

Summary of Female History Research in Local Chronicles of Ming and Qing Dynasties

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Abstract

At present, the Chinese and foreign academic circles are very rich in the study of the history of women in The Ming and Qing Dynasties, mainly covering the following three categories: female chastity, female life, and the writing of female biographies in local Chronicles. Among them, the writing of female biographies in local Chronicles has become a hot topic in recent years. Researchers have analyzed various factors of writing female biographies in local Chronicles, which is expected to bring some new research orientation to the study of female history in Ming and Qing Dynasties.

Keywords

Ming and Qing Dynasties; History of Women; Female Biographies; Local Chronicles.

1. Introduction

In the Han Dynasty, Liu Xiang began to write biographies for specific female groups, which set a precedent for writing female history books. Later, the official history of all dynasties and local official documents also followed Liu's practice and inserted female history books in the documents[1]. So that our current study of women's history can explore the life of some women in the historical period through the texts written by traditional scholars. The female biographies that we can search for now mainly focus on the Ming and Qing dynasties, so the academic circle has the most abundant research results on the history of women in the Ming and Qing dynasties. This paper intends to collect and sort out three important issues in the academic research on women's history in the Ming and Qing dynasties.

2. Research of Female Chastity

The academic research on ancient Chinese women should originate from the May fourth Movement period. From the late Qing Dynasty to the "May 4th" New Culture Movement, due to the rise of the Western trend of thought, western female images were introduced to China. By contrast, Xu Tianxiao, an intellectual at that time, wrote the first general history of Chinese women -- *China women's new history*, in which he believed that Chinese women were full of backwardness and oppression[2]. In this era context, the idea of chastity harming women was strengthened by a group of male scholars. In 1928, Chen Dongyuan denounced in *The Life History of Chinese Women*: "The women of our history are only battered women; The history of our women's lives is but the history of battered women!" [3] Later, Wang Shunu, Liang Yizhen, Lv Chengzhi, Lv Simian and Chen Guyuan analyzed the unequal position of women in the historical development process from the perspectives of marriage, morality, literature and women's life respectively. These studies show that scholars' research on women's history catered to the realistic demand of social enlightenment and national salvation. The research of these early scholars was almost always based on the lie-nv data in the official history. Later, Dong Jiazun in the 40s and 50s, through the *ancient and modern book integration* of the number of lie-nv biography statistics, found that from the pre-Qin to the Song dynasty before the The widow only 92 people, and Song 152 people, the Ming Dynasty increased to 27141 people, Qing

dynasty there are 9482; Before Song Dynasty, there were 92 paragon of chastity, 122 in Song Dynasty, 8688 in Ming Dynasty and 2841 in Qing Dynasty. Accordingly, Dong believes that the Song Dynasty was the turning point of strengthening the concept of women's chastity, while the number of women's chasteness increased sharply in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and the wind of women's chasteness reached its peak in the Qing Dynasty[4].

After the reform and opening up, the academic exchanges at home and abroad have been further strengthened, and the western theories and methods of feminism and gender history have been introduced into China. Du Fangqin, a pioneer in the study of women's history in mainland China, took the lead in applying gender theory to the study of Chinese women's history, and made a local exploration of women's system and status in historical period, women's chastity and women's virtue in Ming and Qing Dynasties[5]. After that, Li Xiaojiang of Dalian Gender Center explained the gender theory, and she also did "Research on Chinese Women's War" by oral way, letting women speak for themselves[6]. This research has accumulated a large number of straightforward and simple oral materials of women, which are completely standing on women's standpoint, expressing women's views and recording women's life experience from women's perspective. And overseas scholars, Dorothy Ko, Mann Susan, Francesca Bray, Li Guotong from different angles, such as based on different historical materials, shows the diversification of women's lives in the Ming and Qing dynasties, they found that women living space in the Ming and Qing dynasties have a range of freedom in family, gradually broke through the Chen Dongyuan's "oppression" about the life of women in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Chinese scholars such as Wu Cuncun, Yi Ruolan and Song Lizhong also show the freedom of women's life at the bottom of society based on notes, novels and custom materials. Wang Yuesheng, Zhuang Dingyi and other scholars focused on the marriage of women in the Ming and Qing Dynasties based on archival materials. Therefore, after the reform and opening up, the study of women's history in the Ming and Qing Dynasties showed a trend of prosperity, and the selection of historical materials began to diversify, and the conclusions reached also broke through the "oppression theory" put forward by scholars during the May Fourth Period who concentrated on the study of official historical materials.

At this time, in the selection of historical materials, scholars also pay attention to a large number of local chronicles of the "lie-nv" materials, and apply these materials to their research. From the point of the existing research results, most of the research results regard the lie-nv biographies in local chronicles as historical materials, that is, the lie-nv biographies are often separated from local chronicles and used together with the female materials in official history, collection of scholars, notebooks and novels as historical materials for the study of various aspects of women in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Female historical materials in local chronicles as historical sources, scholars analyzed the concept of chastity, marriage, family, daily life, social relations and other aspects of women in Ming and Qing Dynasties. There is also a regional perspective to study the performance of women in different areas of Ming and Qing Dynasties in these aspects.

Among them, the research on the concept of chastity in Ming and Qing dynasties basically follows Chen Dongyuan's view. The representative research results, such as Guo Songyi, a scholar from mainland China, based on the data of chaste women in local Chronicles, found that the number of chaste women in Qing Dynasty was increasing, which was related to the positive representation and negative denigration of the unfaithful women by the state; Guo Songyi also paid attention to the marriage phenomenon of women in Qing Dynasty from political and economic perspectives[7]. Du Fangqin believed that virginity of women in Ming and Qing Dynasties were at their peak[8]. Wang Chuanman's *The Establishment, Evolution and Influence of The System of appraising for women's chastity* analyzes the relationship between the system of official appraising for Women's chastity and the view of women's chastity [9].

Fei Si-yan, a Taiwan scholar, pointed out that there was a gap between reality and record in the social phenomenon of chaste women in the Ming Dynasty. By examining the official history, scholarly anthology and some local chronicles, she found that in reality, the chastity were collective behaviors of women, and in record, the reason for the large-scale recording of chastity in the Ming Dynasty, is state appraisal system, scholars writing and social memory and there are three kinds of mechanism of high operation as a result, this led to the chastity idea of Ming dynasty in the "quantity" and "quality" has become strict [10]. An Bilian emphasizes that the promotion of system by the Ming Government is the main factor of the strengthening of chastity view, so even in the late Ming dynasty society appeared the women's liberation thoughts, the chastity idea still develops towards the extreme direction of religious [11]. After Zhang Bin cun observed from the perspective of the system, that women in Ming and Qing dynasties generally choose to preserve chastity after the death of her husband, is the rational choice in the widow's best interest, and the changes in the social and cultural environment made widows in Ming and Qing dynasties, more easy to preserve chastity, difficult to remarry [12]. Different from predecessors, Although Lu Weijing, an American scholar, also focused on the "chastity" of a large number of virgins in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, she believed that the chastity of virgins was an active choice of young women based on the influence of social system, moral responsibility, emotional attraction, religious belief and other factors. This refutes the view of many researchers since the beginning of the 20th century that young women in Ming and Qing Dynasties are silent and obedient victims, and declares that young women are actors of historical change [13]. The research is refreshing.

3. Research of Female Lives

The research on women's life has a wide range of contents, often combined with the analysis of widows, filial piety, chastity and other related aspects. Jonathan D. Spence, a American scholar, his book *The Death of Wang: The Fate of the Little Man Behind Big History* mainly takes *YanCheng County Annals* of Shandong province and novel notes as research materials. In the way of storytelling, the fate of wang, a local insignificant person, is narrated in the big historical background, showing the miserable life of widows in Shandong province [14]. Chen Sheng-yong made a special research on forced marriage and remarriage according to the biography of the lie-nv in the Local Chronicles of Ming Dynasty. He believed that in the Ming Dynasty when the concept of chastity was prevalent, widows remarried in the society was universal [15]. Tao Daoqiang and Liu Zhenggang's *a Brief Analysis of Widows' Life in The Ming and Qing Dynasties* mainly focuses on the lives of the lie-nv in local Chronicles and investigates the hard working widows' lives in Ming and Qing Dynasties [16]. Zhao Xiu-li 's doctoral thesis collected a lot of information about female loyalty and chastity, which were scattered in "characters", "the lie-nv biographies" and "Art and Literatures" of the local Chronicles, research the choice behavior of women in the "normal" and "abnormal" living environment in the Ming dynasty, she thought the influencing factors of female choice have the official education, scholars guide, place order and customs. However, she began to notice the oneness of female texts and the historical authenticity, and realized the gap between records and reality [17], but the authors do not delve into the factors that cause this gap.

In recent years, with the development of regional social history research, women's life in the region has also received corresponding academic attention, the eyes of many scholars at home and abroad began to focused on every aspect of women life in different regional social, there are the representative scholars such as A Feng, li Bozhong, Liu Jieting, Lv Lizhong, Shen Haimei, Zhuo Yiwen, Xie Zhongguang, Lian Ruizhi, etc. They respectively pay attention to women's life from the aspects of economy, law, education, literature, ethnicity and so on, showing the richness of women's life in the regional society, as well as the differences of women's life in

different regions. There are also numerous journal articles on women's life in regional societies. The issue of female chastity also continues to receive the most attention and results. For example, the study of Huizhou area has Wang Chuan-man's *Study on the Subjective Factors of Huizhou Women's Mass Chastity in Ming and Qing Dynasties*, [18] Hu Hai, *The Family Role and Status of Huizhou Merchant Women in Ming and Qing Dynasties* [19], and so on. The study of Shandong area has Qin Xiao-mei's *An Analysis of The Ethical Concepts of Shandong Women in the Late Qing Dynasty--Based on the < Lie-nv Biographies > in local Chronicles* [20]; Qi Shan's *The View of Chastity of Women in Qing Dynasty from Concubines in Local Chronicles -- A Case study of <Dongchang Prefecture Annals> in Jiaqing of Qing Dynasty* [21], etc. Research in other areas, such as the discussion of women in Gansu, Shanxi, etc., also has a small number of papers. Shen Haimei's *Women in the Mainstream of Marginal Culture -- Lie-nv Groups in Yunnan in Ming and Qing Dynasties* [22], Cheng Fang and Ma Xiaoxue's *Marriage and Fertility Status of Shandong Women in the Qing Dynasty* [23], they pay attention to regional women's social status, marriage and childbearing situation, their research content are quite deep. In recent years, there have been a lot of master's theses: such as Pan Dali's *Glimmering Light: A Study of lie-nv in Wuchang Prefecture in the Late Qing Dynasty* [24]. Wei Liu's *On the Role of Lie-nv Groups in Fuzhou Prefecture in Qing Dynasty-- A Historical Analysis Based on Local Chronicles* [25], Wang Zhiyue's *On Textual Research of <Guizhou Annals-the Lie-nv Biographies> in Qianlong* [26], Zhang Xiaomei's *An Analysis of Lie-nv in Quanzhou Prefecture in early Qing Dynasty* [27], and so on. These master's theses from the social background of the topic, are more focused on the type of lie-nv in local Chronicles, role, family life, social impression, social relations and other aspects, the depth of the study is still very short. However, it can be seen from the study of women in these regions that the academic circle began to use a large number of lie-nv's materials in local Chronicles to discuss the life of women in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Scholars not only took the lie-nv's biographies in local Chronicles as the main historical materials, but even took lie-nv in local Chronicles as the research object to analyze all aspects of women's life in the Regional society of the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

It is worth mentioning that in the study of women in Lingnan Region of China, Helen Siu, a American scholar, paid attention to exploring the origin of women's resistance to marriage in Lingnan region from the perspective of regional traditional customs, indicating that customs and culture have a profound influence on women's life, and the study of women's history must be traced to the source [28]. As for the traditional lingnan women, Liu Zhenggang and Qiao Yuhong pointed out in their paper *the legend of virgin and the reshaping of women's image in the ming-qing dynasties* that the women in the Pearl River Delta revealed in the Literature of the Song Dynasty mostly appeared as strong images, which completely deviated from the ideal standards of "tenderness" and "weakness" in the discourse of Confucian scholars and officials [29]. In the eyes of scholars in Song Dynasty, the traditional gender image of Lingnan was "women are strong, men are weak". And Wei Xia's *Resistance in Tradition -- An Analysis of Guangdong Women's Roles in The Early Qing Dynasty* [30], Luo Yu's *Studies on Women in Social Economy of Hainan in Ming and Qing Dynasties* [31], Han Jian's *An Analysis of Women's Economic Rights and Interests in Guangdong in Qing Dynasty* [32], Xia Kun's *A study on maids in Guangzhou in late Qing Dynasty* [33] and other studies, they have shown that lingnan women still work both at home and abroad, and participate in economic work, until the late Qing dynasty. They play an important role in the society, family and economic life and make different contributions to the society and family. From this point of view, in the Lingnan society from the Qin and Han dynasties to the late Qing Dynasty, the Confucian ethics advocated the principle of gender between men and women, which did not seem to play a very restrictive role. However, the chaste and filial women appeared in lingnan area in different periods, Liu Zhiwei [34], Liu Zhenggang [35] and other scholars focused on analyzing how the Guangdong scholars, under the influence of the central Plains traditional culture, reformed the fierce image of women in the

Pearl River Delta during the Tang and Song dynasties in accordance with the requirements of Confucian orthodox culture, so as to gradually bring Guangdong women into the ranks of Confucian orthodox chastity and filial piety. Qiao Yuhong discussed how the female image changed from the historical process of lingnan society[36]. These studies have analyzed the evolution of female images in Lingnan area from the perspective of writers.

4. The Writing of Female Biographies in Local Chronicles

The above mentioned studies, whether national or regional, most of the women's materials were obtained from local Chronicles, focusing on the female images, behavior and life revealed in female biographies. Usually, there is no difference between "writing" and "fact" in the biography, and little analysis is made on how the editor compiled local Chronicles and wrote female biographies, and the correlation between the writing of female biographies and the development of female history, and the characteristics of The Times when female biographies were written. Of course, some scholars, such as Fei Siyan, An Bilian and Wang Chuanman, have also noticed the factors of the times that caused the writing of these lie-nv biographies, but they have ignored other factors that influenced the writing of lie-nv biographies, such as the desire of writers, the tradition and style of writing, etc. Therefore, there are few studies on the background, writing mechanism and the relationship between female biographies and historical development.

As a matter of fact, with the development of regional social history research, it has almost become a fashion for scholars to study regional society by using local Chronicles data of Ming and Qing Dynasties. Some scholars have begun to pay attention to the generation process of local Chronicles data, and then discuss the gap between "writing" and "fact" of local Chronicles texts[37]. As far as female biographies are concerned, Fei Si-yan pointed out that there is a gap between the content of written female biographies and the facts, but she did not mention the specific writing process of female biographies, nor did she distinguish the stylistic differences of female biographies. Later, the academic circles have studied the issue of lie-nv writing in local Chronicles. For example, Hou Jie and Chen Wenjun began to interpret how did the local Chronicles of North China write about local women from the perspective of gender, and explored the gender concept of local Chronicles editors[38]. Liu Jia's paper began to investigate the distribution and regional differences of lie-nv groups in local Chronicles in Taiwan in the Qing Dynasty from the compilation of local Chronicles, the inclusion of lie-nv in local Chronicles, and the implementation of the honor system[39]. Lu Ning and Ma Jianmin's paper investigated the situation of lie-nv and the honor of lie-nv in the five local chronicles of Ningxia in Ming Dynasty. Their paper also touched on the subtle relationship between the compilation of local chronicles and lie-nv writing[40].

In the past two years, Liu Zhenggang, a scholar, taking the "speech" written in the lie-nv biographies of Guangdong local Chronicles as the object of investigation, analyzed the editor's "speech" written on women who died in social turmoil. He found that the "speech" written by the editor about women who lived in different times, different regions and different classes showed modeled characteristics, and then proposed that the "speech" written by the editor of local Chronicles had imaginary or fictitious contents. He believed that this was caused by the editor of local Chronicles deliberate propagandizing the Confucian concept of "loyalty, filial piety and loyalty"[41]. And Du Yunnan, Liu Zhenggang once observed the "speech" of sutter female, they found that sutter female "speech" written by local chronicle editors also had the characteristics of modeling, virtual and imagination[42]. These papers began to focus on how local chronicle editors wrote the female biographies, realizing the difference between "writing" and "fact". However, few scholars have systematically discussed the generation and materials of the lie-nv in local Chronicles, the evolution of the biographies of the same women in different

periods, and the relationship between the editors of local chronicles and the women's biographies.

5. Conclusion

In a word, the research on the lie-nv in Local Chronicles is Basically based on the lie-nv in Local Chronicles as the source of historical data, and the research on chastity view, marriage, life and other aspects of women in the Ming and Qing Dynasties is the majority. However, most of the research results of local Chronicles' lie-nv biographies only focus on the classification and analysis of their images, types of moral deeds and family roles, and few of them discuss the generation and evolution of lie-nv biographies in local Chronicle from the relationship between local chronicle editors and lie-nv biographies. Therefore, it will be a new research orientation to explore the process of female biographies being written and constructed as "historical data texts".

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