

# A Study on the Writing of Women's Suffering in *Qiu Yuan*

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## Abstract:

The research on the writing of women's suffering in *Qiu Yuan* mainly explores the suffering faced by women in traditional feudal society and turbulent historical periods, and how they cope with these challenges through flexible survival strategies. This paper studies the writing of women's suffering in *Qiu Yuan*. First of all, the article analyzes the historical background of *Qiu Yuan* and the tragic fate of women under feudal customs, especially the physical and mental devastation of women by bad habits such as foot binding. Then, this article conducts an in-depth analysis of the individual fates of characters such as *Qiu Yuan*, Mrs. Liang, Xiaoquan, Sister Chen, and Zhi Hua in the book. The protagonist *Qiu Yuan* lost her father in her early years, her husband in her middle age, and her son in her old age, but she still did not bow to fate. Mrs. Liang shouldered the burden of the family after losing her husband, Koizumi worked hard for his children all his life, Sister Chen helped *Qiu Yuan* in times of difficulty, and Zhi Hua fought against educational injustice. It shows their tenacity and struggle in turbulent times. Finally, the article explores the philosophy of life in suffering. This study provides a new perspective for understanding the role of women in social history, explains the plight and struggles of women in history, women's survival wisdom in suffering and mutual aid and support between women.

**Keywords:** Qiuyuan; female; suffering.

## 1. Introduction

*Qiu Yuan* is a novel with a strong autobiographical flavor by the writer Yang Benfen. It tells the life of author Yang Benfen's mother, the protagonist *Qiu Yuan*. *Qiu Yuan* and her life can be summed up as full of suffering and struggle. She was born in 1914. *Qiu Yuan*'s father passed away when she was a child. Later, she married a civil servant. With the outbreak

of the Anti-Japanese War, she and her family experienced many migrations and gave birth to five children. However, due to the turbulent times, only three children survived. Her daughter Zhi Hua, the second eldest child, is the author of this book, Yang Benfen. Later, *Qiu Yuan*'s husband died, and she struggled to survive with her two children. In the end, when her family was sorting out her belongings, they found

that she had left herself this summary of life: “I have tasted all the ups and downs in my life, and ended up like this.” This sentence reflects Qiu Yuan’s feelings about his life and his helplessness towards reality.

Through the story of Qiu Yuan, this work shows the tenacity and desire to survive of women of that era, as well as their pursuit of happiness and dreams in suffering. The book delicately describes the persistence and struggle of the protagonist Qiu Yuan in life, showing her strong spirit of surviving hardships.

The research fields of *Qiu Yuan* are very wide, including the practical difficulties faced by women, the social and historical background of the time, the narrative skills of the article, and the language style. For example, Rao Hui’s paper *Suffering, Traditional Women and Everyday Writing: A Review of Yang Benfen’s Qiu Yuan studies the above aspects*. It is discovered that traditional women choose to be patient when facing suffering. The novel shows the good and evil of human nature by describing the suffering in ordinary people’s daily lives[1]. However, there are currently relatively few studies on the writing of suffering and the philosophy of existence in *Qiu Yuan*. Through the story of Qiu Yuan, it shows how people maintain hope, courage and faith in adversity, and shows people’s attitude towards life and philosophy of survival in the face of suffering.

This study uses content analysis to study the philosophy of survival written about suffering in *Qiu Yuan*. This article has important academic and social significance. It not only interprets the content of the book *Qiu Yuan*, but also helps readers find emotional resonance and psychological comfort in literary works, and inspires people’s hope for life, thus triggering people’s discussion of the philosophy of survival.

## 2. Memory of Female Suffering in the Historical Picture

*Qiu Yuan* is a memoir by Yang Benfen, written from a novelistic perspective, which recounts her mother’s long years of trials and tribulations from a first-person viewpoint. The story is set between 1914 and the end of the Cultural Revolution and the resumption of the college entrance examination, a period of change and challenge in Chinese history. The article focuses on specific existences and personal choices under the role of history with a non-fictional vision, and in a sense, one can see it as a warm record based on the consensus of the historical context.

### 2.1 Women’s Sorrows under Traditional Feudal

### Customs

In *Qiu Yuan*, feudal customs are an important background element, including foot-binding, child brides, and the Three Obediences and Four Virtues. Among them, the main character, Qiu Yuan, is deeply poisoned by the old customs, especially the custom of “foot-binding”. “Foot binding” is the practice of forcing young women to use strips of cloth to tightly wrap their feet, resulting in deformed bones in the feet, deliberately shaping the beauty of the so-called ‘three-inch golden lotus’, and wrongly believing that a small foot is the ultimate in beauty. This practice not only causes deep physical suffering to women, but also severely restricts their freedom of movement and affects their daily lives and trajectories. The phrase “little feet of woolen blue cloth” refers to the way the main character, Qiu Yuan, was forced by her mother to have her feet wrapped and to wear shoes made of woolen blue cloth of rough texture. Even though she secretly removed the bandages from her feet because of the pain, her feet could not be restored to their former state. This decision was like a shackle that constrained Qiu Yuan’s life for a long time. The physical pain brought by the footbinding was unbearable for her, and the inability to walk for long periods caused her to miss out on many opportunities in life, including the fever caused by inflammation in her feet and her failure to enter a teacher training school, which ultimately became an unforgettable regret in her heart.

There are many other feudalistic ideas in the text, which quietly permeated the lives of the heroine and various female characters at the time. For example, Mrs. Xu suffered from breast cancer, but in order to preserve the “dignity of her body”, she described herself as having sores and wrapped her left breast in rags all day long. Even though the pain was excruciating, she never cried out in front of others, nor did she think of seeking medical treatment, and finally, she just waited calmly for her death. Another example is when Qiu Yuan is violated by an outsider, her husband, Ren Shou, even though he is usually a benefactor of the township and a cynic, his first reaction to this situation is to ask his wife to choose to kill herself. When the upright and kind husband is confronted with feudalism, the warmth of loved ones also gives way to dogma. After Qiu Yuan lost her husband in middle age, she was forced to marry again to make ends meet, she had to seek the consent of her youngest son, and in the end, because she failed to seek the consent of her eldest son who was far away from her hometown, she had a guilty conscience and felt sorry for her son, which demonstrated that the idea of the Three Principles and Five Constant Rules is deeply rooted in people’s life choices, and it can be seen that the society of that time was so deep in the oppression

of the women's physical and mental confinement[1]. It is these traditional notions of the female body, which has no choice of its own and can usually be sacrificed, and which, for women, cannot help themselves even if they suffer bodily mutilation, that pull women into the abyss of suffering.

## 2.2 Analysis of the Fate of Individual Female Characters

The novel lifts the weight of women's consciousness, and these expressions are not confined to Qiu Yuan as an individual, but are diffuse and communicative, forming the contours of the consciousness of the women's community[2]. Qiu Yuan, a typical of thousands of traditional women, is deeply indoctrinated and persecuted by feudalism, but reveals the resilience of women and the glory of humanity in the face of suffering. In addition to Qiu Yuan, there are more female characters in the text (Xiaoquan, Big Sister Chen, and Zhi Hua). A closer look at the different character traits and destinies of the other female characters in the text can express the situation of ordinary women in turbulent times, reflecting the far-reaching impact of social change on their lives, as well as the absurdity and catastrophe in the diversity of sufferings.

Xiaoquan, a female character, touches the heartstrings of countless readers with her deep motherly love and endless toil. All her life, she seems to be running and laboring for the sake of her children, but fate is extraordinarily harsh on her. Faced with an offer to sell her child to a property, she refuses, vowing to protect her daughter's future. However, this motherly love does not bring her any luck, and she ultimately fails to escape her fate and meets a tragic end. Xiaoquan's story is a profound interpretation of the greatness and helplessness of a mother's love, as well as a realistic portrayal of the plight of women's existence in turbulent times.

In the most difficult times of Qiu Yuan, the appearance of Big Sister Chen is like a ray of warm sunshine, lighting up the world of Qiu Yuan. This kind woman was not only eager to help Qiu Yuan find a livelihood, but also offered to remarry when she was facing an existential crisis. The figure of Big Sister Chen is the embodiment of kindness and warmth in human nature, and she provides valuable support and solace to Qiu Yuan during turbulent times. Big Sister Chen's presence not only helps Qiu Yuan get through the difficult times, but also highlights the beautiful quality of mutual help and love among people in the midst of social change.

The fate of Zhi Hua, a female character who loves to read and longs for knowledge, is equally saddening. At that particular time in history, social changes deprived her of

education and pushed her into a cycle of "devolution" and marriage. Zhi Hua's experience is an indictment of the deprivation of women's right to education and a profound reflection on the marriage system's constraints on women's personal development. Her fate, full of helplessness and sorrow, is a true portrayal of the predicament faced by women in a particular period of history. Suffering from physical destruction without being able to save themselves, it is these traditional concepts that pull women into the abyss of suffering.

The characters in the work feel powerless and adrift in the face of fear and violent situations, and these emotions reflect the individual's struggle for survival in the midst of social and historical dilemmas[3]. Suffering is more an inescapable destiny[4].

## 3. Life Philosophy in Suffering

### 3.1 The Qiu Yuan Family Faces up to and Endures Suffering

*Qiu Yuan* depicts the family and personal life of the protagonist Qiu Yuan. There are many important characters in the book, and each character faces difficulties and challenges in his or her own life and shows different qualities and ways of coping.

As the core character of the book, Qiu Yuan's life journey can almost be summarized by the word "suffering". Qiu Yuan shows the status and role of female subjects through spatial writing. The chapters of the work are named after geographical locations, symbolizing Qiu Yuan's life journey in different geographical spaces[5]. Throughout Qiu Yuan's life, although she was born as a young lady, most of her subsequent life was full of hardships. She lost her father when she was young, her husband when she was middle-aged, and she lost her son in her old age[6]. Qiu Yuan seemed to be repeatedly tempered by fate. However, in the face of these heavy blows, she never succumbed to fate. Qiu Yuan's father died early, and this blow not only forced her to grow up quickly, but also made her shoulder the burden of the family prematurely. Qiu Yuan's husband died of illness in her middle age, which meant that she not only had to face the pain of losing her partner, but also had to raise several young children alone and support a family on the verge of collapse. In order to provide food for her children, she reluctantly remarried. This choice was both a necessity for survival and a difficult struggle in that era.

In the storms of life, Qiu Yuan has not been unshakable. Her fourth son died of accidental drowning, which almost became the last straw for her. The pain of losing her beloved son almost made her collapse. However, in despair,

she finally chose to persevere and continue to take care of the remaining children and raise them up. Qiu Yuan is facing a turbulent society, and the old traditional concepts have exerted all kinds of invisible pressure on her. She was forced to bind her feet, a cruel custom that left indelible scars on her body and mind. After remarrying, Qiu Yuan also had to face the criticism of public opinion. However, no matter how bad the environment was, Qiu Yuan always endured it silently and did not succumb to these oppressions. The tenacity and wisdom she demonstrated were her way of surviving and seeking dignity in the face of adversity. Qiu Yuan explores the ways people seek survival and dignity in suffering through the description of death and life[7].

Qiu Yuan's experience makes people think deeply about the status and destiny of women in traditional feudal society. Not only was she oppressed by society, but she was also bound by her family and feudal ethics. Although her husband Renshou is kind, he lacks respect and understanding for Qiu Yuan at this critical moment. This kind of neglect and oppression of women is not only a tragedy for society, but also a tragedy within the family. By describing extreme suffering, it inspires readers to think deeply about the nature of life[8].

In addition, Qiu Yuan's mother, Mrs. Liang, is also a strong woman. After her husband passed away, she took on the burden of the family alone and raised Qiu Yuan and other children to adulthood. The perseverance and wisdom she displayed in difficult situations undoubtedly laid the foundation for Qiu Yuan's future tenacious character. The daughters of Qiu Yuan live in an era of transition from the old to the new. They no longer follow traditional concepts of marriage, but bravely pursue personal happiness. This courage and wisdom to resist social pressure is not only the inheritance of their mother Qiu Yuan, but also reflects their own unique understanding of the philosophy of life.

### 3.2 Flexible Survival Strategies of Female Characters

In *Qiu Yuan*, the female characters demonstrate flexible survival strategies such as endurance, adaptation, and indirect resistance, and cleverly seek survival and dignity for themselves and their families in an environment of oppression and challenges. These strategies not only reflect their wisdom in dealing with difficulties, but also demonstrate their resilience in the face of adversity in life.

Patience is the most prominent survival strategy of the female characters in the book. They often choose to silently bear the pressure from family and society rather than confront it directly. Take Qiu Yuan as an example. After her husband died, she was forced to remarry. On the surface,

this choice seemed to be for survival, but in fact it reflected her silent acceptance of social and family expectations. Qiu Yuan had no feelings for her second husband, but she chose this path for the livelihood of her children. One can imagine the pain in her heart. However, this endurance not only allowed her to maintain a certain stability in her life, but also enabled her to retain a bit of dignity in difficult situations. Qiu Yuan's mother, Mrs. Liang, is also a model of forbearance. After her husband passed away, Mrs. Liang resolutely took on the burden of the family. She did not protest against her fate, but supported the operation of the family with her silent dedication. Mrs. Liang's tenacity and wisdom not only saved her family from falling into deeper trouble, but also provided a role model for Qiu Yuan's growth. Traditional women choose to endure when faced with suffering. The novel shows the good and evil of human nature by describing the suffering of ordinary people in their daily lives[9].

Adaptation is another important strategy for these women to survive in turbulent environments. Faced with an ever-changing society, Qiu Yuan is keenly aware of the importance of education. Not only did she ensure that her sons received an education, she also worked hard to secure learning opportunities for her daughters. In that era, it was still a challenge for women to receive an education, but Qiu Yuan insisted that this was the key to changing the family's destiny. Through education, she not only hopes that children can escape the mercy of fate, but also hopes that they can find a better foothold in society. In addition, Qiu Yuan's remarriage seems to be based on economic considerations, but in fact, it is also an adaptation to social reality. She was well aware that in that society, women would face great difficulties raising children alone. By conforming to social rules, Qiu Yuan found a way for herself and her children to survive in difficult circumstances. Indirect resistance demonstrates the more secretive strategies these women adopt when facing unfair fate. Although these women often appear submissive on the surface, they express their resistance to their unfair fate in indirect ways. By letting her daughters receive education, she hopes that they will no longer be at the mercy of fate like herself, but will be able to change their destiny through knowledge, which is also an indirect fight against traditional female concepts. Although remarriage was a forced choice, Qiu Yuan did not completely submit to her new marriage. She fought for her dignity to the maximum extent and indirectly challenged the traditional society. Their strategy is not to directly fight against social oppression, but to overcome strength with softness through forbearance and wisdom, and to complete the struggle against unfair fate in seemingly silent endurance. The survival wisdom and resilience of human beings in extreme adver-

sity. This survival philosophy is not just a passive endurance, but a rediscovery and construction of the meaning of life[10].

#### 4. Conclusion

This article takes *Qiu Yuan* as the textual basis, analyzes its description of suffering, describes the protagonist and ordinary women surviving in that social background, and presents a series of touching pictures of life. This study focuses on these suffering narratives, vividly demonstrating the suffering and struggle of women in feudal society and turbulent times. This is not only an individual tragedy, but also the epitome of social history. At the same time, it also deeply analyzes the wisdom of women in seeking survival and dignity in war, poverty, and various family changes. Through endurance, adaptation and indirect resistance, they demonstrate their wisdom in dealing with difficulties and show their resilience in the face of adversity in life. It also focuses on the mutual help and support among women, showing the kindness and warmth in human nature. The brushstrokes are delicate and real, making people deeply feel the weight of history and the difficulties of women.

All in all, this study explores its profound practical significance and academic value through the analysis of the writing of female suffering in *Qiu Yuan*. Although *Qiu Yuan* focuses on women in a specific historical period and social background, the suffering and struggle of women show universal significance. No matter any culture or society, women's tenacity and fighting spirit are worth celebrating and cherishing, which makes the theme of *Qiu Yuan* have universal value across time and space. It not only provides people with a unique perspective to examine history and reflect on reality, but also provides important inspiration and reference for people to understand feminism and pay attention to women's rights. Through this work, people

can more deeply understand the important role that women play in social development and the suffering and injustice they endure, and they will also cherish equality and respect in modern society.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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