

Growth and Sexuality Writing in Yin Jianling's *The Paper Puppy*

Shuxin Lin

Beijing Teaching Chinese as a Second Language, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China

Abstract: *The Paper Puppy*, penned by Yin Jianling, is a contemporary coming-of-age masterpiece that explores themes related to sexuality. Unlike previous works of contemporary Chinese literature that focused on the sexuality of adults, Yin's work centers on the awakening of sexual consciousness of children. Through a series of adolescent female figures, such as Su Liaoliao and Qiu Zi, she presents sexuality-related confusion encountered by these young girls during their growth and analyses the reasons behind them. The description of sexuality in this work considers it an important aspect of the process of growing up. It provides adolescent readers with a rich experience and offers a profound reflection on the issue of sex education, with significant educational and social value.

Keywords: Yin Jianling; *The Paper Puppy*; Young girls; Sexuality

Introduction

In contemporary Chinese literature, sexuality is often portrayed with transcendental significance through the writers' interpretation. The New Sensibility School's writing on sexuality, for example, reflects the political changes of the 1930s. Jia Pingwa's writing on sexuality criticizes the unknown corruption of intellectuals in the 1980s, and Wang Xiaobo's writing on sexuality expresses his meticulous thoughts on human nature. The focus of sexuality writing in contemporary literature however is primarily on adults. How should the topic of sexuality be addressed in children-oriented literature? When discussing sexuality in the context of growth, what additional significance does it hold beyond itself? These questions are of great importance for enhancing the writing of sexuality in this field. Taking Yin Jianling's *The Paper Puppy* as an example, this essay delves into the writing style in literature to explore the issue of young girls' sexual development, exploring the literary and social significance of this topic.

1. Navigating through the River of Youth: Exploring the Hidden Process of the Awakening of Girls' Sexual Consciousness

According to famous writer Cao Wenxuan, Yin's work deserves the most attention in the realm of literature focusing on growth. She has been diligently exploring the mystery of growth. In her writing, sexuality is portrayed as a manifestation of growth. Her work differs from existing cognitive and behavioral descriptions of gender relations by focusing on the continuous development and change of the sexual consciousness of underage girls. Specifically, she explores the awakening of that and the process of sexual physiological maturation, including the more private and subtle changes. Puberty starts with the development of secondary sexual characteristics, such as breast appearance. It can be seen that the first sign of secondary sexual characteristics in young girls is the development of breasts. This is illustrated in *The Paper Puppy*, where a girl named Su Liaoliao suddenly feels that her breasts seem to be a little different from usual, like the embryos of flower buds, so small and delicate that they cannot be seen at all without careful attention. In addition to that, Yin also focuses on the subtle psychological portrayal of the protagonists, depicting their innermost thoughts as they experience sexual awakening during their growth. The author explores the curiosity and embarrassment of a young girl by touching upon the growth of pubic hair and armpit hair. In this way, the girl's helplessness is soothed and the confusion caused by the lack of sex education are further examined. Although Qiu Zi is happy with her breast development, she still feels embarrassed when her first

period comes. The girl avoids her classmates when going to the restroom. She chooses a position to stand in a hesitate manner and tries to cover up the rustling sound of tearing sanitary pads by coughing. At the sight of this, Su is in a state of unconscious shock, her whole body tingling with fear of being discovered. She finds it shameful and unbelievable for someone so young.

In addition to the description of young girl's inner world, Yin also observes this significant process through the eyes of her peers. Su excitedly confides in her best friend Jiu Jiu, who reacts with surprise. Reading these charming dialogues may bring a smile to readers' faces, just like the adults in the text. In real life, as a popular buzzword this year, "period shame" mirrors girls' potential avoidance of menstruation in their consciousness. As Gaston Bachelard once said, "Childhood resides deep within us, still within my heart, forever within our hearts; it's a state of mind". Employing a retrospective narrative style, Yin recreates the confusion that children encounter during their growth and presents anecdotes of awakening sexual consciousness with a beautifully simple tone.

2. Early Onset of Puberty and Emotional Dissonance in Adolescence: Unveiling the Emotional Triggers of Sexual Consciousness

Chen Min's study of Wang Xiaobo's writing on sexuality distinguishes between normal and abnormal sexuality writing. The latter is characterized by sadomasochistic themes and is often categorized as perverted sexuality. These depictions present the main character with a painful physical and psychological predicament. Literary representations of such relationships often aim to reveal deeper social issues. This is also true in *The Paper Puppy*. These issues faced by young girls are mainly sexual harassment and sexual pre-maturity. Yin pays particular attention to the physical changes and psychological activities of them. On a physical level, Qiu Zi satisfies herself through masturbation and has developed a strong habit. In her daily attire, she tends to wear bright and flamboyant clothing with low necklines and tight-fitting clothes that highlight her mature body. She also applies cheap makeup. She intentionally tucked her clothes tightly, accentuating their fullness, swaying her waist, lifting her hip as she walks, delighting in her own gait. On a psychological level, after class, Qiu Zi will often whisper to Teacher Y, with her arms wrapped around his neck and her hair tickling his cheek, winning her smiles of satisfaction. Her behaviour is inappropriate for her age and can be seen as a sign of precocious puberty. The words of sexual harassment flow unchecked from her lips. In the face of Teacher Q's romantic interaction with Su, she makes inappropriate comments about her appearance. In response to harassment from senior delinquent students, Qiu Zi always replies with confidence without engaging in flirtatious behaviour.

Yin presents the emergence of abnormal sexual awareness and explores the pathological phenomenon and its root causes through the narration of the teenage protagonist's family relationship and childhood experience. Qiu Zi's parents divorced due to her mother's infidelity, which has left her with a sense of insecurity. At the age of three, she was sexually abused by a neighbour. She ran away in terror and told her mother, who continued to socialize with the neighbour as if nothing had happened. This trauma caused her to develop a deep hatred towards her mother and feel ashamed of herself for being defiled. As she grows up, her father's indifference leads to her mental illness. She even resorted to kneeling down and slitting her wrists to persuade her father to accept her relationship with a married man named Mi Qiu. Her mind has become increasingly sensitive and fragile due to the absence of prompt and scientific psychological intervention, as well as the frequent occurrence of moments that leave her feeling perplexed and palpitated. She manages to seek solace in her mind in response to the lack of love and care resulting from inter-generational conflicts.

3. Be the Guide of Girls: Facing the Harsh Reality of Sex Education

Traditional education has long shunned the topic of sexuality, for which many scholars have favoured filtering it out of children literature based on the sensitivity of the topic, making it a taboo for a long time. Yin, with the sentiment of a female writer, pours her heart and soul into the special stage of puberty, writing about the distress and shyness of young girls, and using her extraordinary imagination to build godmother-like characters to help them step into the adult world with confidence. In addition to the young girls who manage to navigate through the river of youth, there are also a group of characters who serve as guides in her writing.

The Paper Puppy features a guide named Dany, who is created by the writer for a young girl named Su Liaoliao. Freud's psychoanalytic theory proposes that the psyche comprises three aspects: the id, ego, and superego. The id is driven by primal desires, the ego is grounded in reality, and the superego seeks to uphold moral standards. Dany, who embodies the consciousness of the id, consoles Su during her time of trouble with the thought that it is natural for humans to want to play pranks and seek attention, there is no need to suppress it in an excessive way. When Su longs for warmth and feels ashamed of her behaviour, Dany comforts her by holding her shoulders and educates her with patience, for everyone has an unknown side, and it is important to recognize and accept it, and strike a balance. It should be noted that Dany's guidance is not commanding, but rather supportive. Dany offers assistance to Su Liaoliao during critical moments, allowing her to reflect and find a path that aligns with her inner thoughts. However, in the case

of Qiu Zi, despite our hopeful blessings, she instead chose a divergent path. Falling in love with a married man ten years her senior, she became pregnant, and ended her life by leaping down. Throughout Qiu Zi's life, her father's emotional distance left her trapped in a lack of common sense and sexuality-related knowledge. This unwittingly pushed her to the edge of crisis, and once engulfed, she found herself unable to self-rescue, leading to grave mistakes. A girl in her prime should be as gorgeous as a flower, yet due to "eating the forbidden fruit", she couldn't navigate the highs and lows of youth. This ultimately cast a heavy shadow over her once promising youth, perpetuating the text with a pervasive sense of tragedy.

In *Orange Fish*, Yin remarks that she firmly believes that it is essential to have guides to help teenagers navigate the river of youth. This is also true in *The Paper Puppy*, in which the roles of guide and adolescents are not fixed, but can be mutually transformed. Under the influence of Dany, the protagonist Su Liaoliao, initially bewildered during adolescence, gradually develops into an emotionally resilient and empathetic individual. As time passes, the adult Su Liaoliao takes up the baton of the "guide", becoming a professional youth hotline counselor. It was as if she inherited a spiritual legacy, assisting fictional characters like Qiu Zi who were akin to herself, and dedicating herself to helping other girls in need of guidance.

4. Conclusion

In her works, Yin Jianling examines the physiological changes experienced by young girls during their growth and their subsequent psychological impact. She explores the topic of sexuality, which has been avoided in children literature. She adopts an accepting attitude towards the sexuality-related confusion faced by young girls during their growth. She delves into the issues of sexual harassment and early pregnancy in a profound manner. From the subtle changes of the body and mind to the detailed description of the family behind young girls, Yin's groundbreaking work holds great significance in expanding the scope of children literature and enriching the subjects and themes of contemporary literature on sexuality.

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