticism theory in Japan.

II. THE ERA OF PRE-FEMINIST CRITICISM (MEIJI PERIOD TO 1970S)

A. Female Emancipation Before the War

As early as the Meiji era, women's liberation movement and Female emancipation has appeared in Japan. In the early years of the Meiji era, with the pace of "civilization", western democratic ideas such as "freedom", "equality" and "human rights" poured into Japan. However, the main enlightenment thinkers in Japan at that time were all men such as Fukuzawa Yukithi. It determined that they would not take "equal rights between men and women" as their main fighting target. [1] Until the height of the civil rights movement, finally came the voice of the women themselves. In 1884, one woman called Kishida Yoshiko, who was one of the "three civil rights birds", issued "To All the Sisters", refuted female subordination and called on women to fight.

In the era of Taisyo, under the influence of democratic movement, overseas women's liberation thought and socialist thought, women's liberation thought ushered in the historical opportunity of vigorous development, and formed the four major schools: anarchistic school, socialistic school, Christian school and liberalistic school.

Kamithika Ithiko is the representative of anarchistic school. In 1914, he founded the women's art magazine in Tokyo and published the autobiographical novel "Prelude". In the same year, she became a female reporter of a Tokyo newspaper, take charge of political, economic and social columns. During this period, under the influence of Osugi Sakae, a famous anarchist social activist at that time, she turned to anarchy in thought. In the heyday of proletarian literature in Japan in the 1920s, she published her novels in left-wing literary magazines such as "Seeders" and "Reform", describing the spontaneous resistance of peasants before the initiation of class consciousness. Later, she mainly engaged in literary criticism, published "moral position in the modern" (1923), "the female journalists now with the past", "public art and the proletarian literature and art" and "art and modern life" (1926). She founded the women's magazines "saffron" and "women's literature", provided a stage for female writers to show their literary talent.

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Kamithika Ithiko is the representative of liberalistic school. She entered the literary world in 1912 when she participated in the editorial work of women's friends and began to publish novels and essays in 1917. She held up the banner of "gender equality", explored the problems faced by women in education, career and marriage, and took an active part in the movement for women's suffrage and the abolition of prostitution. In 1923, he published a review called "on widows". She believes that traditional education inculcates women with the idea of good wife and good mother, which makes women lose the ability of self-reliance. Therefore, she advocates that women should pay attention to the cultivation of self-reliance. She spares no effort to attack the traditional concept of chastity in society, such as discriminating against widows and preventing their remarriage, considered widowed women to have the freedom of love and marriage. Her views are aimed at middle-class women, combined the actual problem in the life to seek the improvement method of suit reality. Therefore, it is not complete while it is close to social life. For example, she insisted that housework and childcare are women's most important social functions, not ideologically seeking radical change in the relationship between the sexes. She tended to solve problems on a personal level. Therefore, she is a liberal with individualistic tendency.

It is particularly worth mentioning that during this period, progressive women represented by Raityo Hirazuka and Akiko Yosano, Launched a "maternal protection debate" of great significance in the history of Japanese criticism. The above four schools focus on the important topic of feminist criticism — "motherhood", elaborated respective main viewpoint. The dispute was protracted. As a result of the fierce ideological exchanges, the criticism with women had attracted the attention of the Japanese critics. At the same time, they also launched a series of campaigns for women's rights, and made the idea of equality between men and women deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. This played an enlightening role in Japanese society at that time.

In the early years of the Showa, anarchism was gaining momentum and Marxism was gaining ground. Anarchism flaunts equality and the absolute freedom of individuals, and it had a considerable influence among the female critics at that time. Itsue Takamura is one of the representative figures. "Feminist Manifesto" criticized the existing marriage system. In January 1930, it founded the proletarian women's art league with Raityo Hirazuka, and founded the women's magazine "women's Front". In 1931, with the financial aid of her husband, Kenzo Hashimoto kenzo, she began to study the history of Japanese women, Monographs "matrilineal system" (1938) and "recruitment marriage" (1953). It is pointed out that the matriarchal clan existed for a long time in the long history of Japan. Although gradually replaced by the patriarchal system after Heian Era, women's rights of inheritance, property rights and walking-off continued until the Kamakura Era. Her research questions the rationality of the existence of patriarchy, and provided a historical basis for the study of women's history based on feminism.

In 1920s and 1930s, under the influence of Marxism, proletarian literature flourished. In 1928, the All-Japan

Proletarian Art League was founded. As one of the instructors, Yuriko Miyamoto published a large number of social and literary criticism based on communism. In the 1930s, in the dark age of Japanese full-scale militarism, in order to avoid political scrutiny, much of her commentary deals with human ideals, it acted indirectly as a resistance to the government and the military. Another instructor, Inago Sata wrote numerous comments about women in revolutionary positions, such as "Women workers and middle-class women" (1929), "The language of women" (1940). She promoted women's awakening and independence, to seek social enlightenment on the basis of institutional change.

B. Women's Comments After the War(from the Postwar to the Mid-1970s)

After the defeat, Japan carried out a series of democratic reforms under the leadership of the United States. Women have not only gained the right to participate in politics and discussion, but also the right to equal education and equal pay for equal work between men and women. In particular, the civil law amendment of 1946 achieved freedom and equality of marriage, fundamentally abolished the traditional family system, and established women's property inheritance right and spousal inheritance right. Through a series of changes in the political, educational, labor and family systems, women gradually embarked on the path of free and independent development. With the improvement of women's education level, a number of outstanding female critics appeared in the field of women's problems in Japan, such as Itagaki Naoko, Maruoka Siuko, Matsuoka Yoko, Takeda Qingko, Miyake Yanko and so on. Itagaki Naoko studied aesthetics and philosophy at Tokyo University, and successively worked as a lecturer at the Kokushikan University, Japan Women University and Chiba University. Her familiarity with the history of European literary thought became the theoretical basis for her later critical activities. She pointed out that female writers and their works should be re-evaluated from the female perspective. In particular, the Japanese female writers who are about to be buried in the vast literature history have been excavated. She published "Critical Biography of Female Writers" (1954) and "The women's literature of Meiji, tadashi and show an eras", systematically sorted out modern Japanese female literature. A lot of preparatory work has been done for the vigorous development of feminist criticism. Itagaki Naoko had full confidence in the booming future of women's commentary. She believed that with the improvement of women's education level, the future female critics will certainly have a qualitative leap.

In addition, Yuriko Miyamoto is also a critic focusing on women's literature. Her major work is "women and literature". This book takes female writers since Meiji as the research object. In this book, she said that modern Japanese female writers could not really open a new chapter until working women produced their own literature. She took women's liberation as her lifelong cause, criticized the male-centered gender structure, and believed that the socialist system was the only way to realize women's liberation.

In general, the pre-war women's liberation thought was generated and developed under the influence of western democratic thought and in the process of women's liberation movement. At the beginning, it had a strong realistic political appeal and played a role in enlightening women's subject consciousness in the society, but it was lack of systematicness in theory. After the war, with the democratic process in Japan, women's education level was greatly improved. Most female critics had received higher education, and many of them had studied abroad. The new era gave them a broader international vision. In this period, the focus of women's criticism was still on social issues such as politics and education, but in the literary criticism circle, the re-evaluation of women writers and their works began to receive attention.

III. THE BOOMING PERIOD OF FEMINIST CRITICISM IN JAPAN (FROM THE MID-1970S TO NOW)

1975 was the international year of women, and the following year was the "United Nations decade of women". From then on, the names of "feminist movement", "women's liberation movement" and other historical periods were finally replaced by the word "feminism", which marked the establishment of feminist critical theory in the real. In 1970, Kate Millet published "sexual politics", studied patriarchy and its formation and influence mechanism, from in various fields, such as law, biology, sociology, psychology and literature. Her study became the pioneer of feminist criticism, also became the important opportunity for the founding of feminism. In this huge international trend, Japan soon set off a climax of female learning. The symposium on feminism was held in 1980, "Lecture on feminine" (four volumes) was published, exploring the possibility of the development of feminism in Japan from the perspectives of cultural anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, literature and law.

From the late 1970s to the 1980s, feminist criticism in Japan ushered in a new era with numerous talents. There are two tendencies in this period: one is to reappraise the important male writers and their representative works in the literary history from the Angle of feminism; second, reinterpret female writers and their works from the perspective of feminism.

The pioneer of feminist criticism is Kimi Komajaku who wrote "The Witch's Theory" (1978) and "Literary Theory of the Witch" (1982). Her feminist criticism theory can be roughly divided into two parts: one is to read the classics male writers from the perspective of feminist criticism, to criticize the patriarchal system of women's oppression, reveal the patriarchal culture on the distortion of the female image [2]; interpret the representative works of female writers from the perspective of feminist criticism. She reveals that the sexual domination of women by men in Japanese society is the root cause of gender inequality, thus shaking the traditional social values. [3]

Another female critic, Muneko Mizuda, in her masterpiece from heroine to hero, made a systematic study on the gender differences in text expression by taking

famous Japanese male writers such as Kotaro Takamura, Natsume Soseki and Owai Mori, as well as female writers of Britain, America and Japan as research objects.

It is particularly worth mentioning that in this book, Mizuda made a comparative study of Jane Austen and Yaeko Ogami, Beauvoir and Yuriko Miyamoto, Doris Lesin and Minako Oniwa, Sylvia Plath and Keiko Kawano, which pioneered the comparative study of the eastern and western cultures of female literature in Japan. [4] It is one of the characteristics of this period to analyze the female literature and the female images in the literary works with the theory of feminism.

Since the 1990s, the systematic research on the formation and development of Japanese feminist criticism has been carried out vigorously. Such as "the trap of love novels" (1991) written by Kazuko Mieda, pointed out that Japanese men writers love novels can be divided into two categories. One is writers represented by Soseki Natsume deeply influenced by the tradition of European fiction, although the heart longs for equal communication between men and women, finally, they have to follow the hierarchy to deal with sexual relations reluctantly. The other is represented by Yasunari Kawabata, who has always regarded women as the projection of male desire and blindly expressed the persistence and desire for female body. Mieda believes that neither of these two types can escape from the trap of "love novels", to put women in the position of "the other" and carry out cultural violence against them, which is the embodiment of the patriarchal central idea. "On the literature of the male stream" (1992), co-authored by Hiroko Ueno, Keiko Tomioka and Chiyoko Okura in the form of dialogue, thoroughly criticized the male writers in the history of Japanese literature and aroused wide attention from the society. [5]

Michiko Egusa and Kazuyo Urushida in their book "Reading male writers: the maturation of feminist criticism" (1994) reread the classics of modern literature masters such as Toson Shimazaki, Osamu Dazai, Ogai Mori, skillfully used the critical method of western narratology. It combined feminist criticism with narrative analysis, which was unique at the time. [6] Yuko Iida applied the concept of sexual difference to study modern Japanese literature in "Their Stories — Modern Literature and Gender Differences" (1998). The natural sex of refers to biological differences, gender refers to the gender difference defined by social culture. The book argues that literature is also an effective anti-sexual device; it is needed to use the concept of Gender to reveal the "politics of sex" behind literature. [7]

In 21st century, Japanese feminist criticism developed further, many excellent works with theoretical depth have emerged. Feminist criticism has become the most dynamic literary criticism theory in Japan.

IV. CONCLUSION

With the improvement of women's social status and the expansion of women's rights, feminist criticism has developed rapidly in Japan in recent years. It has become the most dynamic critical theory in Japanese literary criticism. If

we continue to ignore this trend in Japanese criticism, it hinders our understanding of Japanese society.

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