

The Paradox of Style — Repetitive Writing in Chen Ran's Novels

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Abstract. Since the mid-1990s, Chen Ran, together with Lin Bai, Xu Xiaobin, Hai Nan and other writers, has published a number of texts of female private writing, which have become a literary trend attracting wide academic attention. It represents another revival and variation of female writing in the history of contemporary Chinese literature, and is featured by repetitive writing. "Repetitive writing" is a neutral term, which not only refers to the self-repetition in a writer's works, but also carries multiple interpretive dimensions. This paper probes into the repetitive writing in Chen Ran's novels from four aspects: linguistic habituality, the reproduction of character images, the consistent literary aura and the similarity of themes. It also explores its paradoxical relationship with the construction of a writer's style that possesses both fluidity and stability, in the hope that writers can avoid the stereotyping and rigidification of their styles while establishing their own writing styles.

Keywords: Chen Ran, style, paradox, repetition

1. Introduction

There are various causes for the emergence of "the paradox of style" in a writer's literary creation. When the two sides of the paradox are the fluidity and stability of style, either state is caused by the repetitive writing in the writer's works, and repetitive writing can also directly lead to "the paradox of style". If a writer makes proper use of "the paradox of style", his or her works will possess unique artistic charm. If the balance of the paradox of style tilts too much towards fluidity, the writer will be erratic, impossible to generalize, and trapped in a rootless whirlpool. If the balance tilts too much towards stability, the writer will become rigid and conservative, losing the vitality of creation. Only by constantly adjusting between the stability and fluidity of style, maintaining a middle course at all times, and refining the strategies of repetitive writing can a writer produce enduring and high-standard literary works.

Compared with Lin Bai, Xu Xiaobin and Hai Nan, who are also representative writers of female private novels in the 1990s and have been persistently engaged in novel writing and active in the contemporary literary world up to now (even though their aesthetic tendencies in novel writing have shifted towards realism and orthodoxy to varying degrees), Chen Ran basically stopped writing novels in the first decade of the 21st century, with only a few essays published in journals or on self-media. Meanwhile, in contrast to Lin Bai's creation of novels with various themes and even various forms, Xu Xiaobin's extensive involvement in multiple literary genres, and Hai Nan, whose poetic

glory overshadows her novels, Chen Ran's repetitive writing is the most obvious. Although she has created a heterogeneous work such as *A Legend of a Small Town*, its popularity cannot compare with her representative works of the same type: *Private Life*, *Cheers to the Past* and *Nowhere to Say Goodbye*. Chen Ran may not be able to represent the female private writing of the 1990s single-handedly, but her works have few variations in language, literary aura, character images, themes and other aspects. Therefore, the author holds that she is the only writer who has stuck to the camp of female private writing in literary history. Unlike the other several female writers who have kept writing and thus received more complicated comments from critics, the change of writing style means that the paradox between the fluidity and stability of style is constantly adjusted, while the paradox of style in Chen Ran's works can be clearly interpreted through her repetitive writing.

2. Linguistic habituality

Emptiness, confusion, haunting nightmares and colliding echoes are the most typical features of Chen Ran's novels. In her most famous novel and also her only full-length novel *Private Life*, Chen Ran highlights these features as a kind of soliloquy with her unique philosophical speculation and carries it through the whole book. "So I said to my arm, 'Miss No, we won't be angry.' I named my arm Miss No, because I think it represents my brain most of the time. I named my leg Miss Yes, because I think it more often stands only for my body, not my will." [1] With these two bizarre metaphors, Chen Ran makes the heroine Ni Niuniu talk to parts of her body. Seemingly absurd, the textual effect is exactly to show the extraordinary precocity of Niuniu, a girl who appears neurotic to others, and the morbid strangeness of her inability to control her limbs. Just as Susan Sontag, the American female intellectual, states in *Illness as Metaphor*, the words spoken by patients with mental illnesses have their own unique systems, and as a cultural phenomenon, they possess extraordinary profundity and are the object of pathological linguistics research. The words spoken by Ni Niuniu, the heroine in Chen Ran's *Private Life*, are obviously a kind of pathological language with literary and philosophical speculation. Ni Niuniu can only control her limbs partially and intermittently, obsessing over some parts of her body and forming a tendency to separate from the body as a whole. In turn, the controlled parts manipulate her will, thinking and soul. This phenomenon seems extremely abnormal to ordinary people, like a congenital mental paralysis. Chen Ran makes extensive use of this psychopathological language in her novels represented by *Private Life* and forms a habit. As a driving force for reading, she presupposes a premise and refreshes readers' horizon of expectation through the habituality of her unique language, thus establishing her unique linguistic style.

This unique psychopathological linguistic style of Chen Ran is beyond the reach of Lin Bai, Xu Xiaobin, Hai Nan and other female writers of the same school. In other words, the language of the latter three can inhabit multiple dimensions, but they cannot be as proficient as Chen Ran in being winding, soliloquizing, isolated and eccentric. In the novel *A Lonely Journey*, when interpreting "loneliness" as a state of existence and "journey" as a metaphor for life, Chen Ran opens with a concept-first psychopathological language: "No, I'm not sick. I'm just tired from the holiday." X held one of my hands and looked at me with the smile I had long been used to. Yesterday, an extraordinarily heavy snow fell, and the snow accumulated all winter poured down crazily. All the houses, trees and wire frames were covered with thick white velvet, looking like a fairy tale world built with childhood building blocks from a distance." [2] *A Lonely Journey* tells a sad yet joyful story, with sorrow pervading the whole text, while the joyful elements are mostly self-mockery and self-amusement in the words, focusing on the sorrow of the atmosphere, which is also created by the habituality of Chen Ran's psychopathological language. However, compared with the autistic and

defensive gloom in *Private Life*, its language is more relaxed, highlighting a sunny kind of gloom—that is, the heroine seems sensitive, thoughtful and fond of life at first glance, but in fact her heart is fragile and vulnerable, and her state of mind can collapse in an instant. Through the comparative reading of *Private Life* and *A Lonely Journey*, Chen Ran constructs her own style by using the habituality of language in readers' perception, and then establishes the stability of her style through a series of other texts. Yet each single text has its own unique linguistic style, which is the irreproducible part of Chen Ran as a writer—namely, the construction of an identical textual style is impossible. In the comparative reading of different texts, whether reading Chen Ran's novels in chronological order, according to other specific criteria, or even randomly, the fluidity of Chen Ran's linguistic style will be reflected.

This fluidity of style is perceived on the premise of the stability of style. However, the paradox of style under the proposition of linguistic habituality lies in the reversible two-way interaction of which is the premise—that is, the stability of style can also take the fluidity of style as the premise. In other words, in the comparative reading of texts, once a text has a linguistic style significantly different from other texts, with a gap beyond the scope of natural flow and forming a cliff-like contrast, this text becomes an anomaly of linguistic habituality. Then the stability, as the main aspect of habituality, will be replaced by the fluidity, the secondary aspect. Yet this anomaly does not mean that it will become a representative work, an important work or a well-known work of the writer. A clear example is Chen Ran's short story *A Legend of a Small Town*: "When young people were still in open-crotch pants and sucking their thumbs, they had vaguely and half-comprehendingly known the unpredictability of that wasteland from the old stories told by their grandfathers or grandmothers. As time went by, they developed a distant, vague awe and fear from the bottom of their hearts for the uninhabited withered weeds, twisted vines, grotesque rocks and trees on the north bank of the Luogu River, the bare earth hills, and the equally bare sky above the earth hills. No one could tell exactly what had happened there." [3] This linguistic style is quite different from Chen Ran's habitual fragmented language. It is full of local, nostalgic and physical flavors, as if revealing an ancient legend, and is a language without obvious writerly personality, because similar expressions can often be seen in the writings of Jia Pingwa, Yan Lianke, Liu Heng and other contemporary Chinese writers. The fluidity of linguistic style dominates, but it is not innovative; instead, it shows a tendency to converge with the existing universal writing methods. Although the stability of female consciousness can still be perceived to a certain extent, Chen Ran failed to control the stability with fluidity to achieve a breakthrough and innovation in style. Therefore, in terms of this novel alone, Chen Ran did not make good use of "the paradox of style".

3. The reproduction of character images

There are several categories of character image reproduction in Chen Ran's novels. The first is the reproduction of male images. For instance, in *Private Life* and *Cheers to the Past*, the father figures are vague but carry the author's obvious emotional tendency: they are addicted to extramarital affairs, irresponsible to their families, and even have bad habits and violent tendencies. They withdraw from the narrative after a certain part of the novel, and other male images appear as substitutes for the father figure. Admittedly, this substitute image can never completely coincide with the father figure, and for the teenage heroine in the novel, it is impossible to develop a real father-daughter relationship. In this sense, the substitute image lacks certain elements, but at the same time, the heroine often develops an Electra complex beyond normal father-daughter affection as compensation for the lack of fatherly love, and the ending of the Electra complex is always unsatisfactory. "As an insurmountable absolute existence, a congenital possession and eternal

intimidation, and an indelible shadow left by childhood trauma, the father as a male figure always lingers in Chen Ran's consciousness. According to Freud's theory of the Electra complex, attachment to and 'breakup' with the father is one of the ways for women's psychological growth. Chen Ran has textualized women's attachment to and 'breakup' with the father through individualized narration." [4] The female characters created by Chen Ran, such as Ni Niuniu in *Private Life*, meet Teacher T, her math teacher, along the context of the absent father. But why is Teacher T given a code instead of a name? This is exactly Niuniu's escape from facing the hidden Electra complex in her heart, just as the heroine Mengmeng in *Cheers to the Past* wants to escape Lao Ba, except that the contradiction of the latter is less acute and more tender than the former. In addition, Teacher T is a deformed and negative existence for Niuniu, aggravating her tendency of personality deviation. Meanwhile, she never dares to define her hidden Electra complex for Teacher T with specific words; it is something to be abandoned, and she even refuses to remember his name. Furthermore, Teacher T has a magnet-like attraction to abnormal women. Seemingly secular, his repressed depression in his heart takes Niuniu as a target to vent in a punitive and coercive way after meeting her. The relationship between him and Niuniu is not that of a hunter and his prey in a role-playing scenario, but more in the primitive sense—a one-sided desire for comfort where men are above women and the strong above the weak. Obviously, Niuniu refuses this, so Teacher T fades out of her life in the end, which also reflects the sadness of this character. Even though Doctor Song in *Cheers to the Past* is in tune with the heroine Mengmeng, the psychological shadow of loving and fearing her father makes this relationship impossible to succeed.

The second category of character image reproduction in Chen Ran's novels is the mother figure. Compared with the reproduction of father figures, which is based on fluidity (i.e., different external perceptions but stable spiritual core), the mother figures in Chen Ran's different novels are relatively stable in comparison—all of them are sensitive, suspicious, love their daughters more than themselves, and have a strong desire to control their daughters. In typical texts such as *Private Life*, *Cheers to the Past* and *The Knock on the Other Ear*, the mother figures in the latter two tend to break up the heroines' romantic relationships. The mother in *Cheers to the Past* allows herself a rich love life but firmly interferes with her daughter Mengmeng's relationships; the mother in *The Knock on the Other Ear* controls her daughter Dai'er's physical and mental freedom, breaking up her friendship with her girlfriend Yiduoren and her love with her poet lover, only to possess Dai'er exclusively. In *Private Life*, the mother's desire to control the heroine Ni Niuniu is not in an aggressive way. Chen Ran changes her writing strategy, portraying the mother as a figure who controls Ni Niuniu's physical and mental freedom through retreating by using loneliness and weakness as bargaining chips. Meanwhile, she creates another female figure, the widow He, as Ni Niuniu's close friend and a compensation for the absence of a normal mother, forming a contrast with the biological mother. However, the widow He is burned to death in a big fire, dealing a fatal blow to Ni Niuniu, which also symbolizes Chen Ran's evolution from longing for an ideal mother figure to the mental collapse caused by the harsh reality.

The relationship between Ni Niuniu and the widow He is poetic, ethereal and mutually comforting. Living with her mother every day has become a habit for Niuniu, and when her spirit is unbalanced, she goes to find the widow He. Only the widow He can understand Ni Niuniu's heart, because they are of the same kind. This reflects the author Chen Ran's real-life situation and her ideal mother-daughter relationship from a side perspective. In her works depicting mother-daughter relationships, the imperfect mother figures in reality always reappear in the same posture in different texts, and her physical and mental control over her daughter has become a symbolic signification in Chen Ran's novels. Moreover, the author's ideal mother figure often coincides with the teenage

heroine in her works, which allows us to understand the paradox of style between fluidity and stability in the reproduction of character images in Chen Ran's novels from two different dimensions. Meanwhile, if the character images in Chen Ran's works are divided into two groups—male and female images according to gender—apart from the apparent gender complementarity, there is also a rigorous internal symmetry: the female images created by Chen Ran are divided into two categories: absence and compensation, which also applies to her male images, such as the father and Yin Nan in *Private Life*, and Doctor Song and Lao Ba in *Cheers to the Past*. In this regard, *Private Life* is obviously Chen Ran's most mature novel, because an intermediate item is set between the absence and compensation of male and female images—Teacher T for the former and the widow He for the latter. The difference is that the former leans towards absence and the latter towards compensation, which also reflects Chen Ran's innate closeness to women and suspicion of men.

This constitutes the paradox of style between fluidity and stability in the sense of the reproduction of complex character images. Chen Ran handles the fluidity of character images in a bizarre and unpredictable way, yet the texts show amazing stability in superficial comparative reading. Without in-depth exploration, one would conclude that Chen Ran's style is stereotyped and inflexible. Undoubtedly, Chen Ran has unparalleled ingenuity in the paradox of style constructed by character images.

4. The consistent literary aura

The term "literary aura" is a unique term in ancient Chinese literary theory, referring to spiritual issues such as the charm of an article. It has been repeatedly mentioned in literary theories such as *The Critique of Poetry*, *The Literary Mind* and *the Carving of Dragons*, and Han Yu's works, and has been a topic of debate among scholars from ancient times to the present. Compared with the connotations of "literary aura" involving the natural aura of heaven and earth, the regional characteristics of music, the regional features of a writer's style, and the epochal characteristics of literary style, it tends to focus more on the innate temperament of the writing subject and the stylistic features presented in the works. "If the harm brought by the Cultural Revolution to men in *Private Life* is direct, cruel and naked, then the harm to women is indirect, metaphorical and concealed; if the collective and social memory of the era exists in the male group, then women are marginal and individual; the women in *Private Life* seem to have never appeared in mainstream culture, thus seemingly escaping the catastrophe of the Cultural Revolution, but the 'post-traumatic stress disorder' leaves them with nowhere to escape in another way." [5] Chen Ran is naturally sensitive, dislikes cultural circles, refuses to participate in activities, and her later writing was intermittent with no complete novel creation. The passing of her mother and beloved dog dealt a huge blow to her. This is an analysis from her personal level. On the social level, the above quote is one manifestation of the literary aura in Chen Ran's novels, namely the sense of ruins after a catastrophe, reflected in autistic writing after experiencing vicissitudes of life. The "literary aura" is long and sorrowful, always tightening the string in the mind and holding back tears.

In addition, the "literary aura" in Chen Ran's novel *Private Life* is presented through the inner surging of the characters' emotions. The heroine Ni Niuniu calls herself a disabled person. On the surface, this is because the people she loves and who love her have withdrawn from her life one after another through death or permanent departure without moving a muscle. As a result, the seemingly solid social network connected by various intimate relationships is gradually unraveled, leaving her alone. At this point, Ni Niuniu goes through a process of disability—compensation—re-disability, and the result of "re-disability" is obviously more tormenting than the initial "disability", with wave after wave of heartbreaking mental pressure leading to confusion, loss of support and

disorientation. At a deeper level, these disappearing characters are actually part of the personality of the heroine Ni Niuniu, and even the author Chen Ran. Originally the texture of a perfect spirit, they leave one after another, leaving only a fleshless shell. However, this increases the concentration and spread of the novel's "literary aura", and deepens its stability in the process of constant flow, further enhancing the stylistic recognition of *Private Life*. Ultimately, this is due to the vigor of the "literary aura". Those lost textures are hard to regenerate, and the only possibility of repair or rebirth lies in the passage of long time. Rebirth means the blurring of specific details in memories, while the painful emotions at the core or supporting role can never be reborn. It is this impossibility that makes the literary aura of *Private Life* never fade, and the tenacious power touching readers' hearts is stable. Ni Niuniu's disabled spiritual skeleton appears calm on the surface but turbulent inside, ready to reach the point of emotional outburst. Her state of mind is peaceful and indifferent, full of philosophical insights, but this is largely not due to personal subjectivity, but a catalyst of the social environment and life circumstances as objective external forces, showing a precocious appearance. In addition to this appearance, the real existence of the heroine Ni Niuniu has a complexity intertwined with innate and acquired factors, which is difficult for readers unaware of the inside story to distinguish. Meanwhile, Chen Ran's novels represented by *Private Life* have a complex "literary aura" due to the complexity of the characters' emotions and existence. With the author's superb control ability, the complex "literary aura" makes the novel's style orderly in the process of constant flow, forming a complete and progressive chain: the complexity of emotions under the writer's outstanding writing ability—the complexity of literary aura—the fluidity of style—the systematization of fluidity—the stability of style. This prevents "the paradox of style" from derailing due to complex writing strategies and instead develops in a positive direction.

The "literary aura" not only maintains consistency through constant repetition and variation in the single text *Private Life*, but also remains consistent in the comparative reading of Chen Ran's different texts. In this context, the motivation for the stability of Chen Ran's novels does not lie in internal structure or production mechanism, but in the fact that Chen Ran has never changed her style when writing different novels, showing consistent characteristics. For example, in the short story *Human and Starry Sky*, Chen Ran creates a quirky yet sensitive female college student who spends all day thinking about rigorous philosophical issues with the unique unrestrained thinking of literature, misses love due to self-cognitive disorders and other reasons, and ends up alone again. If we study Chen Ran's novels from the perspective of Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* by Russian formalist scholars, we will find that most of Chen Ran's novels follow one pattern and have a relatively simple typological framework in terms of narratology. Different narrative strategies naturally affect the "literary aura", but since Chen Ran's novels are not good at narration but stand out for their language and literary aura, the so-called "stability of style" has no derogatory meaning here. Meanwhile, a light side emerges within the style of some of Chen Ran's novels including *Human and Starry Sky*. The self-mocking and pseudo lightness in *Private Life* is replaced by lyrical and youthful lightness, which can also be regarded as a reflection of the fluidity of Chen Ran's novel style in textual comparative reading.

The problem here is that in the process of comparative reading of Chen Ran's novels, because the "literary aura" involves various aspects, the stability and fluidity of the style created by its consistency may not target the same argument, which is inevitable. The issues of fluidity and stability cannot have distinct symmetry on every argument, especially for the versatile literary aura. This can also be tentatively regarded as a kind of "paradox of style".

5. The similarity of themes

"With her own gender role, strong female consciousness and unremitting exploratory spirit, Chen Ran has become a unique and important representative of female literary writers in the history of contemporary Chinese literature. As a female writer, Chen Ran insists on writing from a female perspective and depicts the personal survival experiences and feelings of modern urban women in society with an extremely personalized writing mode. The manifestation of female consciousness in her novels is the most touching part and the eternal charm of her works." [6] This summarizes the theme of Chen Ran's novels as the female theme, specifically the theme of expressing female consciousness. The origin of female consciousness is influenced by many factors such as region, era, race, class and living environment, making it a very complex issue. Therefore, whether the female theme in Chen Ran's works is to expose the survival dilemma of women, show their spiritual world, or express their silent resistance to patriarchal oppression is worthy of discussion. Meanwhile, the theme of female consciousness in Chen Ran's novels is definitely shaped through her specific female writing strategies. What are the specific female writing strategies adopted by Chen Ran in novels such as *Private Life*, *Nowhere to Say Goodbye*, *Cheers to the Past*, *Divination on Sandglass Street* and *Paper Pieces*? In *Nowhere to Say Goodbye*, Chen Ran takes the fate of three girlfriends who are displaced, unsupported and alone in their daily and spiritual life, working environment and romantic relationships, and through their choices of life paths, glimpses the spiritual crisis and survival confusion of these women with distinct feminine temperament and appeal in a patriarchal society, full of a sense of marginalization and powerlessness. *Cheers to the Past* is like a condensed version of *Private Life*. Mengmeng, a teenage girl, has a similar native family to Ni Niuniu. As the narrative protagonist, her parents' divorce brings her a life experience equivalent to "losing her father". The appearance of neighbor Doctor Song fills Mengmeng's desire for fatherly love. Although the possibility of further expansion is prevented by the almost ingrained sense of original sin of shame, this cross-generational relationship still takes root in Mengmeng's heart in an indelible way. Chen Meng uniquely uses the spatial image of "nunnery", which is extremely feminine and full of Gothic terror, as the main setting of the story, further guiding the female consciousness towards intensity and repression. *Divination on Sandglass Street* is an extremely special text in Chen Ran's novel creation. It is the only one that uses the method of mystery novels to express female consciousness. Compared with the sensitive, fragile and delicate language of her other novels, its language is calm and sharp, more like a work written by a male writer. Taking an abnormal death case as the main body of the story and searching for the murderer as the narrative clue, the novel is full of doubts throughout the process. Everyone is a suspect and lives in fear, distrusting each other. The sudden death of Director Lang, the case leader, is taken as the starting point to reflect the complex relationships in the unit, the power struggles with hidden knives in smiles, and the romantic interactions between men and women, all of which seem to imply the truth of the case but make it more confusing. In the end, the truth emerges in an extremely accidental way, showing a sense of absurdity. There is no second similar example of this narrative strategy of "case occurrence—case solving—truth revealed" in Chen Ran's novels, and the path to express female consciousness and the female theme pointed to by female consciousness is also unique. In addition to expressing the passive extinction of female consciousness in terms of oppression and being oppressed, action and reaction from the improper relationship between men and women on the surface, Chen Ran starts from a murder case seemingly under the patriarchal discourse system, starts with the young female victim at the beginning of the novel that is most easily ignored by readers, elevates the trivialities of people in the process of the text to the mockery of women's right to survival and even to female

consciousness as life itself. It is in this subtle way that Chen Ran expresses female consciousness from the opposite and tiny aspects.

Of course, this female writing strategy of Chen Ran is only an individual case, but together with other female writing strategies with minor differences, it leads to the female theme. However, the text that most abundantly expresses the female theme is still *Private Life*. When the heroine Ni Niuniu was young, she stood firmly with her mother, nanny grandma and the family dog, silent yet sensitive. Her same-sex friendship with the widow He, her hatred for Teacher T, and her mutual support in the short intersection with her girlfriend Yi Qiu are all examples. In some other descriptions by Chen Ran, we can also find that Ni Niuniu is trying to transform from the publicity and determination symbolized by black to the concealment symbolized by the neutralization of gray. The driving force for this transformation is reflected in the novel as her love with men, specifically her short and deformed Electra love for Teacher T and her pure yet irrecoverable love for Yin Nan. These deformed or beautiful loves inevitably end in vain. Ni Niuniu has both Electra complex, desire for normal love and Oedipus complex. The widow He is a substitute for her mother. The lack of fatherly love leads to her Electra complex, and the sensitivity and excess of maternal love lead to her Oedipus complex for other adult women.

These factors are all components of female consciousness in Chen Ran's novels, and the complex female consciousness constitutes the equally complex female theme. The author holds that the hubbub in the so-called "complexity" is exactly the factor constituting the fluidity of Chen Ran's works, while the common female theme represents stability, the eternal theme in her works. This is the paradox of style pointed to by the theme. Admittedly, in addition to female issues, Chen Ran's novels also have themes such as loneliness and self-cognition, which can be regarded as the fluid side, but they are still derivatives of the theme of female issues and have the overall stability. Although men also face the above problems, and the male images created by Chen Ran also have these troubles, due to Chen Ran's own female consciousness and her focus on writing about women, the issues of loneliness and self-cognition in men are relatively not placed in a prominent position for research.

6. Conclusion

"There are indeed overly personalized writing parts in Chen Ran's novels, such as parts in *Cheers to the Past* and *The Cabin of Ar* that cannot be included in the integrated theme, universal situation or the integrity of the works themselves. We can only regard them as Chen Ran's personal notes. However, personalized writing is not equal to personal writing or writing about the individual. Any personalized writing, while drifting away from the mainstream discourse, is bound to conform to another marginal ideology, which makes it possible for the works to enter the social civilization and cultural order." [7] This is the paradox of style from the perspective of theme regarding the relationship between the individual and the collective in Chen Ran's novels. There are paradoxes of style in terms of language, character images, literary aura and themes in Chen Ran's novels, and each specific paradox has infinite referentiality and polysemy. Such paradoxes are realized through the specific features presented by repetition. Chen Ran is a master at using the paradox of style, presenting this complex and intractable concept to readers in the form of specific literary works with superb skill. This makes her paradox of style unique both in the female private writing of the 1990s and in the entire modern and contemporary Chinese literature.

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