

# *Discussion on the Literature of Female Image in Xia Yan's under the Eaves of Shanghai*

Qishan Zhang<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Tianjin,  
China

a. 1911511214@mail.sit.edu.cn

\*corresponding author

**Abstract:** Xia Yan's *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* describes the life of five tenants in an alley under the rainy weather in Shanghai in the early days of the Anti-Japanese War. It is Xia Yan's turning work in the 1930s and explores the prospect and hope of China's development from a small perspective into the social level. Among them, female image plays an important role. Their different identity background, thoughts and psychology, habits, emotional experiences, lifestyles, and social relations build the basic framework of the story and enrich the connotation of the story. Their shaping is more typical, echoing the repeated distinctive types of women in modern literature. The academic research on *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* is relatively abundant, but the research results on the female image in it are still rare. This paper mainly adopts the literature review method, combs and analyzes the related research in different periods according to the research content, summarizes the research experience, and puts forward the existing problems to lay the foundation for the following research on the female image in *Under the Eaves of Shanghai*.

**Keywords:** Xia Yan, *Under the Eaves of Shanghai*, Female image

## 1. Introduction

Xia Yan is a famous Chinese litterateur, film scriptwriter, drama writer, and social activist. *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* is one of his most important plays of the 1930s. It breaks through the original left-wing literary creation pattern, integrates realism and modernism, and writes about the sadness and joy of the little people buried in the corner of modern cities, as well as their dual dilemma of psychology and survival. The current academic research on *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* can be divided into five categories according to the research content: comparative research, realism, spatial construction, artistic techniques, and female images. At present, there are relatively few aspects of the female image in the relevant studies of *Under the Eaves of Shanghai*. Therefore, based on mastering the materials, this paper combs the relevant literature on studying the female image in *Under the Eaves of Shanghai*, hoping to gain new inspiration through accumulating experience. This paper tries to use the case study method and text close reading method to read and think deeply about the text and interpret the image building of female characters in the work. Taking "analysis of female image" as the main line, this paper analyzes the identity background, psychological, character, emotional life, and social relations of the characters. It explores the typicality of the female image in the text and the epochal nature of the female destiny. This will enrich the research results from the

perspective of the female image in *Under the Eaves of Shanghai*, supplement the shortcomings of previous studies, improve the research depth of Xia Yan's drama, expand the research space of the work, and provide references for future studies.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Current research

Xia Yan's *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* has been widely concerned since its publication, and the research results are quite rich. With the theme of "Under the Eaves of Shanghai," a total of 183 pieces of literature can be searched on CNKI, which can be roughly divided into five categories according to the research content:

#### 2.1.1. Comparative study

The comparative research results of *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* are abundant. Ren Dong's *Intertextuality Interpretation of "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [1] is developed from four aspects, comparing with Maupassant's *The Return* in terms of plot, with Nariyoshi Fujimori's *Light and Darkness* in the creation of the ending, with Gorky's *The Bottom* in terms of character description, and with Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in terms of artistic style. Based on the theory of intertextuality, the author analyzes the influence of other writers' works on Xia Yan's creation, which provides rich artistic resources for the study of *Under the Eaves of Shanghai*. Furthermore, by comparing the artistic styles of "Under the Eaves of Shanghai" and "The Cherry Orchard" [2], Chen Jian and Li Peiyuan summarize the common points of the two works, and expand them from the three aspects of simple and condensed narrative style, the structural art of shape dispersing but spirit concentrating, and the implicit and meaningful lyrical atmosphere. The simple and condensed narrative style lies in the simplicity of scene description, the disorder, and the implication of the characters' language. The structural art of shape dispersing but spirit concentrating is concentrated in the parallel structure of multiple lines, and the positive description often gives way to the technique of side description. The implicit and meaningful lyrical atmosphere is that the atmosphere is set off by the environment and sound, which is real and full of emotion. The researcher uses a large number of plot examples to prove his own point of view fully, points out the similarities and differences between Xia Yan and Chekhov's artistic styles and expression techniques, and clarifies the relationship between their inheritance and development. It's an excellent piece of work.

By comparing Xia Yan's *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* with Cao Yu's and Lao She's plays, Yang Yang in his *On Xia Yan's "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [3] points out the particularity of On Xia Yan's *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* as a drama with political intention and the fundamental reasons for its success and fully affirms the creative value of it. Duan Quanlin's *Seek Differences from Same Thing, Different Approaches but Equally Satisfactory Results: A Comparison of Structural Methods in "Sunrise", "Under the Eaves of Shanghai", and "TeaHouse"* [4] points out that the three plays all adopt the dramatic structure of cutting off the cross-section of life, but they are different in the arrangement of characters.

Starting from the "love triangle" of the dramatic plot, Yuan Guoxing compared the four works of Xu Zhuodai's *Hometown*, Xu Dishan's *Peach of Spring*, Xia Yan's *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* and Ba Jin's *Cold Night* in the article *Deconstruction of Home* [5], and explored the evolution of Chinese family concept in modern times through their similarities and differences. Well-reasoned and based on evidence. Li Deyou summed up the advantages and analyzed the similarities and differences of the two works in *the comparison of "Peach of Spring" and "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [6]. The characters of the two works are vivid and real. *Spring Peach* likes to express the characters' personalities with simple characters' language, while *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* uses delicate

brushstrokes to describe the psychological activities of the task. Both writers combine realism with freehand brushwork, which not only has a deep understanding of social reality, but also intends to create symbolic artistic conception. Although the outcome arrangement differs, there is also a high degree of similarity in the spatial and temporal structure and the structural treatment of external conflicts. Yuan Guoxing and Li Deyou's analysis is meticulous, starting from the general common points and comparing the similarities and differences step by step. From the broad to the narrow sense, from the shallow to the deep, to create excellent works in comparative research.

Such research results include Zhu Xixi's *"Cherry Orchard" to "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* -- on Chekhov's influence on Xia Yan [7] and Jin Mingquan's *On the Rational Color of Xia Yan and Nariyoshi Fujimori's Drama* [8], which are also extremely excellent works, and together with the above works, enrich the research in the comparative field of *Under the Eaves of Shanghai*. This kind of research is helpful to broaden the horizon and understand the artistic characteristics and advantages and disadvantages of the works more deeply.

### 2.1.2. Realism

As for the realistic study of *Under the Eaves of Shanghai*, there are not only an in-depth analysis of its realistic spirit but also an expose and regret of the inherent defects of the spirit of the work and the author's avoidance attitude caused by the limitations of the creative concept of the times. The former, such as Liu Shichen's *Exploration of Realism in Xia Yan's "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [9], expounds the spirit of realism and the development direction of poetics in work from the three aspects of "creative reflection and identity perspective", "aesthetic image and poetic tradition" and "life drama and creation paradigm". The latter, for example, *In Realism Under the Eaves: Re-reading Xia Yan's "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [10], Zhu Weibing criticizes Xia Yan for revealing the political dark curtain of reality but immediately retreating from it, setting up the ideal image of a revolutionary inheriting person but portraying her very flat, trying to cover up the unsolvable emotional problems with noble revolution, resulting in illogical of the character's actions, and so on flaw. He points out the inherent dilemma of the left-wing drama "socialist realism", which is to the point.

Such research results also include Chen Jun's *A Covered Tragedy: A Reinterpretation of "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [11], which reveals the tragedy hidden behind the ideal ending of the play and the tragedy itself of the author's act of covering up the tragedy of the story and causing the regret of the work. The study of realism in *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* not only sums up the development of realism in the play, but also makes an objective criticism and examination of it. It will help the creators and researchers to sum up and absorb the relevant experience of realism literature and promote the further development of realism literature in our country.

### 2.1.3. Spatial Construction

Chen Chuxiang's *Captive of Space: An Analysis of the Spatial Structure "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [12] traces back to the source, starting from the historical origin of the "lane house," analyzes the living conditions of the characters one by one and the promoting effect of the space setting on the development of the plot of the script based on the real architectural structure and the use function of each space. This study is rich in historical folklore knowledge and simple language, which essentially restores the historical reality and the author's creative conception and enables readers to have more profound thinking and interpretation of the text. In the same type of research, Song Jia's *Making a "Tao" Field in a Spiral Shell: A Review of the Construction of Theater Space "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [13], which analyzes the functions and effects of various Spaces in the performance process from the perspective of the spatial structure of stage sets. In addition, Zhang Jin and Zhang Huimin mentioned the abstract concept of space in their article *Daily Life and*

*Resistance Practice in Urban Space: Reinterpretation of the Connotation of Daily Life "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [14]. The story takes place in a small alley in the period of the Republic of China in Shanghai. Its narrow and closed reality space has made the intellectual's thought space infinitely enlarged, creating an "anti-space" artistic effect. At the same time, it shows the resistance of the small citizens and intellectuals to the oppressive social atmosphere and spiritual burden. The narrow artistic space of *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* carries the indomitable and great souls of the people in modern Chinese society, which makes the text have extremely powerful and profound artistic connotations.

This kind of research goes deep into the cultural and historical background of modern society to explore the meaning and connotation of the works and finds a new way to interpret the works from a unique perspective. The two-pronged approach is rich in content and helps readers to understand and think about the author's creative ideas.

#### 2.1.4. Artistic techniques

Yao Chengli's *The Montage Colors of Xia Yan's Drama* [15] and YanSu's *The Beginning and Classic of the Anti-Japanese War Drama: Xia Yan's "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [16] both point out that Xia Yan used montage techniques in the drama, on the one hand, the interweaving of time and space makes the drama full of tension, on the other hand, the parallel narrative of the primary and secondary lines of five families makes the plot more vivid. In addition, Yao Chengli believes that the open structure of Xia Yan's drama prose culture gives the drama a profound charm, and Yan Su agrees with Xia Yan's flexible use of the three unities. Both studies emphasize and analyze the important role of the montage technique in creating the text, which affects the creation structure of the drama and is a key artistic technique.

Liao Bin mentioned in *Tragicomedy of Social Life Under the Undercurrent of Ordinary Life: A Brief Discussion on the Unique Realistic Expression Technique "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [17] that Xia Yan abandoned the high-intensity drama conflict, diluted the plot, and restored the true face of life. It guides people to grasp the essence and development trend of life through the seemingly plain plot and the surface of daily life. Fang Weilin in *"Under the Eaves of Shanghai" in the desalting hyperplot system* [18] gives a more detailed elaboration of Xia Yan's unique desalting techniques and its role. They are divided into "diluted plot system", "diluted character system," and "diluted living atmosphere", and concise examples demonstrate their rationality. The three systematically constitute a "diluted super-plot system" with order and aesthetics, which hides deep meaning in the light atmosphere and adds aesthetic shock to the work. The researcher systematically explains his own views in an extremely logical language, which makes the reader's thoughts open. Zhu Yuncai's *Lyrical Atmosphere "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [19] discusses the causes of the gloomy lyrical atmosphere and emotional tone of the work from three aspects: the external creation background of the "low pressure" era, the characters' emotions distorted by the pressure of life, and the description of the oppressive environment under the rainy weather. Clear thinking, concise language. The results of the three studies mainly focus on the artistic technique of the author to dilute the plot and the special lyrical atmosphere caused by it. They all capture Xia Yan's unique creation in *Under the Eaves of Shanghai*, and are extremely logical and systematic in the discussion, which is three extremely excellent works.

The above studies complement each other, comprehensively analyze the artistic techniques used by the authors in the text, and basically cover the gaps in the study of artistic techniques in the text. This kind of research is helpful to enrich readers' understanding of the artistic methods of the works and to have a deeper and multi-faceted understanding.

### 2.1.5. Female image

In Gao Yuejuan's *Different Women in the Same Era: A Study on Female Images in Cao Yu and Xia Yan's Plays* [20], Fanyi and Yang Caiyu, Hua Jinzi and Mei Yi, Chen Bailu and Shi Xiaobao are compared and analyzed. However, she only evaluates characters in terms of traditional moral norms, ignoring the complexity of characters, times, and environments, which makes it difficult for me to agree with her views. Ji Wanru's *Exploration of Female Character Shaping in Xia Yan's Drama "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [21] profoundly analyzes and explores the text from three aspects: the realistic factors affecting Xia Yan's creation, the characteristics of female image shaping, and the influence of his female image shaping on the current playwright, then summarizes the characteristics and rules of creation. It has a unique style in studying female images *Under the Eaves of Shanghai*. Other studies mainly focus on the character and emotional analysis of specific female characters. For example, Zhang Jing's *A Woman Living Between the Cracks -- A Brief Analysis of the Character Image of Mrs. Zhao in "Under the Eaves of Shanghai"* [22] carefully interprets the character of Mrs. Zhao and points out the tragic causes of becoming the unkind characters but fails to investigate the epochal character and typicality of the image. There is also Wang Jinfei's *sorrow as a woman - in the comparison of "Under the Eaves of Shanghai" and "Top Women"* [23]. In the article, she uses the method to divide the female characters with similar characteristics in *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* and *Top Women* into three groups for comparative analysis. It shows the tragic fate that women will be oppressed no matter in the present or the future, whether by default or resistance, and shows the female characters' sorrow as women, but it still fails to explore the causes of their tragic fate deeply. This kind of research helps to change the perspective, find the neglected points in the previous texts, and understand the whole story of *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* more comprehensively and profoundly by taking women as the object of observation or the main body. At present, the analysis of female images in the work has not been deeply studied, which leaves a large space for the writing of this article.

Xia Yan does not describe the characters' spirit deeply but expresses the characters' thoughts, personalities and lots through external language, actions, and objective conditions, and constructs the characters' images from details. In addition, female images are essential in *Under the Eaves of Shanghai*. Their different origins, personalities, emotional experiences, lifestyles, social relations, and conflicts build the basic framework and enrich the connotation of the story. The current research on the female image mainly focuses on the character and emotional analysis of the characters, which is superficial. It should be combined with the historical background of the text and analyze the epochal character and typicality of their images from a broader perspective while analyzing the emotional character of the characters.

### 2.2. Summary

*Under the Eaves of Shanghai* was published in 1937 and had a history of more than 80 years. The research on it has not only a sizeable historical span but also a very wide variety of perspectives, including comparative studies, realism, spatial construction, artistic techniques, female images, and other aspects of the current research. Among them, the number of studies on female images is relatively small; the content is not deep enough, so there is a large room for expansion.

### 3. Conclusion

At present, the literature research on Xia Yan's *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* has five directions: comparative study, realism study, spatial construction study, artistic technique study, and female image study, and there are abundant research results in each direction. Only the female image

perspective of the research results is insufficient, the angle is single and not deep enough. This provides a lot of room for future research.

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