

# Can Xue Fiction under Feminism: Dreams, Reality, and Psychological Deep Exploration

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## **Abstract:**

As a feminist pioneer in contemporary Chinese literature, Can Xue's works are known for their unique narrative techniques and profoundly feminine perspectives. This study explores the feminist narrative strategies of Can Xue's novels based on their unique narrative techniques and profound female perspectives. Through analyzing the interweaving of dream and reality, it reveals the externalization of women's inner world and its innovative role in narrative; through the exploration of psychological depth, it shows the complex struggle of women in gender roles and identity; through the meticulous analysis of family, body, language, and other imagery, it criticizes sexism and advocates gender equality. The conclusion of the study shows that the novels of Can Xue not only enrich the expression of feminist literature, but also reveal the real situation of women in a patriarchal society through the integration of dream, reality, and psychology, providing ideological support for the reconstruction of gender rights, and demonstrate its unique contribution and value in the field of feminist literature. This study not only expands the theoretical boundaries of feminist literature but also provides a new dimension for interpreting the works of Can Xue, highlighting its unique contribution and value in contemporary feminist literature.

**Keywords:** Feminism; Can Xue's novels; surreal narratives.

## **1. Introduction**

In today's society, the topic of feminism has become an important area of literary research that cannot be ignored. As feminist theories continue to evolve and deepen, many literary works have been re-examined

from this perspective, broadening the dimensions of interpretation to explore the women's experience, gender power, and the reconstruction of traditional cultural significance embedded in them. Against this academic background, Can Xue, as a unique writer in contemporary Chinese literature, has provided rich

textual resources for exploring women's inner world and challenging traditional gender concepts with its unique narrative style and profound feminist consciousness.

Entering the new era of globalization and informatization, women's groups, while enjoying unprecedented development opportunities, are also facing more complex and changing challenges. The profound changes in social structure and the continuous updating of cultural concepts have brought about unprecedented diversity and complexity in women's issues, which urgently need to be exposed and reflected upon through literature, art, and other means. Through the subtle exploration of dreams, reality, and psychological depth, Can Xue's novels not only reveal the richness and depth of women's inner worlds but also provide valuable textual resources and profound inspiration for us to understand feminist issues and promote the process of gender equality.

Some scholars have pointed out that female consciousness exists at different historical stages with different evolutionary characteristics and literary manifestations, and the feminist trends of these different periods have also influenced the creation of Can Xue's novels to varying degrees and in different aspects, especially its contribution to subverting and deconstructing the traditional gender roles, and establishing the image of new women [1][2]. In addition, some studies have deeply explored the uniqueness of Can Xue's novels from the perspective of narratology, such as nightmarish imagery, neurotic personality mentality, and nightmarish interpersonal relationships, revealing the primitive sexual impulses and deep narrative logic of her novels [3].

These studies have not only enriched the understanding of the feminist perspectives and narrative features of Can Xue's novels but also provided valuable theoretical support for us to further explore Can Xue's novels. However, the existing studies are still insufficient in combining feminist theories with the specific texts of Can Xue's novels, especially in exploring the topic of women's struggles with gender oppression and self-knowledge from the perspective of intertwining dreams and reality. Therefore, this study focuses on the feminist narratives in Can Xue's novels, and through analyzing the interweaving of dream and reality, the exploration of psychological depths, and the cultural significance of specific themes and imagery, it reveals how Can Xue's literary creations challenge the traditional notion of gender, and contribute to the dissemination and development of feminist ideology.

Specifically, this study will first explore how dreams become an externalization of the female psyche and their role as a starting point in the narrative. Subsequently, it will delve into how psychological depictions show women's struggles with gender oppression and self-perception, revealing their significance. Further, it analyzes how Can

Xue criticizes sexism, advocates equality, constructs a feminist cultural space through the imagery of family, body, and language, and explores the influence and reconstruction of these images on traditional culture. The study adopts a combination of textual close reading, theoretical interpretation, and comparative study, and through an in-depth analysis of Can Xue's novels, aims to reveal its unique contribution and value in feminist literature. Through this study, it is hoped that more scholars will pay attention to the novels of Can Xue, which will promote the in-depth development of feminist literature, and at the same time provide new perspectives and inspirations for the understanding of contemporary women's experiences and the promotion of gender equality.

## 2. Interweaving Dreams and Reality: A Feminist Narrative Starting Point

By adopting the method of interweaving dream and reality in many novels, Can Xue skillfully blurs the boundary between dream and reality, and through this blurring provides a unique perspective for the revelation of women's inner world. In Freud's psychoanalytic theory, dreams are usually regarded as windows to the unconscious, the fulfillment of an individual's wishes, and the manifestation of unresolved issues and emotions in the unconscious. In reading the transcripts of interviews about her, Can Xue's creative philosophy of revealing women's marginalized position in the family and society through her works is very much in line with what is presented in her works [4]. In exploring the specific role and artistic effect of dream shaping, the complex interactions between self, ego, and superego behind dreams can be deeply analyzed with the help of psychoanalytic theories of personality structure and archetypal criticism in the findings of previous scholars. Previous studies have pointed out that dreams are not only the unfolding of the individual's subconscious but also the narrative product of collective unconscious archetypes under specific cultural symbols. Through the shaping of these dreams, a deeper inner reality is revealed in the artworks, allowing the inner struggles and psychological transformations of the characters to be more realistically and comprehensively presented. This analysis not only enriches the understanding of the function of dreams but also enhances the artistic effect of artworks in revealing the complexity and spiritual connotation of human nature [5]. The dream in Can Xue is not only a reflection of reality but also an externalization and expression of women's inner world, which is an intentional narrative strategy. It carries women's repressed desires, fears, and struggles in real life. This interweaving makes the situations and characters' psychology in the novel complex and multi-faceted, providing rich material for a feminist-free

narrative.

From the perspective of narratology, Can Xue's narrative skill lies not only in the innovation of form but also in its profound excavation and expression of female experience. Can Xue believes that literary creation is an important means for her to fight against the constraints of traditional gender roles and to pursue self-realization. Through the technique of interweaving dreams and reality in her writing, she breaks the traditional narrative structure and provides a space for women to freely express their inner world and life experiences. This narrative strategy not only enriches the expression of feminist literature but also provides new perspectives and thoughts for the development of feminist theory. From the point of view of the narrative theme, Can Xue's creative work focuses on the depiction of characters' perverted psychology, digging out and displaying all kinds of complex perverted, and unconscious psychology under the characters' superficial behavior. Her novels evoke anxiety akin to psychiatric turmoil, portraying horrid, repulsive settings filled with chaotic mutation. Characters are imbued with a fatalistic dread [6]. Taking the work *Huangni Street* as an example, the dream and reality in the novel interpenetrate with each other, forming a surreal atmosphere. This narrative technique breaks the traditional linear narrative structure, making the boundary between dream and reality and providing more possibilities and depth for feminist narratives. The absurd scenes in the dreams, such as the soot from the incinerator falling like rain and dead rats and bats rotting on the ground, are not only distorted reflections of the real world but also symbols of women's deepest fears and despair. These dreams reveal women's helplessness and depression in real life, and at the same time provide an outlet for them to vent their emotions. In dreams, women can release their emotions and experiences that are unspeakable in reality, which makes dreams an important expression of women's inner world and reflects the importance feminism attaches to women's experiences and emotions.

Dreams in Can Xue's novels not only have the function of revealing women's inner world but also have profound symbolic meanings. The scenes and imagery in dreams are often metaphors and symbols of the real world, and they reveal women's marginalized position in the social structure as well as their inner complexity and diversity through surreal techniques, challenging the stereotypes and limitations placed on women by traditional society. For example, in *The Cabin on the Hill*, the subjective consciousness of the novel's characters is completely out of control, and they can only rely on their feelings to accomplish something; in such a situation, the dreams of people such as *More Goodness Without* and the heroine's imagination about her metamorphosis before her death all play a supportive role in the advancement of the plot [7].

The space of the imaginary hut also plays the same role. The hut is the fulcrum of the novel, a symbol of women's inner longing. The women's search for the hut on the hill reflects the difficulty and persistence of women in the process of pursuing self-identification, and also profoundly echoes the important feminist discourse on women's self-realization and subjectivity.

Can Xue's narrative, rich in female voices and dream-inspired experiences, exposes women's marginalization and inner struggles, fostering new insights into contemporary Chinese feminist literature. Her works embody the feminist core: attending to women's existence, voices, experiences, and emotions, advocating for societal reevaluation of women. She showcases feminist narratology's potential, using innovative techniques and symbolism to empower women's voices and freely express their inner lives.

### **3. Exploring and Revealing the Psychological Depths: an Inner Look at Feminism**

Can Xue's novels not only blur the boundaries between dream and reality, but also delve into the psychological depths of her characters, revealing women's confusion and pursuit of gender roles, identity, and self-realization. The women in her novels are often faced with identity distress and reshaping; they are both wives and mothers in traditional family roles, and individuals who desire self-realization and pursue independence. Summarizing previous scholars' in-depth analyses and studies of Can Xue's works, it can be concluded that the "perverted" psychology of the female characters in Can Xue's novels is not a simple depiction of pathology, but rather a profound reflection of women's spiritual dilemmas under the oppression of the real society. Concurrently, these studies elucidate how Can Xue's nuanced brushstrokes and narrative techniques reveal women's inner struggles and resistance, enriching the depth of female characterizations [8]. Therefore, Can Xue's novels expose women's psychological dilemmas, offering a mirror into their hearts torn between tradition & modernity, family & society. This psychological exploration enriches female characters and deepens readers' understanding of women's inner worlds.

The study of such windows reveals that many of the women in Can Xue's works are bound by traditional concepts while trying to find their position in modern society. Despite diverse life circumstances and varying degrees of "perversion," they share a nightmarish psychological struggle with gender themes. They grapple with patriarchal oppression, engage in self-harm or self-reinvention, retaliate fiercely, suffer internal conflict, or succumb to

madness [9]. From the gender theory perspective, these female figures demonstrate the diversity and complexity of gender roles and challenge the traditional binary concept of gender. They are neither fully traditional nor fully modern women but are in the transition zone between tradition and modernity, family and society. The existence of this transitional zone is precisely the fluidity and plurality of gender roles emphasized in gender theory. By narrating the struggles and resistance of these women in the minutiae of daily life, it is possible to show their wandering and conflicts between tradition and modernity, between the individual and the collective.

Philosophy seeks truth in all things and the world. Can Xue's novels offer a philosophical depth, revealing a profound life inquiry beneath their metaphorical narratives [10]. Through a street life full of symbols and metaphors, the work *Five Fragrant Streets* skillfully utilizes the techniques of psychological depiction and a psychological perspective to reflect the psychological state of women in a specific social environment. The women are portrayed as contradictory bodies that are both influenced by traditional concepts and longing for a modern and free life. They are struggling to find their place between tradition and modernity, and this narrative tension makes these women not only carry their emotions and desires but also map out the complexity and contradiction of the gender structure of the whole society. From a psychological point of view, this in-depth exploration of women's psychology helps to promote women's self-consciousness and self-identification and provides strong support for them to find their self-orientation in real life.

It can be seen that the exploration of the deeper layers of the female mind is of great significance in feminism. First of all, it promotes the awakening of women's self-awareness. Female characters begin to reflect on their situation and question traditional gender roles and identities, thus gradually recognizing their subjectivity and value. This awakening of self-awareness is precisely one of the core demands of feminism, which encourages women to challenge traditional gender roles and identities and pursue self-realization and independence. At the same time, this quest also contributes to the reconstruction of gender rights. Can Xue's novels reveal the social roots of gender inequality and provide strong ideological support for women's struggle for equal rights. In addition, this reconstruction also highlights the modern significance of feminist literature, emphasizing that "feminist literature is not only about women but also about human nature and freedom" in Can Xue's conception. Focusing on suppressed voices, particularly women's, Can Xue's work delves into human nature's complexity, challenges gender norms, and advocates for women's status reevaluation. It defies traditional gender stereotypes, showcasing women's diverse

roles. With nuanced psychology and narrative prowess, Can Xue shatters literary stereotypes, offering richer, more varied portrayals of women.

#### **4. The Depth and Reshaping of Imagery: a Multidimensional Perspective on Feminist Culture**

In addition to in-depth psychological scrutiny, the detailed exploration of imagery from a feminist perspective in Can Xue's novels also helps to promote profound reflection and positive reconstruction of culture. She fully demonstrates the aesthetic function of imagery in her novels, and is well aware of the connotation of "imagery is a picture made of language", which is why her novels become a carnival of imagery [11]. In Can Xue's works, themes and images such as family, body, and language appear frequently, and these elements not only constitute the skeleton of the story but also carry profound cultural meanings. With her unique narrative technique, Can Xue transforms these elements into a carrier of feminist thought, showing women's struggle and transformation between tradition and modernity, repression and awakening.

The family, as the basic unit of society, often carries complex emotional and power relations in Can Xue's novels. In *The Last Lover*, the family, as a carrier of traditional gender concepts, is given a new interpretation. Family is not only a harbor of love, but also a proving ground for women's self-awareness awakening, and a stage for female characters' psychological changes and identity exploration. Can Xue portrays familial dynamics and women's struggles, exposing their marginalization and pursuit of self-worth. This implies a critique of traditional family concepts and gender discrimination.

In addition, the body, as an important medium of female self-expression, is given unprecedented attention and display in *Breakout Performance*. Through the delicate depiction of the body, Can Xue challenges society's gaze and regulation of the female body, and gives the body initiative and resistance. The female characters find a way of self-expression in their physical performances, and their bodies are no longer passive receptacles, but tools for actively constructing self-identity and challenging gender norms. The use of this kind of body imagery not only enriches the narrative level of the novel but also builds a unique feminist cultural space in which women can breathe freely and express themselves bravely.

Language, as a bridge of communication and a carrier of ideas, also plays an important role in Can Xue's novels. Through her unique language style, she breaks the narrative conventions of traditional literature and gives new voices and power to female characters. These languages

are not only a true portrayal of women's inner world, but also a direct challenge and deconstruction of gender power relations. In Can Xue's novels, women express their emotions, desires, and struggles through language, and their voices are weak but firm, constantly impacting the barriers of traditional gender concepts.

Can Xue creates a distinct feminist cultural space via imagery of family, body, and language. This space deepens understanding of women's psyche, linking dream, reality, and cultural reconstruction. Her unique storytelling intertwines these core images, vividly conveying feminist ideas and women's struggles between tradition and modern awakening.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has carried out a comprehensive exploration of dreams, reality, and psychological depth in Can Xue's novels, which have been analyzed in depth through three main parts. First, the study explores the narrative strategy of interweaving dreams and reality, a technique that not only builds a narrative space full of tension in Can Xue's novels but also becomes an important starting point for feminist narratives. Dreams are not only the mapping of psychological activities but also a true reflection of women's inner world, showing their struggle and breakthrough in gender oppression and self-knowledge. Secondly, the study pays attention to the psychological depiction and the remodeling of female identity in Can Xue's novels. Through the delicate portrayal of the inner world of female characters, Can Xue shows the dilemmas and challenges they face in their pursuit of self-knowledge and identity construction. These female characters are often in complex family relationships and social environments, and their psychological changes and identity remodeling process reflect the true state of women's existence in real society. Finally, this study explores the depth and remodeling of imagery in Can Xue's novels from the multidimensional perspective of feminist culture. Imagery such as family and body are endowed with rich cultural connotations and symbolic meanings in Can Xue's novels, which not only reflect women's existential dilemmas but also reveal the deep structure of feminist culture.

In summary, this study reveals the unique value and contribution of Can Xue's novels in feminist literature through an in-depth analysis of the novels. Through unique narrative techniques and profound psychological depictions, Can Xue shows women's struggles and growth in gender oppression and self-knowledge, which provides us with new perspectives for understanding feminist culture.

However, this study also has certain limitations. For ex-

ample, the interpretation of Can Xue's novels may be influenced by the researcher's subjective perception, and the analysis of feminist culture may be one-sided. In addition, due to the richness and complexity of Can Xue's novels, this study has not been able to cover all aspects of them, and there are still many issues that deserve further exploration.

Looking ahead, academics can further study Can Xue's novels in comparison with other feminist writing to understand the developmental lineage and diversity of feminist literature more comprehensively. At the same time, we can also pay attention to the reception and influence of Can Xue's novels in different cultural contexts to explore the possibility and significance of their cross-cultural exchange. Through these studies, we can gain a deeper understanding of the rich connotation and far-reaching influence of feminist literature.

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