

# Freedom of Life and Self Pursuit: Discussion on the Awakening of Female Consciousness in Rose Gate

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**Abstract:** In the development of “new period literature,” the prominence of female family novels is a new tributary in the long river of literature development, which shows the subversion and rebellion of traditional family novels with a distinct female consciousness. The publication of *Rose Gate* by Tie Ning opened up a new field of female writing. Through the description of women’s life world, it shows the survival mode, life situation and survival experience of Chinese women, and shows the struggle of Chinese women’s life and the predicament of their souls in the 20th century, as well as the different salvation paths of women under these circumstances.

**Keywords:** Female; *Rose Gate*; Freedom of Life; Self pursuit

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## 1. Introduction

Compared with the female literature since the May 4th and the literature dominated by socialist literature after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the female writing in the new period shows a different color of female literature. It not only revolutionized the narrative angle and text content, but also explained the mainstream status and significance of women’s writing. “*Rose Gate*” is not only “the door of life” but also “the door of women.” The work mainly shapes four female images of three generations of Zhuang family, and depicts a colorful female world to people from different sides. The *Rose Gate* takes a little girl, Mei Su, who muddles through the door of life in a noisy time. With her innocent eyes, she has witnessed the tortuous life of her grandmother Yiwen Si.

## 2. Getting out of the shadow of male power: the liberation of women’s life

Chinese feudal culture has influenced the abnormal female concept of the Chinese people, and the female world has become a disaster area where feudal culture is cruel and rampant. Feudal ethics often locked women’s speech and behavior space, but also imprisoned their ideological territory. Although they try to play the role of a good wife and mother, they can never change their subordinate status as men. When they are affirmed by three obedience’s and four virtues with gentleness, courtesy and thrift, their self-independence consciousness as women is gradually lost. As a result, their original sad survival pattern is covered with the strange circle of cultural fate <sup>[1]</sup>.

Among the many female images created in the *Rose Gate*, under the shadow of patriarchal culture, Yiwen Si’s mother gradually put the feudal patriarchal culture into the female conscious pursuit and self-

restraint. When she learned about the love between her daughter Yiwen Si and Zhiyuan Hua, she seemed frightened and fell ill. Because the lack of strong female subject consciousness, it also led to the tragedy of Yiwen Si. Father and mother's life arrangements made her had to marry into the house, but her married life was not happy. On the day she just married into the Zhuang family, Shaojian Zhuang mercilessly whipped and ignored her, therefore Yiwen Si's original sense of impure also vanished. Slowly, Zhuang Shaojian brought her humiliation and sexually transmitted diseases, which made her lose the minimum dignity of women. However, Yiwen Si did not decadent. The decline of the Zhuang family made her forget all the pain. Yiwen Si firmly shouldered all the burden of the family, saved the Zhuang family from danger again and again, and showed her rare courage as a strong woman. However, Yiwen Si was not respected for this. Old Mr. Zhuang did not affirm what she had done, and never showed any mercy to Yiwen Si for his son Shaojian Zhuang's self-indulgent behavior. However, Yiwen Si endured all this firmly. In order to gain her proper position as a wife, she sincerely reflected on her ignorance in the early stage of love, and traveled across mountains and rivers with her daughter to Yangzhou to look for her husband Shaojian Zhuang, but she still got the ruthless hatred and indifference from Shaojian Zhuang. He also fought for divorce and remarriage. What he got was a permanent scar on her forehead.

In this way, the emotion and spirit of Yiwen Si have been greatly damaged. The huge difference between Yiwen Si's contribution to the Zhuang family and her great mental damage has wiped out her small tenacity. After the injury, she decided to take desperate revenge on the family and the traditional feudal moral consciousness. At this point, the clean soul will bid farewell to the body, and the evil devil will occupy the body<sup>[2]</sup>. And she take crazy revenge on Old Mr. Zhuang in a abnormal way of incest. This revenge lifestyle satisfied her soul. Instead of getting rid of the strange circle of fate, she became an abnormal abuser.

With the arrival of Mei Su, her granddaughter, Yiwen Si's distorted psychology and abnormal means have caused a huge shadow on Mei Su's young heart. Yiwen Si also represents the will of male power when she was young. She imposed the bad luck, injustice and resentment she suffered when she was young on her granddaughter Mei Su. As a bystander, Mei Su saw the superficial harmony between grandmother Yiwen Si and aunt Luo. She also witnessed Yiwen Si's merciless attack to Longbei Ye, and the alliance and haggle over every ounce of life posture of she and aunt-dad. She has become a tool for her grandmother, who has the image of a "bad mother," and is also used by her grandmother. In such a false and dark living environment, Mei Su is ruthlessly suppressed, and her resistance will only lead to her grandmother's more ruthless whipping. In the spring when she was 13 years old, she found that her body was like a rose that was about to open. The abnormality of her body did not mean that she broke free from her grandmother. In another plan of Yiwen Si, she was used as a tool to catch adultery, but she still couldn't get rid of her grandmother's bondage. She yearns for freedom, and although she feels warm and comforted by Zhuxi's repeated protection and love, she finally escapes from the "south house" that she both misses and hates.

Mei Su gets rid of the tease of fate in such a way. It can be seen that the author's arrangement is realistic and unique compared with the traditional family novel. The grandmother's "break free" forms a striking contrast with Mei Su's "break free," which reflects the writer's warm praise for women's liberation spirit and the praise for the new women like roses in the new society to break through all barriers and pursue their desired freedom and life. Undoubtedly, the author also let us feel sympathy and sorrow for her life and her spiritual distortion.

### **3. Crossing the door of women: self-pursuit**

The Rose Gate portrays many female images of the Zhuang family. Rose gate is a gate connecting women's nature and society. Inside the gate is the desire of women's individual life, and outside the gate is the mandatory enjoyment of women's life by social interests. When pursuing life freedom, every woman must

first cross this threshold <sup>[3]</sup>. The several women described in the work all embody different characteristics and each has multiple features. How did they cross the door of women?

Yiwen Si is also a figure with dual character. We should not interpret her as an “bad mother.” In order to cross the door of women, Yiwen Si constantly took care of her female characteristics, sought all opportunities and struggled in difficulties. She handed over her house, furniture and precious gold Ruyi, and tried to follow the mainstream society, although her inner world was complex and even contrary to herself in reality, winning aunt Luo’s trust has become her life ideal. She looked forward to her former self passing through the Rose Gate cleanly. So that the desire of life could coincide with the soul. After a short marriage with Jikai Zhu, she fulfilled the responsibility of a daughter-in-law with his mother. She was no longer the vicious woman who retaliated against old Mr. Zhuang with her body.

The image of aunt-dad is very tragic. She is the representative of traditional women. In the traditional marriage system, she obeyed the arrangement of her family and married a man who ran away less than three days after marriage. She returned to the Zhuang family disappointedly. Aunt-dad closed the door to women forever. She didn’t recognize her female characteristics. She lived as a man and completely covered up her female characteristics. It is difficult to pass through the rose gate to complete the pursuit of female individual life desire by this way, and it is difficult for the society outside to contact her soul. Because of Dahuang, she launched a bloody struggle with Luo’s family, which eventually led to her tragic life.

Zhuxi boldly pursues her own life. She is firm, frank and true. She defies her mother-in-law Yiwen Si’s frequent provocation and peeping. For her husband Tan Zhuang’s weakness, she chose patience and tolerance. After losing interest in her life with Tan Zhuang, she firmly chose to live with Daqi, but when Daqi’s personality made her realize that this was not the love and life she wanted, she resolutely left Daqi to pursue Longbei Ye. She followed her inner desire to pursue a happy life. She was true to her heart, even if she enjoyed a short period of happiness. When her mother-in-law deliberately asked Mei Su to come back in the name of illusory going out to witness the embarrassing scene between her and the flag, she hated her mother-in-law even more, but she still took care of her mother-in-law. As a woman with multiple identities, she has a firm independent stand, with a character of dare to think and dare to act, so the female image of Zhuxi is more vivid and colorful.

Mei Su is the narrative subject in the Rose Gate, that is, “I.” She is the only independent and clear bystander in the rose war <sup>[4]</sup>. Under the oppression and pain thrown to her by her grandmother Yiwen Si, she resisted tenaciously and struggled. She longed for freedom, but in her growing up life, her grandmother Yiwen Si imprisoned her with all kinds of difficulties and rules. She designed all aspects of her life step by step. Even when she went to the toilet at night, she had to intervene. Facing the scheming and wily Yiwen Si, she can only escape from the abyss of helplessness and fear.

#### **4. Walk into multiple horizons: Awakening of women’s survival consciousness**

In the Rose Gate, Tie Ning’s description of the fate of several women in different times has multiple meanings. In particular, we should not give a vicious and abnormal image to interpret Yiwen Si, which runs through the whole work. Yiwen Si wants to live in this world as a real woman. Her childhood is beautiful and pleasant. She can read the Four Books and Five Classics and also can imitate the writing of lakeside poets. She went to Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy to study and accept modern civilization. The students were willing to communicate with boys in neighboring schools about national peril, freedom and equality. At this time Yiwen Si got acquainted with Zhiyuan Hua and was influenced by him, and in Zhiyuan Hua, she saw her ideal of love and hope for the future. However, the enormous shackles of her parents led her into the kingdom of despotism. In the traditional marriage system, her parents personally chose Shaojian Zhuang, who brought great harm to her body and spirit. In her married life with Shaojian Zhuang, she not only didn’t get the sweetness of love, but was ruthlessly tortured and indifferent by her husband. Shaojian

Zhuang brought her sexually transmitted diseases, coupled with her mother-in-law's malicious difficulties and abuse, Yiwen Si's repeated forbearance can only get more severe insult and pain. In the material life, she repeatedly saved the down-and-out the Zhuang family in exchange for a more ruthless hatred of her father-in-law. Under the double oppression of spirit and body, Yiwen Si carried out crazy revenge on the family. Her survival consciousness was produced simultaneously with her abnormal behavior. Her crazy rage was her stubborn resistance consciousness. The arrival of the new society frustrated her original good stock plan. When she was devastated, Yiwen Si met Jikai Zhu who had the same experience as her. Under the protection of Jikai Zhu, Yiwen Si decided to marry Jikai Zhu under the formal legal provisions. However, the crime of bigamy forced her to leave Jikai Zhu. Yiwen Si has always been a filial daughter-in-law in the Zhu family. This is completely different from the image of the former Zhuang family. Tie Ning's description of Yiwen Si's unfortunate encounter and resistance from childhood to middle age can be said to be an appeal and publicity for women's survival consciousness from the perspective of male power. However, in her later life with her son, daughter-in-law and grandson Mei Su, the female consciousness embodied in Yiwen Si was oppressive, even at the expense of others' lives. Zhuxi boldly pursues her ideal love and bravely resists the oppression and insult of her mother-in-law Yiwen Si, which is also the highlight of the strong female consciousness in the new society. With the joining of aunt Luo's family and getting along with aunt Luo more deeply, Yiwen Si is constantly improving herself, hoping to become a glorious revolutionary in the new society, but Yiwen Si is selfish. She didn't bravely stand up to defend her aunt's fate tragedy and watched the Erqi and Sanqi inflict cruel harm on her aunt.

## 5. Conclusion

Literary writing in the new era presents a variety of creative trends. Firstly, writers bravely stand up to question and torture the great disasters brought to people by the past cultural revolution. Works focusing on describing people's living conditions emerge one after another. Of course, there are some historical periods in the Rose Gate, but this is not the author's main writing purpose. In the trend of female writing in the middle and late 1980s, female writers were no longer blindly integrate into the social mainstream, no longer fall into the entanglement between politics and ideology, and began to rethink women's destiny, persistently pursue spiritual equality and the human ideal of gender harmony. Therefore, women's writing from the late 1980s to the early 1990s is completely different from scar literature and reflective literature in the early 1980s in their simple reappearance of history and tracing of historical causes. For the Rose Gate, it marks that the author Tie Ning unconsciously becomes the spokesman for women's fate, and boldly tortures women's life position through unique female writing.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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