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Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise: Debates and Significance in "Suffering Narratives"

Yuliangyuan Liang

International Department of Shude High School, Chengdu, China
jenny2007lyly@163.com

Abstract. With the development of feminism and the awakening of female consciousness, works depicting female suffering have faced increasing controversy. In February of this year, the view simplistically defining Fang Si-Chi as a "weak woman" sparked heated discussions on social media, with the debate's popularity continuously rising, reflecting cognitive divergences on the issue of gender violence and the collision of feminist discourses. Therefore, this paper analyzes "Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise" and explores the presentation of suffering literature and the contradictions in female consciousness within contemporary society. This study adopts the research method of netnography, focusing on analyzing gender concepts, social values, and other issues reflected in posts by netizens on RedNote and Weibo criticizing Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise as a "weak female narrative." It analyzes the controversies and value of the suffering narrative within the novel, and finds that behind labeling Fang Si-Chi as a "weak woman" lies the prevalence of the traditional concept of "victim-blaming" and the patriarchal society's disciplining towards the perfection of female victims. However, the controversy also reflects the complexity and contradictions of women's issues. On the one hand, with the improvement of women's social status, Fang Si-Chi's mode of resistance no longer aligns well with contemporary women's mainstream perception of resistance. On the other hand, Fang Si-Chi's tragedy reflects the social reality while simultaneously promoting the development and transformation of the women's movement.

Keywords: narrative of suffering, suffering literature, fang si-chi's first love paradise

1. Introduction

In most existing research on Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise, the literature predominantly focuses on analyzing Fang Si-Chi's suffering and exploring the control and oppression of women under patriarchal society. However, there exists a significant research gap concerning the controversies surrounding Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise and its diverse interpretations evolving with changing times. Therefore, this paper will specifically investigate the textual controversies of Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise and the issues of contemporary social gender values they reflect, analyzing the disputes and value inherent in its narrative of suffering. This study employs the research method of netnography to explore and analyze relevant controversies manifested on Weibo and RedNote. The research aims to achieve breakthroughs and innovations in the following two aspects: (1) Delve

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deeply into the contestation of contemporary gender values revealed behind the controversies surrounding Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise, paying particular attention to the collision between traditional notions such as "victim-blaming" and the new wave of feminist thought, thereby interpreting the complexity and contradictions within women's issues. (2) Construct a dynamic analytical model using netnography to trace the evolutionary trajectory of key controversy points among user groups on Weibo and RedNote, exploring the controversies presented by Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise and their social significance and value.

2. The "narrative of suffering" in fang si-chi's first love paradise

2.1. Definition of the narrative of suffering

The narrative of suffering is a literary or oral form that primarily describes human experiences of hardship, pain, or sorrow. This narrative mode can provoke profound reflection among readers or listeners on humanity, life, human history, and societal values [1].

2.2. Synopsis

Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise tells the story of Fang Si-Chi, a 13-year-old girl from a privileged background, blessed with sweet looks and a passion for literature. After meeting her admired Chinese literature teacher, Li Guohua, she is subjected to five years of rape under the guise of his hypocritical lies, framed as "literature conveying truth", ultimately leading to her mental breakdown.

2.3. Presentation of the "narrative of suffering" in fang si-chi's first love paradise

2.3.1. Oppression under the absolute power of the "other"

The disparity in age and social status between Fang Si-Chi and Li Guohua creates a starkly unequal power dynamic: one is a dependent, inexperienced schoolgirl; the other is a male teacher with independent financial means and a history of prior offenses. This power imbalance becomes the direct source of Fang Si-Chi's suffering. As a young girl – a vulnerable group physiologically and within gender relations – she suffers abuse. The sacred title of "teacher" provides the perfect cover for the perpetrator's identity. Exploiting Fang Si-Chi's love for literature, Li Guohua's absolute power is further consolidated [2].

2.3.2. Dual control: physical and psychological

The most immediate suffering Fang Si-Chi endures stems from Li Guohua's rape and manipulative words. After reading her essays, Li Guohua identifies her as a girl with strong self-esteem who would not expose his crimes. He distorts the vile act of rape into "love," describing it with classical Chinese painting terms like "Cao's robes cling like water, Wu's belts float in the wind" [3]. He declares, "In love, I am unrecognized talent" [3]. Such glib and deceptive words easily bewitch Fang Si-Chi, who holds an obsessive attitude towards literature. Simultaneously, he exploits her need to "defend her dignity" to subject her to prolonged verbal and physical humiliation.

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2.3.3. Family and society

The story is set in 21st-century Taiwan, China. In Chinese society, the topic of "sex" has long been taboo, and adolescent sex education has often been lacking. Despite her family's affluence, when Fang Si-Chi vaguely hints to her mother about her relationship with Li Guohua, her mother retorts, "So young yet so flirtatious" [3]. Furthermore, her family's understanding of sex education and sexuality itself is limited; they assume Fang Si-Chi doesn't need to learn about "sex", viewing it as dark and dirty. Consequently, society at that time largely adhered to the notion of "victim-blaming" regarding sexual assault. Families and society never turned their gaze towards the perpetrator, instead criticizing the victim's suffering, labeling them as "impure" or "not cherishing themselves." This forces victims into severe self-doubt and a trap of self-justification, inflicting secondary psychological trauma. From then on, Fang Si-Chi stopped speaking of her ordeal, "They were absent from class, yet thought school hadn't started"[3]. Thus, erroneous societal notions and familial prejudice further intensified Fang Si-Chi's suffering [4].

3. Controversies and related values of fang si-chi's first love paradise—analysis based on posts from rednote and weibo

3.1. Analysis of related posts—a netnographic study

3.1.1. Summary of original posts

In the original Weibo post, the author argues that Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise is a book that glorifies sexual assault and exploits female suffering to promote self-destruction through a "weak woman narrative." The post also claims that the book conveys the idea that women, when victimized, brainwash themselves into loving their abusers, which may lead women to wallow in victimhood mentality. Additionally, it suggests that the book sends harmful social messages and could mislead male readers.

3.1.2. Analysis of comments and related posts

In all derivative posts and comments, most participants are women, yet public opinion remains sharply polarized. Support for the original post is significantly higher on Weibo than on RedNote.

In Weibo’s comment sections and follow-up posts by the same blogger, the top comments overwhelmingly endorse the original post’s stance. Key arguments include: The book’s descriptions make women uncomfortable and inflict negative emotions on female victims, weakening their will to resist. The book’s popularity stems from patriarchal society’s desire to discipline women, portraying victims as choosing suicide over resistance, thereby distorting societal perceptions of sexual violence. However, supporters of this view remain a minority across both platforms, with most netizens opposing it—particularly on RedNote, where critical posts are more prevalent.

In discussions on gender issues, the definition of a "weak woman" is notably ambiguous and limiting. The "weak woman narrative" emerged from online debates and gained traction as posts went viral. The original post simplistically categorizes women as either "strong" or "weak," overlooking the complex power dynamics and sociocultural factors behind gender-based violence—such as patriarchal conditioning of female behavior and socioeconomic disparities that exacerbate gender inequality. Overuse of the "weak woman" label risks reinforcing stereotypes and biases, further constricting women’s societal space. When "weakness" is framed as an inherent female trait, women’s diverse potential is overshadowed by this reductive label.

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Moreover, the term "weak woman" superficially sympathizes with women while reinforcing patriarchal logic. It carries a discriminatory undertone, implying that women suffer harm due to their own fragility rather than systemic violence. By shifting focus onto victims instead of perpetrators, it rationalizes abuse and perpetuates "victim-blaming," contradicting the principles of gender equality. Ultimately, the experiences labeled as "weak" by the post reflect a widespread societal issue. When structural violence is ignored, sexual violence thrives—especially amid inadequate sex education and entrenched gender disparities.

Upon its release in 2017, Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise garnered widespread attention. The suicide of its author, Lin Yi-han, three months later intensified public discourse. Many netizens view Lin Yi-han as courageous—a whistleblower and rebel. By sharing her personal trauma, she exposed the systemic nature of female suffering, breaking the taboo around sexual violence victims' silence. Meanwhile, the book's first-person narrative, centered on female victimhood, subverts the traditional male gaze, using the lens of sexual shame to critique patriarchal oppression and the distortion of female agency.

3.2. Reflections of societal gender perceptions

Despite most participants in these discussions being women, the polarization of opinions reveals the complexity and contradictions within feminist discourse.

3.2.1. The evolution of contemporary feminist thought

The controversy stems from a clash between traditional expectations of women and modern feminist ideologies. On one hand, accusations of "glorifying assault" and "loving the abuser" reflect pervasive "victim-blaming" and demands for "perfect victimhood." Fang Si-Chi's world is steeped in misogyny: her family treats sex as shameful, blaming her for her own suffering; her friends ostracize her as "dirty" upon learning of her ordeal. Such attitudes persist today, amplified by social media—whether targeting "Fang Si-Chi," sexual harassment, surrogacy, or the "weak woman" trope. These inequalities, rooted in patriarchal culture, reduce women to binary categories of "strong" or "weak." Yet as social media expands, feminist discourse grows more visible. Platforms like Weibo and RedNote host diverse feminist voices, enabling critiques and rebuttals. Rising engagement fosters awareness, challenging traditional female conditioning and advancing feminist ideals.

On the other hand, as feminism progresses, some themes in Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise no longer align with contemporary perspectives. The most contentious is Fang Si-Chi's response to trauma: self-destruction over overt resistance. In a society that stigmatizes sex and demands "flawless victims," even awakened feminist consciousness—as seen in Fang Si-Chi and Lin Yi-han—struggles against internalized oppression. Fang Si-Chi copes by mimicking her abuser's warped literary aesthetic, romanticizing her despair within a male-dominated framework—a consequence of scarce cultural resources for women [5]. Today, with the increasing accessibility of higher education for women and the improvement of their social status and economic power [6], contemporary women with awakened gender consciousness are more capable of breaking free from patriarchal cultural conditioning to resist oppression. They can leverage legal channels, social media, or institutional advocacy and reforms to wage more substantive resistance. At the same time, however, they recognize that Fang Si-Chi's resistance was not a sign of weakness, but rather a manifestation of structural societal oppression and violence.

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4. The controversy and value of "suffering narratives"

4.1. Controversy

The debate surrounding Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise stems from the protagonist's attitude and approach to suffering. Fang Si-Chi does not seek physical revenge, and the author, Lin Yi-han, ultimately chose to end her own life. Critics argue that Fang Si-Chi's romanticization of suffering and silent resistance exemplify a "weak woman" mentality, potentially distorting contemporary gender values. To engage with this controversy critically, we must: (1) Acknowledge historical and contextual differences—Women in different eras face distinct struggles and employ varied forms of resistance. Judging victims through a modern lens risks perpetuating "victim-blaming." (2) Recognize the evolution of feminist resistance—As feminism advances and women's societal status improves, resistance shifts from passive endurance to active defiance. However, this does not invalidate Fang Si-Chi's or Lin Yi-han's tragedies. Their courage shattered the silence around systemic sexual violence in their time. Both forms of resistance—silent and vocal—are integral to the historical progression of feminist struggle.

4.2. Value

The narrative of suffering constitutes an extremely common literary technique in fiction writing. In traditional literature, it has frequently been employed to portray the complexity of human nature and the capriciousness of fate, while reflecting the historical context of its era. However, Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise, as a semi-autobiographical work, represents the author's act of self-revelation - exposing her personal experience of sexual violence to public scrutiny. Unlike the fictionalized suffering in conventional literature, the rape narrative in this work stems from the author's authentic trauma, and this "fictionalized" account of real events often delivers a more profound impact on readers. Simultaneously, suffering narratives typically mirror contemporary social phenomena. The non-fictional nature of this work more clearly reveals how Fang Si-Chi's tragedy transcends personal misfortune, instead reflecting the collective silence surrounding sexual violence within families, educational institutions, and society at large - serving as a sobering wake-up call for readers [7]. Ultimately, the controversy surrounding suffering narratives exposes flaws in current gender discourse. Influenced by traditional notions, society habitually shifts focus onto victims, perpetuating the "victim-blaming" mentality that criticizes traumatized women and reinforces the "weak female" stereotype through labeling. Yet amidst these debates, alternative voices have gradually emerged among the public, advocating for redirecting attention from victims to perpetrators. This paradigm shift substantiates the social value of suffering narratives: the public discourse ignited by literary texts can deepen societal understanding of sensitive issues, thereby fostering institutional reflection and reform. The transformation from individual trauma to social critique demonstrates the crucial significance of suffering narratives within contemporary societal discourse.

5. Conclusion

This paper focuses on analyzing the controversy surrounding the classification of Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise as a "narrative of female victimhood," exploring its reflection of contemporary societal gender values, while also examining its literary and real-world significance. The analysis reveals that labeling Fang Si-Chi as a "victimized woman" stems from the pervasive traditional

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notion of "victim-blaming" and reflects patriarchal society's imposition of idealized standards onto female victims. Simultaneously, the controversy highlights the complexity and contradictions within women's issues: on one hand, as women's social status rises, Fang Si-Chi's mode of resistance no longer aligns with mainstream contemporary perceptions of female defiance; on the other, her tragedy mirrors societal realities and has catalyzed the development and transformation of the women's movement.

This study also acknowledges methodological and literature-based limitations. Firstly, it employs only a single research method—netnography—resulting in a relatively narrow analytical perspective. While focusing on textual analysis and interactive discussions from social media platforms captures the dissemination patterns of online controversies, it lacks in-depth exploration of real-world contexts. This limitation hinders the acquisition of nuanced insights or cognitive differences across diverse groups, regions, and age demographics in offline settings. Secondly, the research sample is constrained: data collection and analysis are limited to discussions on Weibo and RedNote, overlooking user group homogeneity. Both platforms predominantly attract younger users and prioritize fast-food-style dissemination of trending topics, lacking deep critical discourse and failing to incorporate perspectives from older demographics. Finally, the study does not utilize a core theoretical framework, omitting application of specialized theories from feminist scholars like Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, leading to a degree of interpretive deficiency.

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