

Emotional Expression from a Child Narrative Perspective: A Case Study of Memories of Peking, South Side Story

Ziying Fang

College of Humanities and Law, South China Agricultural University, Guangzhou, China
3602808101@qq.com

Abstract. In today's fast-paced modern life, people's pace of living has accelerated, interpersonal emotions have become increasingly distant, and inner feelings of anxiety and restlessness have grown. In this context, people need ways to relieve their irritability and gain emotional support. This paper focuses on emotional expression through a child narrative perspective—using *Memories of Peking, South Side Story* by Lin Haiyin as a case study. Through the perspective of Xiaoyingzi, a naive and childlike narrator full of memories and innocence, this paper explores the expression of genuine emotions. By combining literature analysis and textual analysis, the study reveals the significance of the child narrative perspective in emotional expression. It breaks away from the complexity of the adult perspective and examines the suffering and parting of the adult world through a child's lens. Conveyed in a warm and tender manner, this approach provides meaningful insight for contemporary society to return to its true self and rediscover authentic emotions.

Keywords: child narrative perspective, emotional expression, parting and nostalgia, childhood days

1. Introduction

The child narrative perspective refers to taking children's cognition, psychology and thinking mode as the narrative entry point in literary creation, letting children act as the narrators of the story, observing the world and expressing emotions from children's point of view. *Memories of Peking, South Side Story* was created in 1960 by Lin Haiyin. She lived in the south of Beijing in her early years and later moved to Taiwan. Deeply attached to her life in Beijing, she wrote this autobiographical work depicting her life from the age of 7 to 13 to express her strong nostalgia and homesickness. At present, rich research results have been achieved on the children's narrative perspective and *Memories of Peking, South Side Story*, but there are still some research gaps, such as the lack of in-depth integration of the two research themes. Therefore, this paper combines the child narrative perspective with emotional expression in *Memories of Peking, South Side Story*, and adopts the methods of literature analysis and textual analysis to explore the emotional expression under the child narrative perspective. This research is of great significance for individuals in modern society to return to their original heart, relieve anxiety and rediscover sincere emotions.

2. Parting and growth from the perspective of child narration

In *Memories of Peking, South Side Story*, parting serves as the underlying theme of the book, running through Xiaoyingzi's entire childhood. In the "Huian House" in the alley, Xiaoyingzi gets to know the "mad woman" Xiuzhen and gradually becomes good friends with her. However, due to a series of uncontrollable events, Xiaoyingzi is separated from Xiuzhen. This is the first time Xiaoyingzi directly faces the separation of life and death in her childhood, and the first time she understands what it means to "lose" someone. In the chapter "Let's Go to the Sea", facing the thief in the grass, Xiaoyingzi has no clear understanding of this adult-world concept; she only wonders why he didn't keep his promise to accompany her to see the sea. In the chapter "Aunt Lan", compared to other forms of parting, there is more helplessness and deeper sorrow. In this chapter, Xiaoyingzi realizes that when farewell truly comes, it catches her off guard—until she fully understands that the person who often played with her and comforted her will never appear in the alley again [1]. Throughout her childhood, the heaviest parting—and the one that makes Xiaoyingzi grow up quickly—is the death of her father. This is the most critical turning point in Yingzi's development. From the child narrative perspective, the emotion is sincere and abundant: "Father's flowers have fallen, and I am no longer a little child." She understands that her father is gone forever, that he will never cheer her up in the carriage again, and that she can no longer snuggle up to his shoulder and act spoiled. Though her heart is filled with immense pain, recalling her father's earnest advice before his death—his boundless expectation that she "study hard"—Yingzi seems to mature in an instant. She must take on the responsibility of the family and support the household in her father's place, so as not to disappoint his hopes [2]. Through the child narrative perspective, the book portrays the partings of life and death that Yingzi experiences as she grows up, showing her continuous maturation and her transformation from childhood to adolescence. Under the great changes in life, little Yingzi, with her childlike innocence intact, gradually but inevitably grows into a mature and sensible child [2]. As the theme of parting suggests, growing up means constantly saying goodbye. Through one farewell after another, Yingzi welcomes her own growth.

3. The emotion of nostalgia

Nostalgia serves as the underlying tone of the book *Memories of Peking, South Side Story*. The author, Lin Haiyin, lived in Beijing from the age of five to thirty—twenty-five years in total—spanning her childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. Emotionally, she naturally carries a deep sense of nostalgia. The Chunshu Hutong, Liangjiayuan, the courtyard houses in the south of Beijing, the street performers she remembered, and the oleander flowers planted by her father—these childhood sights and sounds provided Lin Haiyin with an inexhaustible source of inspiration for her writing [3]. In the book, through the child's perspective of little Yingzi, even in that turbulent era, people can still discover the subtle changes in life and the world around them. These are details that can only be captured from a child's point of view [1]. The folk customs and local traditions of Beijing depicted in the book all express the author's deep attachment to her homeland. Little Yingzi's favorite snacks—Lüdagun'er, Bazhenmei, and Gualuozaos—delicately convey the emotion of nostalgia from a sensory perspective. Through the child's narrative perspective, the book takes the most subtle aspects of daily life as its entry point for writing, expressing the purest and most sincere nostalgic feelings with an innocent and carefree outlook. This approach shortens the distance between the text and readers, evoking a strong sense of resonance.

4. The glimmer of childhood life

4.1. The warmth in the hustle and bustle of everyday life

In *Memories of Peking, South Side Story*, Yingzi's childhood is filled with the warmth of everyday life. The affection of family and friends nourishes her growth and daily experiences. Song Ma, as Yingzi's wet nurse, does not merely fulfill her duties as a hired helper; in fact, she holds a deeply caring heart for Yingzi's entire family and becomes a gentle companion throughout Yingzi's childhood. She often uses her rough hands to comb Yingzi's hair, tells her stories about the countryside, and takes meticulous care of her. When she learns of the tragic death of her own son, she suppresses her grief and continues to look after Yingzi's family—even on the morning of her departure, she still combs Yingzi's hair. This is a love that is deep, restrained, and quietly enduring [4]. Through the child narrative perspective, *Memories of Peking, South Side Story* portrays Song Ma in Yingzi's own voice, expressing the warmth inherent in that perspective. The appearance of Aunt Lanyin brings an unusual touch of color to Yingzi's home. Not only does she win Yingzi's affection through her gentleness and beauty, but she also sets an image of a new, independent woman for Yingzi through her resilience and self-reliance. The bond she forms with Yingzi develops into a deep friendship that transcends age [5], adding a particularly bright hue to Yingzi's childhood. In this book, through the child's perspective of little Yingzi, her much-cherished childhood is depicted. With the child's words, sights, and experiences, a warm atmosphere is created, and the emotional expression is both natural and profound.

4.2. Echoes of childhood life

"Winter Sun, Childhood, Camel Caravan" — this segment, appearing as a short poem at the end of the book, delicately and concisely depicts a small episode from little Yingzi's childhood. The warm winter sun pours over the earth as the camel caravan walks slowly down the road, stopping in front of Yingzi's house, the camel bells ringing melodiously. Little Yingzi looks at them with curiosity, her heart filled with longing for the future [5]. This segment is not merely a simple portrayal of childhood life; it is also an echo of childhood life resonating from deep within the author's heart. Through the child's narrative perspective, it expresses a nostalgia for childhood, full of emotion and innocence, offering readers a comforting reading experience. The author Lin Haiyin, through the child's narrative perspective, depicts the old Beijing of the early 20th century through a child's eyes, bringing it to life with vivid detail.

5. Humanistic care from the child narrative perspective

From a child's perspective, there are no worldly prejudices or complex judgments. However, her perspective is limited, and she cannot comprehend the complexities of the adult world. In *Huian House*, the friendship between Yingzi and Xiuzhen, the so-called "madwoman," is undoubtedly the most touching. Due to social prejudice, Xiuzhen's mental instability labels her a "madwoman," and others keep their distance. But little Yingzi sees the gentleness and longing in her eyes [6]. Xiuzhen repeatedly murmurs about her lost daughter. Unlike the strange looks of others, little Yingzi listens patiently time and again, and even takes the initiative to help her search. When she learns that her playmate Niuer is actually Xiuzhen's long-lost daughter Xiaoguizi, she joyfully tries to reunite mother and daughter, completely unaware of the complexities and cruelties of the adult world. *Huian House* depicts this precious friendship through little Yingzi's child's perspective. This section

employs the narrative technique of blank-leaving from a child's perspective—the ultimate fate of Xiuzhen and her daughter is never revealed, and can only be pieced together from fragmented remarks by Song Ma and others. As a child, Yingzi's cognition is limited; she cannot understand the complex rules of the adult world. This internal logic of the child narrative perspective leads to a double concealment in the narration: the narrator's unawareness and the author's nondisclosure [7]. It is precisely this blank-leaving of the child perspective—without excessively revealing possible tragedies and filtering out the labels imposed by society—that manifests the emotional expression of humanistic care from the child narrative perspective.

6. Conclusion

This paper, taking *Memories of Peking, South Side Story* as an example, primarily explores emotional expression from the child narrative perspective. The child narrative perspective in *Memories of Peking, South Side Story*, with its pure and clear gaze, depicts the positive, loving side of society, breaking through the complexities of the adult perspective. In terms of emotional expression, the book is sincere and moving, offering a trace of purity amidst an anxious and complicated society. Furthermore, this paper focuses only on exploring emotional expression from the child narrative perspective in *Memories of Peking, South Side Story*. However, the book can also be examined from the perspectives of other characters to explore the emotional expressions of different individuals. Future research could also investigate the historical context of old Beijing in the twentieth century from the perspective of the social era.

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