

The Narrative Function of "Silence" in New Local Literature: Taking "Aphasia Silence" of Han Shan and "Intergenerational Silence" of The Slowest Is Alive as Examples

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Abstract. New local literature inherits the tradition of local literature, focuses on the changes of rural structure and cultural form in the social transformation stage after the 1980s, and pays attention to practical problems such as the loss of labor force and the difference between urban and rural areas. It has the significance of emphasizing history and reflecting reality. "Silence narrative" involves a multidisciplinary research category and is an important branch of narratology in the field of literary research. This paper uses the methods of literature review and case analysis to explore the differences and commonalities of different forms of "silence" in text structure, theme expression and characterization by analyzing the "aphasia silence" of Han Shan and the "intergenerational silence" of *The Slowest Is Alive*. This paper reveals the realistic problems such as the tragic fate of local individuals and the gap of intergenerational communication behind this kind of "silent narrative", as well as its reference value for interpreting the current rural spiritual ecology and interpersonal relationship changes. This study shows that "Silence" in new local literature is a special narrative mode in the specific era of new local China, which carries the individual's life dilemma and the change of the times. "Aphasia silence" has the narrative function of psychological trauma and external redemption. "Intergenerational silence" reflects the relationship between local ethics and emotional estrangement, which enriches the narrative paradigm of new local literature. This kind of "silent narrative" not only echoes the current practical problems such as the care of rural trauma groups and the imbalance of intergenerational communication, but also provides a unique literary perspective for interpreting the rural spiritual ecology in the period of social transformation.

Keywords: Han Shan, *The Slowest Is Alive*, silence narrative, aphasia silence, intergenerational silence

1. Introduction

Local literature focuses on a single "pastoral" narrative, while new local literature has the characteristics of both local and contemporary, focusing more on the environmental changes,

ideological reconstruction and human predicament of rural areas in the social transformation stage [1]. In recent years, the academic research on its narrative art has gradually heated up. There are not only macro-level discussions such as urban-rural differences and population changes, but also micro-level formal analysis such as narrative perspective, narrative discourse and narrative style. However, the research on the narrative means of "silence" is insufficient, and its role in new local literature needs to be fully explored.

The existing research shows that some scholars have paid attention to the narrative mode of "silence" in literary works, and linked it with power discourse and identity. The deep discussion on the theme level is rich, which provides a lot of method basis and theoretical support for the research of this paper. Specific to the new local literature, although there are studies involving the phenomenon of aphasia in Ge Shuiping's *Han Shan* and the intergenerational gap in Qiao Ye's *The Slowest Is Alive*, the two have not yet been juxtaposed for systematic comparison. Among them, the innovation of the narrative paradigm of the new local literature of "silent narrative" needs to be further explored.

This study analyzes the narrative significance of "silence" in new local writing through literature research and case study, focusing on "Aphasia Silence" from *Han Shan* and "Intergenerational Silence" from *The Slowest Is Alive*. It examines their narrative differences and similarities, enhances the understanding of new local literature, provides insights into the relationship between individual dilemmas and social change, and encourages further exploration of 'silence' as a narrative device.

2. Theoretical overview

2.1. Local literature theory

The concept of local literature was first introduced by Zhou Zuoren from the West and integrated by Lu Xun. It mainly includes the thoughts of nostalgia, criticism and concern for people's livelihood. The narrative is mostly centered on the urban-rural binary opposition [2]. Post-1980s developments in local literature have mirrored changes in rural China. Local novels were in line with reality, deeply concerned about the grand or small situation in society, and achieved remarkable results. Other genres in local literature have also been fully developed, showing a new atmosphere of inheriting and carrying forward local literature as a whole [3]. To sum up, the literary narrative of new local literature focuses on the structural changes of rural areas in the period of social transformation, and reflects on the relationship between individual destiny and the great changes of the times. It moves beyond mere criticism or praise to convey the local people's hidden struggles.

2.2. Narratology theory

Narratology is divided into two factions: "classic" and "post-classic". In the 1960s, classical narratology emerged. According to the difference of research objects, it can be divided into three types, represented by Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp, Gérard Genette, Gerald Prince and Seymour Chatman. Since the 1980s, classical narratology has been influenced by post-structuralism and historicism, and gradually formed post-classical narratology. He pays close attention to readers and context. According to the research purpose, it can be divided into two categories, one is to study the common points of different genres, and the representative figures are David Herman, Brian Richardson, Mary-Lou Leary and so on. The category aims to explain the value of the work, using the concept of classical narratology to analyze [4].

2.3. Trauma theory and intergenerational relationship theory

Trauma initially refers to the physical damage caused by external forces, and then gradually expands to the psychological reflection of individuals or groups on extreme events, leading to symptoms like fear and numbness, which hinder societal development. It highlights violence in modern civilization, necessitating cultural interpretation and social interaction. Trauma theory has three core characteristics: invasiveness, post-ductility and coercive repetition. Invasiveness refers to the forced breaking of psychological defense by traumatic events. Post-ductility means that the impact of trauma is delayed and there is an "incubation period". Mandatory repetition means that traumatic memory will be repeated through illusions, dreams, etc. This theory constructs the link between individual psychology and social culture, and provides a key perspective for the interpretation of literature, history, sociology and other fields [5].

Intergenerational relationship refers to the interpersonal relationship between two generations, which can occur both in the family and in the society. Family intergenerational relationship refers to the vertical relationship of members with blood or adoption relationship, and the core is parent-child relationship. Social intergenerational relations refer to the interaction and differences between groups of different ages in the social context, involving intergenerational exchange and estrangement in terms of ideas, behaviors, and economic support [6].

3. Comparison of aphasia silence and intergenerational silence

3.1. Aphasia silence

The villagers in the Grand Canyon of Taihang Mountain rely on "Shouting Mountain" to deliver messages. The novel mainly focuses on the "Shouting Mountain" between Han Chong and two women. One is the Qin Hua on the opposite Jiazhai, which is a good relationship with Han Chong. One is the mute Hong xia, she is the wife of La hong who was killed by Han Chong. The "shouting" between Han Chong and Qin Hua is the catharsis of desire, and the opening cry of "mute" Hong Xia reveals her life experience. The "mute" is not born dumb, but is caused by the long-term abuse of La Hong after being abducted. In the end, the police found the village because of the pursuit of La Hong, Han Chong confessed and was captured. Hong Xia spoke to retain him, and gradually regained the hope of life in the warmth of the villagers.

The aphasia silence of Hong Xia in Han Shan is essentially a protective mechanism formed after psychological and physical abuse. Her silence has an invasive process. For the first time, she was abducted by human traffickers into the mountains and sold to La Hong as a wife. In this process, she fought back with crying and shouting, but was forcibly suppressed by La Hong. The second time is Hong Xia heard his daughter "Da" biological mother was killed after La Hong, La Hong with a tiger tongs pulled down two teeth of Hong Xia and threatened Hong Xia "You dare to say a word, I want you full of white teeth" [7]. This extreme violence directly against Hong Xia's "speaking ability" breaks through the core of her psychological defense, and she can only minimize her injury through silence. For the third time, after the La Hong family moved to the Anshanping, he said that Hong Xia was dumb when he met people, and shaped Hong Xia as an image of a crazy woman, cutting off her way to help and completely depriving Hong Xia of her language rights.

The post-ductility of Hong Xia's trauma is reflected in the persistence of "aphasia" for a long time after La Hong's death. This is not that it cannot be said, but that there is a psychological inertia that does not dare to say. The delay of trauma makes her equate language with danger. In the original text, it can be noted that the days of Hong Xia's life on the mountainside are basically carried out

around the house. She actively narrows the scope of social interaction to avoid the so-called conflict. This solidified silence can be seen that Hong Xia's heart is still trapped in the cage of trauma.

The "mandatory repetition" of trauma theory points out that individuals often unconsciously repeat traumatic memories through behaviors, emotions or scenes. Even if the individual subjectively wants to forget, the trauma will still reappear in an implicit way. In the state of aphasia of Hong Xia, there is always a "mandatory repetition" of La Hong's violence. For example, when a child pulls her hair and hits her hand, she never hides. Han Chong occasionally jokes to ask if she is stupid and dumb, and she only laughs. This kind of behavior seems to be tame, but in fact, it is the red glow that evokes an instinctive response to La Hong's violent behavior.

It takes a certain opportunity for Hong Xia to break through the cage, and Han Chong's capture by the police just became a dose of fierce medicine to stimulate Hong Xia, and her hard-won "source of stability" was taken away. At the same time, this scene also awakens the traumatic memory of her childhood being trafficked. She realized that "silence" could not retain stability and must be fought for with words.

3.2. Intergenerational silence

The intergenerational family relationship is rooted in consanguinity, characterized by indivisibility and emotional priority, yet prone to conflict due to differing cognitive perspectives. *The Slowest Is Alive* depicts the nuanced love between the narrator and their grandmother, who embodies traits of a typical rural matriarch. The narrator grappled with feelings of neglect due to the grandmother's preference for male siblings, ultimately recognizing it as a survival instinct of a bygone era. This dynamic taught the narrator empathy and societal adaptation. The concept of "Intergenerational Silence" highlights the lack of genuine communication between the narrator and grandmother, despite their verbal exchanges, stemming from differing ethical understandings in traditional rural contexts.

As a practitioner of local ethics, Grandma implements the concept of "son preference" in all aspects of life. The first silent conflict between me and my grandmother was that she was not willing to take "me" to sleep in the yellow lacquer bed of ash willow, which symbolized the privilege of the family. Both sides insist on their own positions. Grandma does not understand "I" am pursuit of equality, and "I" do not understand Grandma's anxiety about family continuity. This kind of silence appears repeatedly in the family education. The elder brother makes mistakes, and the grandmother can always find various reasons not to let the parents criticize, but "I" eat with my left hand is beaten and scolded by the grandmother. The dialogue between the two sides always stays in the hope that the other side will correct the situation according to their own wishes, rather than to explore the reasons behind it. Therefore, silence has become a fig leaf to cover up this ethical conflict.

The 1980s and 1990s are in the period of social transformation, intergenerational differences will lead to different lifestyles and value pursuits due to differences in experience. Grandma has experienced three years of difficult times and the production team is short of food, so she cherishes food and money, which is very different from the way of spending money after "I" came into contact with modern consumption patterns. When I work with the first month's salary to my grandmother to buy a 40 yuan sweater, grandmother's reaction is "furious", scold "I" lose family, turn around put the sweater into the box. Grandma's anger is 40 yuan to buy a lot of food, and "I" did not explain this behavior is hope filial piety grandma. In addition to the silence of life, this silence continues to ferment in the "my" future work choices. Grandma and father want "I" to go to normal school, tuition is cheap and have a stable job, but they also did not ask the "I" idea. The silence between traditional rural social groups and young groups exposed to modern civilization is a kind of

cognitive fault. Communication has become a "chicken-and-duck talk", and finally returned to silence with the passage of time.

Grandma's silence always carries the strength of everyone, but the essence behind this is "fear of loss" [8]. He gave birth to four children, but only "my" father survived, and died of cancer in middle age. At this point, Grandma is no longer chatting, not allowing the neighborhood sedentary, she does not want to expose the vulnerable side in front of outsiders, silence has become a tool to protect themselves. "I" came home early from work and saw my grandmother holding her father's portrait and muttering to herself, "Erniu (my second granddaughter) and I have hard fates, we've brought you bad luck". At this time, "I" first understood the fragility of my grandmother. She could not explain why she had to go through so many setbacks in this life, so "I" quietly retreated. This silence of understanding is the beginning of nonverbal communication and reconciliation between the two sides.

Local families are prone to the collision between tradition and modernity in the transition period. At the same time, the inseparable blood and emotion are both catalysts and buffer valves. As "I" realized at the end of the novel, "the real distance between me and her is never too wide. Regardless of age, or life and death. Like a river, I'm here, she's there. We constitute the two sides of the river". The essence of intergenerational silence is not estrangement, but "people of different times stand on both sides of the river and protect the same land and family in their own way". This is also a profound insight into the "intergenerational relationship" in the new local literature: it is in such silence and reconciliation that the rural families in the transition period have completed the traditional inheritance and modern acceptance.

In a word, the silent silence in Han Shan is broken by violence, which represents the salvation of traumatized individuals in the new rural society. The intergenerational silence in *The Slowest Is Alive* is gradually dispelled, which reflects the reconciliation of intergenerational relations in the new rural society. The breaking of the two types of silence is based on emotion and humanity. In the turmoil of social transition, the warmth of human nature is an important support for solving individual dilemmas and repairing relationship cracks.

4. Social phenomena and impacts

Behind the "silence" of the two works, there are dilemmas such as power aphasia and ethical imbalance. The protagonists of the two works are women in the rural society. The essence behind their silence is not voluntary tolerance, but a passive choice under the unequal power structure.

Foucault believes that "discourse is power". Only those who hold power can gain the right to speak, and these people can make rules and even laws [9]. La Hong is a symbol of family power, he can determine the survival of family members and even the attribution of physical power. Hong Xia does not have any qualifications for discourse expression in this family. Her needs, pain, and resistance are all suppressed by power. The final result is to become a typical "power aphasia". Her silence is not "can not say", but "dare not say", which is a survival strategy after power deprivation discourse. Although the silence between grandparents and grandchildren does not constitute violence in the physical sense, it takes traditional ethics as the carrier and forms an invisible oppression. Grandmother is trapped under the male discourse structure, and the resistance of "I" cannot shake the advantages given to men by this traditional ethics. Silence has become a female dilemma across generations.

The "power aphasia" of women in the two works still has a profound mapping in contemporary rural society. Liu Ni believes that gender is a gender order "constructed through psychological, cultural and social means". In the governance of village affairs, the proportion of female village

cadres is insufficient, and even participation is often marginalized due to the implicit bias of "men know more about policy" [10]. This is the reality of Hong Xia's deprived discourse and grandmother's trapped patriarchal structure, indicating that there is still a passive silence of power inequality among contemporary rural women. From the perspective of local ethics, Wang Lulu emphasizes that local ethics is "local moral knowledge", and its patriarchal inertia is still fermenting. In some rural areas, women are still limited in the allocation of educational resources and career choices, and they often choose to be silent because of the family's ethical discipline even if they have demands [11]. This silence is not conducive to the progress of contemporary society. On the one hand, gender inequality will hinder the economic independence and social participation of rural women, and restrict the release of female power in rural revitalization. On the other hand, intergenerational transmission is formed. The silence of the mother will make the daughter acquiesce that "women do not need to say more", thus solidifying the gender power structure. Only by breaking the shackles of gender and establishing correct local ethics can rural women truly get rid of power aphasia and achieve gender equality and social equity.

5. Conclusion

This study focuses on the "silent narrative" in the new local literature. Taking the "silent silence" of Han Shan and the "intergenerational silence" of *The Slowest Is Alive* as examples, this paper discusses the background, narrative function and realistic mapping of the two types of silence, and clarifies the "silence" as the narrative mode of a specific era. Behind the individual dilemma and the changes of the times, it provides a unique perspective for further interpretation of the rural problems in the transition period.

However, there are some shortcomings in this study. First of all, the research text is limited to two works, and the sample coverage is narrow, which fails to cover different styles of new local literature texts. Secondly, due to the lack of empirical research support, it is difficult to accurately grasp the degree of correlation between the "silent narrative" and the contemporary reality of the countryside. Finally, the classification of "silent narrative" is not comprehensive enough, and other forms of silence and their narrative functions are not involved.

Looking ahead, the research on the "silent narrative" of new local literature can carry out multidisciplinary theoretical interdisciplinary research, combine with the practice of rural revitalization, and provide more targeted ideas for solving the problems of rural spiritual ecology and interpersonal relationship through literary research, so as to give full play to the narrative value of new local literature.

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