

## Original Paper

# Transformation of Yi Women's Discourse from Yi Literature

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### **Abstract**

*The subject matter of literary creation often comes from life, and literary works reflect a certain social outlook. Yi literature is a reflection of Yi society and culture, which contains the voices and expressions about Yi women in different historical periods and social environments. There are many works depicting Yi women in Yi literature, and there are also many works in which Yi women express their own life experiences. We can see the status of Yi women in different societies and times from the situation of Yi women in Yi literature.*

### **Keywords**

*Yi women, female discourse, Yi literature, feminism*

## **1. Introduction**

From matrilineal clan society, to patrilineal clan society, to slave society, and finally to socialist society, the influence of Yi women's discourse has been influenced by social patterns, from the peak of discourse, to the collective absence of discourse, to the present gradual equality of discourse between the sexes. The social revolution overthrew the imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism that pressed down on the people, and for women it even opened up a new way out to find self-liberation. In the mid-twentieth century, the democratic reforms in Liangshan led to great improvements in the Yi society, and with that, the political, economic and educational environments were slowly improving, and the development of Liangshan entered a new era. The experiences and voices of Yi women, who have become "absent" and "silent" due to cultural divisions and gender limitations, are slowly changing.

Yi women have slowly begun to appear in public view. From the perspective of Yi literature as a whole: firstly, the depiction of Yi women's image has gradually become richer and richer, and the authors have started to focus on the Yi women's own selves, meticulously depicting the image of Yi women and expressing their emotions, and the archetypes of women's roles have become richer and richer, no longer relying on the single archetypes of the Yi women's image such as "maker of human history", "spokesperson of wisdom", "aspirant and seeker of love", "rebel against marriage system and challenger to destiny" etc., and the Yi women's image no longer possesses a single personality or character, and no longer serves the Yi male protagonist as a secondary character in the literary works. Secondly, more Yi women have joined in the writing of the subject of Yi women. Yi women have begun to speak and express themselves freely and consciously, and are no longer the objects of narration, no longer the secondary characters constructed by men.

In the process of Yi society moving from matrilineal clan society to patrilineal clan society, the social status of Yi women gradually declined, but with the founding of New China, democratic reforms, and reform and opening up, the social status of Yi women has been restored, and the image of Yi women in literary works has also been changing. By analysing the works from epic poems to modern literature, we will then explore the changes in the discourse of Yi women that are implied behind the texts.

## 2. The Peak of Yi Women's Discourse

The Yi forefathers believed that a matrilineal clan society existed before the patriarchal society, and that the matrilineal clan society was not only the original model of the family, but also the organisational model of the political society, i.e. it used to be a systematic organisational form, which has left a deep imprint in the classical Yi literature.

In the book *Tian Di Zu Xian Ge*, it is written: "All is great for the mother, and the mother is the root of all things. All things are governed by the woman. The woman is the head of the king, the woman is the minister. Make a bow and arrows and divide them to fight wild beasts. The woman divides the prey, and the woman divides it well; she is the ruler and chief, and all are equal. Everything is subject to her, and when she says so, it is done." In matrilineal clan society, the Yi women had absolute power of discourse, were the rulers of the clan society, and were regarded as the source of life and the continuators of material life. During the matrilineal clan society, human beings had not yet invented tools, material productivity was low, the biological differences between men and women were not fully reflected, and because the society was afraid of women's fertility and could not understand why women were able to give birth to life, the Yi males at that time were in a subordinate position.

In the book *Tian Di Zu Xian Ge*, there is also this record: "very ancient times, chaotic, will not plant crops, crops can not grow, and women ah, led to lead everyone, led to burn slopes, burned a few trips slopes, led to go to sow seeds, sow many seeds, women have the knowledge, women have a way. Since then, only buckwheat to eat."

These sentences show that matrilineal clan society recognises the wisdom and hard work of Yi women,

who are the masters of knowledge in the clan. In the traditional Yi society, only the superior could have the opportunity to receive education. In the matrilineal clan society, women could receive education, acquire knowledge, and call for leading the tribe to cultivate and produce, which had strong influence and calling power, indicating that the Yi women at this time had a very high power of speech.

In *Meige*, the Yi women mainly represent the role of the gods, who create the earth for mankind, sow plants and teach marriage. The beautiful earth in the epic is created by Yi women, who teach human beings to survive, reproduce and develop, and praise the wisdom and hard work of Yi women.

### 3. Loss of Voice in Yi women's Discourse

In the later stages of matrilineal society, the tools of labour were greatly improved, productivity increased, the rich and the poor were divided within the clan, and private ownership emerged. Biological differences between men and women became more pronounced, and the economic benefits produced by women were not as good as those produced by men, and the status of women gradually declined.

In *Ashima*, this story is recorded: Ashima, a Yi Sani girl living in A zhuodi, Yunnan, is hardworking, beautiful and intelligent. When she was robbed by her headman's family, she was not afraid of power and was not moved by power and money, and finally fled but was washed away by a flash flood by the headman's sheltering god. Gods against mankind, meaning that when Yi women rebel against male power, the gods are on the side of male power, helping to protect it, and Ashima is in a weak position, and Ashima's struggles and endeavours do not cause any waves.

In *Zizi Niza*, it is recorded that the heroic Yi man, Hayi Diegu, shot a roe deer during a hunting trip, and the roe deer was transformed into a beautiful woman, and eventually was turned into a grey goat, and finally into a ghost. The conversion between Yi women and animals, ghosts and monsters shows that the Yi society does not put Yi men and Yi women on an equal status, and that Yi women are inferior to Yi men, which is an ideological attack launched by the male-dominated society in order to consolidate its own power and status, and to intentionally vilify and regulate the Yi women.

In *Ayi Azhi*, Ayi Azhi marries into her husband's family, where she lives without any freedom, suffering from abuse and cold eyes. She wants to use the outcome of her hard work to get her father-in-law and mother-in-law to allow her to go and visit her family, but she is refused mercilessly, so she chooses to run away. On the way to escape, she meets a tiger and is torn into pieces by the tiger, which is extremely tragic. Father-in-law, mother-in-law and tigers all represent the interests of male power, and Yi women have no way of escaping from their suffering, and no challenge to their male power has ever been successful. Yi women are not only under the feudal patriarchal rule, they are also oppressed by the patriarchal power and husband's power within the family, and they are subordinate to the patriarchal power and husband's power. When they are at home, they are their mother's helpers, responsible for taking care of the family with her, and they are the helpers in the family who can be economically productive; when they are married into their husband's family, they are the reproductive tools for the

continuation of the husband's family, and they are his family's tools of labour. Women are objectified, disregarded and disciplined, and the Yi women have lost their collective voice.

#### 4. Restoration of Yi Women's Voice

With social reforms such as the social revolution, the founding of New China, and the reform and opening up of the country, more Yi women have been able to participate in the life of society, and women's legitimate rights and interests are gradually being restored, with the discourse between the sexes gradually moving towards equality, and Yi women being able to make their voices heard in society.

Ye Wujiao, a female character in Li Na's novel *The Embroiderer's Flower*, suffers from discrimination and abuse in Du's family, and finally has to put all her love on her daughter, vowing to let her daughter receive an education and cultivate her into an autonomous woman in the new era; after the outbreak of the war of resistance, her daughter becomes a revolutionary, and she follows her daughter into the world of revolution. She realised that she was an independent individual, no different from men, and that female consciousness broke through the repression of the patriarchal and revolutionary era.

A Lei puts all the Yi women in her writing in extremely miserable situations, and shows the tragic women in Yi society in people's view one by one. With the characters of Grandma Lama, Mute Erma, Erximo, Erguo and other characters, one by one, the tragic characters questioned the feudal ritual tradition, the male power, and the souls of the tragic women.

Using the pen as a weapon, Lujuan writes about an area that is considered taboo for women, and in her poem, *Sonnet for the Unravelling of the Spell" (I)*, she expresses her own understanding of the divine power of the gods, which she hopes will recall the good qualities, health, and faith of her people. Since written records, most of the history proves that the highest divine power is in the hands of men, and she challenges the traditional male power by writing in such a way to express her opinion in such a field.

In *The Death of the Black Dress*, Jige Quzhen strongly accuses the traditional Yi society of ignoring and objectifying Yi women; accuses the traditional Yi social concept that "men are the root of the family"; and strongly praises the unparalleled resilience of the Yi women's character and their great dedication to their children.

Alimo Riniu's *I am a Yi woman, I can't cook* is a challenge to the male domination of Yi women. In the Yi tradition, the kitchen is the domain of women, and she questions why the Yi society puts all the responsibilities of household chores and bringing up children on the women, without any help from men; why mothers have become the accomplices of the patriarchal society, disciplining the Yi women on behalf of the patriarchal power; why the Yi women have been so tolerant; and why the Yi society has no regard for the Yi women.

#### 5. Reasons for the Absence and Recovery of Yi Women's Discourse Rights

##### 5.1 Changes in Social Patterns

Changes in social patterns have provided a favourable external environment for the enhancement of the voice of Yi women. In the traditional Yi social structure, women were often in a weak position, and their voices were often ignored. However, with the progress of society and the development of civilisation, traditional social concepts have gradually changed, and the idea of equality between men and women has gradually taken root in people's hearts. From matrilineal clan society to slave society, then to feudal society, and finally to socialist society, the change in social form is the fundamental reason for the increase in the voice of Yi women.

With the development of productive forces, men gradually took a dominant role in the process of transforming nature because of their own strength and other reasons. With the emergence of the private economy, the female-dominated matrilineal society ceased to exist and was replaced by a male-centred patrilineal society. Also because of the emergence of the private economy, women gradually lost their equal status and became the object of male oppression."

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir writes, "The ideology of socialism insists on the equality of all men; it does not and will not allow any category of man to be an object or an idol in Marx's truly democratic society, which leaves no place for the Other ". In a socialist society, women are guaranteed political, economic, and social security, and their social status is improved.

### *5.2 Efficient Development of the Economy*

Economic development has played an important role in promoting the voice of Yi women. With the continuous development of the Yi economy, women have been able to participate in more economic activities, such as agricultural production and handicraft production. Participation in economic activities, on the one hand, is to liberate women from the family, Yi women are no longer trapped in household chores, no longer engaged in family self-sufficient production activities, no longer confined to this "unpaid" family labour, began to engage in paid economic labour production, women's living space to expand the economic income is also increasing, contributing more and more to the family. Women's living space has expanded, their economic income has risen, their contribution to the family has increased, and their voice has grown.

This has not only improved the economic status of women, but has also given them more opportunities to communicate with all sectors of society, thus strengthening their voice. At the same time, economic development has led to progress in education, culture and other fields, providing more opportunities for Yi women to develop.

### *5.3 The Awakening of Women's Self-Awareness*

With the changes in social patterns, the spread of modern ideas, and the increase in the level of education of Yi women, the self-consciousness that is the intrinsic motivation for the discourse of Yi women has awakened dramatically, and women have begun to search for their self-worth and the significance of their self-existence. Beauvoir said in *The Second Sex*: "Women are not born, but rather gradually formed. There is no destiny, physical, psychological or economic, that determines the image of the human woman as she is represented in society. It is civilisation as a whole [6] that determines

this so-called person with femininity between the male and the eunuch." The Yi women began to reject this "femininity" that served the male power, began to reject the social and moral constraints, and began to challenge their femininity.

They began to pay more attention to their own needs and rights. Women gradually realised their important position in society and began to pursue equal rights and opportunities. This awakening of self-consciousness has made Yi women more courageous in expressing their views and demands.

#### 5.4 Universalisation of Compulsory Education and Development of Advanced Education

Finally, education has played a crucial role in the promotion of Yi women's voice. The popularisation of compulsory education has liberated many Yi girls from domestic work and enabled them to acquire knowledge, improve their qualities, and cultivate critical thinking and independent thinking skills among Yi women, who then go on to higher education. Compulsory education and advanced education have contributed to the awakening of a large group of Yi women. This has enabled them to express their views more rationally when facing their own development, their own rights and interests, and social problems, and strengthened their right to speak out. At the same time, education has been able to break down traditional gender stereotypes and make more people aware of the important role of women in social development.

## 6. Conclusion

To sum up, the reasons for the lack of discourse among Yi women are manifold, including the social situation in which they live, the level of economic development, women's self-consciousness, and the promotion of education. The combined effect of these factors has led to the gradual improvement of the status of Yi women in society.

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