

# Comparative analysis of the similarities between French Madame Bovary and Chinese The Golden Lock ----- based on feminist perspective

Chenjie Du<sup>1,\*</sup>, Ningfei Yang<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of HeNan normal university, HNU 472500 HeNan China.

\* 1078292089@qq.com

**Abstract.** French author Flaubert's Madame Bovary and Chinese Eileen Chang's The Golden Locker both belong to the category of setting and character novels, in which both Emma and Cao Qiqiao revolt due to their dissatisfaction with real life, and both embody feminist colors. Feminist literary criticism in the French-speaking world has studied numerous feminine images in classic foreign novels, but has paid relatively little attention to Chinese female literary images. This paper will compare and contrast the feminist awakening embodied by Emma in Madame Bovary and Cao Qiqiao in The Golden Locker. Their tragic lives have influenced modern women's views on love and marriage, and how they should face the real life is the reflection left by this work to us.

**Keywords:** Madame Bovary; The Golden Lock; French literature; feminism; comparative literature.

## 1. Research background

It is widely believed that the first wave of feminism emerged in the mid-19th century and reached its peak in the early 20th century, when Madame Bovary was born. 1851-1856, a period of six years, Flaubert's Madame Bovary depicted the rebellious consciousness of women in a patriarchal society and culture with a calm and objective attitude. ----- Emma, a rebellious, arrogant and romantic fantasy woman, opened the "scars" of French bourgeois society. The rebellious, arrogant, romantic and fantastical female figure unveiled the "scars" of French bourgeois society; Zhang Eiling's The Golden Locker, published in 1944, is also widely regarded as the result of the first wave of Chinese feminism. While studying in Europe in her early years, Eileen recognized the problem of male superiority over women in feudal families. In this work, she takes the figure of a woman who has suffered from the ravages of feudal ethics and male power as her cue to indict the poisoning of women in the feudal era and to criticize the inequities between men and women.

Currently, a great deal of research has been conducted in Francophone scholarship on the portrayal of women in foreign classical novels.

The analysis of female images explores the author's view of women (Wan Yinghua et al. 1999; Qi Hongfeng et al. 2002; Song Shuofu et al. 2018. other parts have dissected feminism from the perspective of film and translation (Wang Luzi et al. 2013; Tan Xiaowen 2011, etc. However, scholars in the French-speaking world have paid relatively little attention to the literary images of Chinese women. In this paper, we will explore the similarities in the two Western works in the feminist wave by comparing Emma in Madame Bovary and Cao Qiqiao's struggle against her fate in The Golden Locker.

## 2. Character profile

Born into a wealthy peasant family, Emma's convent life as a teenager exposed her to a variety of romantic literature and was influenced by the thoughts, feelings, and habits of the aristocracy that both made and destroyed her life. She later married the mediocre and honest doctor Bovary. However, Emma's married life deviated greatly from her ideals, and she spent her life chasing her dreams and dreaming of her love, and in such an obsession she became involved with the young Leon and the landowner Rodolphe. Finally in debt and unable to bear it, she commits suicide by

taking poison. In Zhang Eiling's *The Golden Locker*, published in 1944, she describes Cao Qiqiao, a woman from a small merchant's family, who is tortured by being the woman of the second young master of the disabled Jiang family, but is never able to shake the strict hierarchical relations in the large family. Her long unfulfilled desires add to her gloomy mood. So, under all the constraints and pressures, his personality became distorted, not only ruining his son's marriage and causing his own daughter-in-law to suffer, but also breaking up his own daughter's relationship. "For 30 years she wore a shackle of gold. She killed several people with that heavy shackle horn cleavage, and those who didn't die gave away half their lives ."

### **3. The Feminist Awakening**

#### **3.1 Reasons for women's resistance**

##### **3.1.1 Background of the Times**

*Madame Bovary* was written in France in the 1840s, a time when capitalism was being established in Western Europe and the French bourgeoisie was gaining a dominant position after the July Revolution. With the gradual advancement of the industrial revolution, French capitalism developed greatly, and women were in a disadvantaged position during this period, when society believed that women existed only in the social roles prescribed by male society, and they existed as a "second sex" on the margins of society. The oppression of male culture restricted women's right to pursue romance and made them numb to their own senses. It is a mixture of tradition and modernity, of feudalism and capitalism. In that time of war and strife, the society treated feudalism as the embodiment of women's values, and most of the women of that time could not escape the sad fate of having to depend on men to survive, let alone to satisfy normal human love or desire. When desires are blocked, they are transformed into another kind of power. Cao Qiqiao's insane behavior is a product of both the feudalist concept of marriage and the capitalist concept of money, her extreme defense and rebellion against the patriarchal society, and it is not difficult to find the shadow of desire, power and money in the patriarchal society behind her distortion and madness.

##### **3.1.2 Cultural origins**

In terms of cultural origins, Western Christian doctrine and Chinese feudal thought are also key factors that lead to the respective struggles of these two heroines. Greek culture, the source of Western civilization, was largely isolated from the civilization enjoyed by men by Greek women. Russell. In the Bible and Greek mythology, men had absolute authority, and women were depicted as the appendages or ominous objects of men, excluded from the social division of labor; in contrast, the oppression of Chinese women was largely the result of the patriarchal and patriarchal system of "filial piety is the first, and the couple is the ruler and subject". The saddest thing is that Confucianism's "three obediences and four virtues" confined women's cultural horizons, destroyed their vitality, and made them become slaves. "Far from being the inferiority and inequality of the 'second sex' after men, it is an objectified thing that has lost its self-assertiveness.

##### **3.1.3 Personality traits**

Emma's brave and proud character and her pursuit of ideals made her not give in and resign herself to the reality, but try to change her situation. What she did was totally against the moral code of the male-dominated society at that time, so she was labeled as an "adulteress", but she was not afraid of society's accusations. In the face of humiliation and death, she defends her pride and pride in order to protect her soul, and in the final moments when Emma "has no choice", she uses her life to defend her rights, that is, her desire for happiness. Cao Qichao is capable and spirited, and she is arrogant and competitive, and her strong retort to the flirtation of the customer in the sesame oil store shows that Cao Qichao is a girl who is very strong-minded and does not want to be manipulated. So she must have a very strong opinion. When faced with this humiliation, Qi Qiao fights back strongly, using her mean words and rude behavior as a weapon.

## 3.2 Feminist Interpretation

### 3.2.1 The awakening of female consciousness

Emma's life was dedicated to the pursuit of her ideal love. Because of this, she has done many things that are not tolerated in a male dominated society, loving as she wishes and choosing her own way of life, so many people see her as a "moral criminal of the capitalist society". However, from a feminist point of view, many of Emma's requests are reasonable, and some of her "traits" are actually common to women, reflecting an awakening of female consciousness. Her passion for luxury, her desire for passion, freedom, dreams and legendary love, and her courage to put them into practice, make her unique. Emma's fervent and daring quest fully illustrates the awakening of the feminine consciousness within Emma. Emma's inner feminine passion is rich in content. Emma's inner feminine emotions contain extreme disgust and disappointment with reality, passion for an ideal love life, and love for life. Her passion is permeated with elements of the feminine ideal. At the end of the story, Emma is shaking with anger and cries out, "Sir, you have been bullying me with all your heart. I am miserable! But I don't betray myself!" (What Emma does illustrates her view of love-not willing to sell or sacrifice herself for money. When the dream she has been struggling to pursue is shattered, "Elle saisit le bocal bleu, en arracha le bouchon, y fourra sa main, et, la retirant pleine d'une poudre blanche, elle se mit à manger à même", and thus Emma ends her passionate and short life.

For Qi Qiao, Cao Qi Qiao's character can be said to be out of harmony with the whole society, she has an innate

The feeling of unyielding. Because of her unhappy marriage, Cao Qiqiao becomes more and more twisted. She hates society as a whole, she hates fate, she hates all those who are related to her, even the people she loves, and she expresses it in a twisted form. Her madness and cruelty come from a desire for freedom, she longs for a good love, she wants to express her heart, she wants to have a life of her own. However, reality does not allow her to do so. So she rebels against the unfair reality with her strongest will to live and her desire for power.

### 3.2.2 Ways of resistance to reality

Commenting on Emma and Madame Bovary, Mr. Li Jianwu said, "The charm of her tragedy and of the whole book lies in her sense of defiance and her ceaseless pursuit of life." Emma does not live her life in the traditional way; her passionate, romantic mind bursts with a strong sense of life and does its best to pursue the self-healing and true nature of love. Time and time again, Emma pours her whole heart out to her lover, and she is abandoned time and time again. But she still pursues the dream of her heart. Cao Qi Qiao's way, on the other hand, is to avoid and pass on suffering. Usually for a weak woman, with her lowly background and discrimination by the Jiang family, she would choose to look down on others in order to live her life in peace, but not Qixiao, who, when faced with such humiliation, fights back strongly with her mean words and rude behavior. She ruthlessly satirizes everyone, exposing their hypocritical faces and taking pleasure in annoying them. But in fact, facing a situation where everyone despises and hates her only adds to the depression and frustration in her heart, but does not compensate for her loss of dignity. So, after she got hold of the power, she set out to take revenge. --starting with the people closest to him, destroying her son's marriage, causing her daughter-in-law to be tortured to death, and breaking up her daughter's love.

## 4. Tragic destiny and its nature.

### 4.1 Family background

Although Emma in Madame Bovary was born in the rural provinces of France to a wealthy farmer and a mother who died young, her father sent her to a boarding school for girls attached to a

convent when she was thirteen. She was influenced by the aristocratic habits and mirage of romantic literature at the convent boarding school, lacking parental guidance and assistance.

Cao Qiqiao in "The Golden Locker" comes from a family from the city. Her family runs a sesame oil store and usually comes into contact with young men from the pork store and the tailor's son. After her mother's death, Cao Qiqiao is given to her brother, with whom she does not have much affection, to raise, and her profit-oriented brother and sister-in-law want to climb up to the prestigious and wealthy Jiang family, who promised her to the second son of the Jiang family, who suffers from cartilage and cannot take care of himself, as an aunt.

## 4.2 Social Environment

Madame Bovary was written in France in the 1840s, and with the gradual advance of the Industrial Revolution, French capitalism had developed greatly, and both industry and agriculture had made great progress during this period. It was against this background that this work was born. It likewise attacked the crimes of the French provincial aristocracy, landlords, etc., and exposed the corrupting vices of capitalism and the crudeness and vileness of ordinary citizens, in the narrow, closed world of the provincial people, where there was no room for the pursuit of lofty ideals and no illusions of happiness. Women were equally disadvantaged in this period.

The Golden Locker was written in Shanghai, China in the 1940s, a flamboyant foreign society where tradition and modernity were mixed, and where different lifestyles and values were blended to create a glamorous and bizarre atmosphere. The corrupt life of the author Zhang Eiling's decadent aristocratic father and the unfortunate marriage of her parents provoked the young woman to think beyond her years and contributed to the formation of her tragic consciousness. During that time of war and strife, women had a low social status, and most of them could not escape the sad fate of being dependent on men to survive.

## 4.3 Characterization

Natural character refers to a collection of the human nature of the inner character of human beings as natural persons; while social character refers to the complex of the extension, development, change, and even distortion of the inner character of human beings in the complex social relations.

Emma in "Madame Bovary" is a woman full of emotions, perhaps because she did not feel much affection from her family during her growing up, she devoted all her feelings to the love she pursued in the process of realizing her self-worth, and even spent her whole life looking for the ideal love in her mind, pursuing unrealistic fantasies, disregarding her own financial resources in order to meet the superficial vanity. In order to meet the superficial vanity and disregard their own economic ability, constantly borrowing money, high debt, also became the shackles of her life, and eventually pushed her to fall into the abyss.

In "The Golden Locker", Cao Qiqiao is the daughter of a small shopkeeper from the public class, so she must have all the habits of a small citizen. She also has the desire to possess money. She sent herself to the end of the world because of her desire for money. The ruthlessness of reality and her desire for money caused her to be bound by the cage of money for the rest of her life, a "golden lock" to say the least; Qixiao's pride was also a cause of her final personality distortion. When she was young, Cao Qiqiao was a spirited and beautiful girl, a living sign of the sesame oil store, with a large group of suitors, and a girl with high self-esteem. Since she could not find a satisfying home in the small class, climbing into a rich family was also a way to get ahead and be strong. At least, in the values of the small people, this is enviable.

## 5. Conclusion

Flaubert said that Madame Bovary was himself and that he was Madame Bovary. Today, more than a hundred years later, everyone is Madame Bovary. At the end, Eileen Chang writes, "The

moon of thirty years ago has long since sunk, and the people of thirty years ago have died, but the story of thirty years ago is not yet finished - it cannot be finished." At present, although it is a reality that men and women enjoy the same rights in the law. However, the collective unconsciousness accumulated by the long-standing patriarchy still has a persistent impact on women's subjective choices in the real process of women's pursuit of their own emancipation. Although women today are still subject to the inevitable constraints, the situation is slowly improving. A comparative analysis of Emma's and Cao Qiqiao's feminist struggles certainly deepens our understanding of the feminist wave in China and the West.

## Reference

- [1] ( France) Flaubert. *Madame Bovary* [M]. Translated by Li Jianwu. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Wenyi Publishing House, 1992.
- [2] [FR] Beauvoir. *The Second Sex* [M]. *The Second Sex* [M]. Beijing: China Book Publishing House, 1998.
- [3] Through the tragic fate of Madame Bovary to its essence Zhao Liping 2022-10-08
- [4] Feminism in the Cross-Media Text "The Golden Lock" Fu Shouxiang; Chen Xiaoqing 2020-05-25
- [5] Li Jianwu. *Flaubert's Commentary* [M]. Changsha: Hunan People's Publishing House, 1980.
- [6] The Distorted Humanity under the Repression of Desire: A Test of Cao Qiqiao's Image in The Golden Lock Story Wang Ning
- [7] Liu Yuan Yuan, Li Ning. A bleak life under shackles and fetters: an analysis of the image of Cao Qiqiao in The Golden Lock Story [J]. *Western Journal*, 2018 (4): 46-48