

# Oppression and Resistance: An Analysis of Mo Yan's Female Characters from a Feminist Perspective

**Yiyang Feng**

College of Literature and Journalism  
Communication, Guangdong  
Ocean University, Zhanjiang,  
Guangdong, 10566, China

## Abstract:

Women have long been swept and consumed by the tide of patriarchy, enduring various forms of persecution. Mo Yan has written a series of women's tragic songs with delicate strokes, including the helpless cries of women under oppression, as well as the horns of women's counterattacks. The author focuses on Mo Yan's classic works such as "Big Breasts and Wide Hips", "Frog", and "Red Sorghum Family" from a feminist perspective, analyzing the oppression of women and the success or failure of their resistance under oppression, and drawing on the power of the present world for women's development.

**Keywords:** Oppression, resistance, female sex, Mo Yan

## 1. Introduction

Mo Yan is a renowned contemporary Chinese writer who won the Nobel Prize on October 11, 2012. Mo Yan has extraordinary creativity in creation, with delicate brushstrokes depicting a series of three-dimensional and vivid female images, writing a series of mournful songs about women who suffer. Mo Yan is full of concern and pity for women, and once referred to himself as a "feminist" in an interview. The author intends to study the female characters in Mo Yan's works from a female perspective, obtain new thinking angles, and gain a deeper understanding of the character images. By analyzing the oppression and resistance suffered by female characters, readers can gain a deeper understanding of feudal patriarchal society.

## 2. Oppression "- Women Under Multiple Encirclement and Suppression

Mo Yan contains emotions of care, concern, and sympathy for women, using skillful writing to show us the struggles and groans of women in the sea of patriarchy: in a patriarchal society, women are both "wives" and "containers for giving birth"; It is both a 'mother' and a 'food'; It is both a 'population' and a 'commodity'. Women are torn apart and consumed in a patriarchal society, enduring various forms of persecution for a long time. Some of these oppressions come from men, some from people of the same gender, and without realizing it, "executioners" or even themselves.

## 2.1 Male oppression of women

China has a feudal history that spans thousands of years, and “male centeredness” is deeply rooted. Mo Yan’s works focus on the various hardships of women: the oppression of the patriarchal society and the oppression of women by male characters from the surrounding areas are the most severe. The “Three Inch Golden Lotus” of the feudal era, which valued small feet as beauty, was a female encirclement aimed at catering to male pathological aesthetics and controlling women’s freedom of life. Women self destructively harmed their own bodies to reshape their “beauty” and conform to male mate selection standards. In “Big Breasts and Wide Hips”, Lu Xuaner was forced to wrap herself up as a “little footed” monster that she couldn’t lift or carry by her aunt’s coercion and temptation when she was five years old. She lived in the “Lotus Fragrance Studio” she had built and suffered from criticism during the Republic of China period. Finally, she “married” into Shangguan family for the price of two acres of vegetable land. The rise of patriarchy has indirectly led to a social trend of “favoring sons over daughters”, and women who are born with the ability to conceive have suffered greatly as a result. In “Frog”, Chen Bi caused the “dwarf” Wang Dan, who was already unsuitable for reproduction, to conceive multiple times in order to give birth to a son. After Wang Dan gave birth to his daughter, “Chen Mei”, who was bleeding to death, Chen Bi’s first concern was not his dying wife, but instead shouted out, “Heaven has left me... Heaven has left me... Heaven has left me... The old Chen family has been passed down for five generations, but I never expected it to be left in my hands...” From a male perspective, women are only objects for entertainment or containers for passing on the family line, completely objectifying women. Regarded as a second gender, they repeatedly set standards to suppress and tame women, subjecting them to physical and mental abuse.

## 2.2 women oppression of women

In the various encirclement and suppression of women in feudal society, there were many cases of same-sex abuse against same-sex women. Most of them were oppressed by patriarchy in the early stage and were domesticated into “spiritual men” through repeated obedience tests. Their roles gradually changed from victims to perpetrators, creating a vicious cycle that exacerbated women’s

survival difficulties.

In the 1990s, the “Androcentrism” in Chinese literature gradually deconstructed, and writers realized the shortcomings of the feudal male dominated works in the field of gender consciousness, which showed a lack of modernity. They reshaped the images of men and women, and in Mo Yan’s works, there was often a scene of “yin flourishing and yang declining”. As a female speaker in the Shangguan family, Lady Lu played the role of a “spiritual man” in the Shangguan family. Since Lu Xuan’er married into the Shangguan family, she was either beaten or scolded. Due to her infertility in the early stage and inability to have a son in the later stage, she subjected her daughter-in-law to extreme abuse and instigated the weak Shangguan Shouxi in the family to beat Lu Xuan’er: “Women are lowly lives, It’s not possible not to hit her. A wife who is beaten is effective. During Lu Xuan’er’s last childbirth, the delivery room of the Shangguan family was deserted, leaving only the pregnant woman struggling in pain; Shangguan Lv said, “With a light carriage and a familiar road, you can give birth slowly on your own.” However, the people led by Shangguan Lv in the donkey shed were busy delivering the donkey, saying, “It is a newborn head care, I have to take care of it.” They even spared no expense to hire a doctor to deliver the donkey, so that the animal medicine used by the donkey could be used by the parturient. Mo Yan used the bloodiest and most absurd comparison to vividly demonstrate the oppression between the same sex: women can only realize their value through reproduction, and in the old society, women’s lives were not even comparable to a livestock.

But in the later stage, Lu Xuan’er’s role gradually shifted from being oppressed to a pressure taker: under the pressure of her mother-in-law and feudal male power, she was unable to resist and gradually became a recipient of traditional marriage concepts, recognizing that “one must obey the marriage arrangements of elders; having a boy is the only way to realize value”. After marriage, she constantly “dated” and “vaccinated” others to adhere to the so-called values bestowed upon women by the era of male superiority and female inferiority. When dealing with her children’s marriage, she imposed this set of ideas on the next generation unchanged. She intervened multiple times to interfere with her daughter’s marriage. When Shangguan Laidi’s younger brother and Sha Yueyue began to develop

love, she strongly opposed it. Even under her daughter's strong opposition, she betrothed her daughter to the "mute" Sun Buyan, prompting her daughter to elope with Sha Yueyue Yueye. Lu Xuan'er is both a pitiful victim and a pitiful perpetrator here, and the root of all her pain stems from being a woman.

### 2.3 Lack of self-worth among women

Throughout the long course of history, women have always played the roles of sacrifices and contributors, paying a heavy price for the extinction of their individuality. In front of their husbands, they are the "color", the property of their husbands' desires, and the tool for reproducing offspring; In front of children, they are "food" and containers for nurturing children. They voluntarily objectify themselves and embed themselves into the food chain for the sake of their families and children.

In Mo Yan's novel "Frog": Wang Renmei is a representative figure of hollow self-worth. As the family member of an army officer and the niece-in-law of the "family planning enforcer"—Aunt, Wang Renmei should have lived a happy life. However, deeply poisoned by the concept of son preference, she sought Yuan Sai to "remove the IUD" in order to bear a son, openly violating the "family planning policy," which ultimately cost her life. Willing to serve as a breeding machine for boys, Wang Renmei regarded the era's oppression of women as her own crucial mission, voluntarily confining herself within the fences of traditional patriarchy, and also perished under the shackles of such notions.

Wang Chunmei once summarized that "Big Breasts and Wide Hips" is a mournful song sung for women who suffer and are oppressed by feudal culture throughout the world. In the design of female names in "Big Breasts and Wide Hips", we can see the lack of self-worth. As the female protagonist of the book, Shangguan Lu's real name, Lu Xuan'er, is only present in the final "Supplement" volume. The names she gave to her children (Shangguan Lai Di, Shangguan Zhao Di, Shangguan Ling Di, Shangguan Xiang Di, Shangguan Pan Di, Shangguan Nian Di, Shangguan Qiu Di), and the twin siblings she gave birth to were named "Golden Boy and Jade Girl". The names of the six sisters embody her "beautiful wish" to have a boy, which is also a repeated verification of her hollow self-worth. In the era of famine, women were once again

turned into "food". In order to support her family, Lu Xuan'er turned herself into a "container" for smuggling food. She endured the humiliation of the male captain and secretly stored food in her stomach. After returning home, she would pick her throat and feed her family, often spitting out blood because of spitting out beans. The younger generations in the family relied on eating Lu Xuan'er's beans with tears and blood to make a living. The daughter of the Shangguan family even traded her body for food to maintain the operation of the family. Shangguan Laidi fell in love with Sha Yueyue in exchange for a warm fur coat for the family. Shangguan Lingdi fell in love with a bird Han in exchange for a wild bird caught by a man. Shangguan Xiang Di, and for the sake of the family, she sold herself into a brothel and fled to a foreign land without any news... Women in the Shangguan family here have no self, no self-awareness, and are purely tools to support the family. This is a "sacrifice" without resistance. Women objectify themselves unconsciously, using the extinction of their personalities as fuel to support feudal operations.

## 3. Resistance - 'Scream in Despair'

Under various encirclement and suppression, women, in despair, let out their hoarse cries and burst out with astonishing strength: they are unwilling to accept the arrangement of fate, resist the oppression of women in feudal society, and dare to break free from the shackles of male dominance. But limited by the times and individuals, some of these rebellions are successful rebellions of self-awareness awakening, while others are due to a lack of self-awareness, essentially still defenders of feudal male chauvinism.

### 3.1 Successful Resistance - Awakening of Self Awareness

Li Ling mentioned in "The Image of Evil Women in Modern Chinese Male Narrative" that when analyzing modern Chinese male narrative literature, we often see men's hatred and fear of female subjectivity. They demonize proactive women and regard female subjectivity as persecution of men. Promote proactive women as the embodiment of evil, vulgar, and ugly desires. This kind of writing ignores the awakening of the spirit of proactive women themselves, deliberately cutting narrative shots and entertaining proactive women. In Mo Yan's writings,

he vigorously praises proactive women and beautifies them, believing that this is a rebellion against feudalism and a successful rebellion for herself. In “The Red Sorghum Family”, Dai Fenglian is bold and brave, daring to think and act, and is a typical proactive woman. She is not willing to accept the arranged marriage by her parents (marrying a leprosy patient from a single family), actively “wild” with Yu Zhan’ao in the sorghum field, and for her own happiness, she induced Yu Zhan’ao to kill the father and son of the single family. Later, she openly cohabited with Yu Zhan’ao and had children. Compared to women of the same time, she is shocking, advanced, and luckier. Dai Fenglian has independent thinking, dares to resist feudal oppression of women, and actively pursues her own happiness. From the perspective of results and spirit, this is a successful rebellion with self-awareness.

### 3.2 Failed Resistance - Lack of Self Awareness

Mo Yan not only strives to write about the trauma and suffering that Chinese women have suffered in the long river of history in his book, but also has women shouting at the top of their lungs in desperate situations. However, due to historical and personal factors, not every woman can successfully resist like Dai Fenglian. In “Big Breasts and Wide Hips,” Lu Xuaner retaliates by handing over her body to others in order to resist the inhumane abuse of her mother-in-law and husband. She voluntarily goes outside to have children with other men, and none of the eight children she gives birth to are born to Shangguan Shou Xi. Lu Xuaner’s starting point is to resist feudalism, which is commendable in spirit, but she turns to the idea of giving birth to a boy at the expense of her own health. From this concept of adhering to the feudal moral values of male superiority and female inferiority by resisting traditional chastity and chastity, it can be seen that Lu Xuaner has al-

ready been domesticated as a defender of traditional moral values. All the resistance she has done is only to maintain the traditional male superiority and female inferiority concept. This kind of resistance is undoubtedly a failure and has no impact on traditional moral concepts. The reason for the failure of resistance is undoubtedly the lack of women’s own value, and their unconscious objectification of themselves has become a part of maintaining feudal moral concepts.

#### 4. Summarize

Analyzing Mo Yan’s works, I often lament the tragic fate of women. In Mo Yan’s writings, one by one, the real and bloody female tragedies are unraveling the veil of feudal patriarchy. Their oppression and resistance remind us of the importance of ideological liberation for women. We can still draw on the power of women’s development in Mo Yan’s works, be wary of the ideological corrosion of contemporary women by remnants of feudal thought, and provide reference materials for the development of feminism today.

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