



The Image of “Chinese Girl” in Japanese War Literature: Taking Tatsuzo Ishikawa, Ashihei Hino and Hiroshi Ueda as examples

Yang Wang

Ritsumeikan University, Japan, 6038577

Abstract: Taking the representatives of Japanese war literature during the Anti-Japanese War as examples, and combining gender studies and analysis on post-colonialism and text, this paper interprets the images of “Chinese girl” in Tatsuzo Ishikawa’s *Soldiers Alive*, Ashihei Hino’s *Hana to Heitai* and Hiroshi Ueda’s *Koujin*. The sexual violence suffered by Chinese women revealed in *Soldiers Alive* has brought trouble to the writer, while Ashihei Hino was warned by the army department about the description of Chinese women in *Hana to Heitai*, in which the communication and love between the Japanese army and local women shown coincide with the Japanese policy of “propaganda and comfort”. Hiroshi Ueda is a famous “soldier writer” as Ashihei Hino. In his war novel *Koujin*, Chinese women are also portrayed as being full of “smiles” and kindness to Japanese soldiers. So Chinese women in the Anti-Japanese War were deprived of their national consciousness, thought and resistance, thus becoming “others” without any threat.

Keywords: War Literature; Girls; Sexual Violence; Chinese Women

After the Lugouqiao Incident, Japanese scholars went to the Chinese battlefield one after another either as military reporters or as front-line soldiers. With the publication of the reportage and diary based on their battlefield experience, “war literature” has finally been established as a literary category in Japan. At the mention of the representatives of Japanese war literature writers during the Anti-Japanese War, most readers will surely think of Tatsuzo Ishikawa, who was convicted for his novel *Soldiers Alive*, and Ashihei Hino, who is in sharp contrast to the former and has become famous for his three novels about soldiers. In addition, who cannot be ignored is Hiroshi Ueda, who is also known as “two stars of soldier writers” with Hino.

There are abundant previous studies on the above three writers and their representative works, most of which are focused on the Japanese soldiers in the works, while the Chinese, especially the Chinese women, who also appear in the text, have not received sufficient attention from scholars. However, the author believes that this is precisely the most unavoidable issue in the study of war literature. As Li Yannan pointed out, in the Japanese war literature with China as the scene during the Anti-Japanese War, the “Chinese” are often distorted as absolute “objects” and “others” under the domination of the imperialist ideology inherent in general Japanese writers^[1]. Especially, as the “object”, Chinese women had to suffer not only the same life risk as Chinese men, but also sexual violence from Japanese soldiers. Therefore, avoiding the discussion of the double victim, Chinese women in war literature is a “perennial problem” of Japanese war literature research. The author believes that only after carefully examining the image of Chinese women can the essence of Japanese war literature be grasped more accurately. Since the war literature in a broad sense covers too wide a range, this paper will focus on the war literature during the Anti-Japanese War, discussing the images of Chinese women in Tatsuzo Ishikawa’s *Soldiers Alive*, Ashihei Hino’s *Hana to Heitai* and Hiroshi Ueda’s *Koujin*. In addition, it will analyze the fictionality of the works and the authors’ understanding of the war based on relevant historical materials.

1. The “Chinese girl” as a war victim

Copyright © 2020 Yang Wang

doi:10.18282/le.v9i5.1205

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

As for the reason why *Soldiers Alive* is banned from sale, Noritsugu Gomibuchi pointed out in his book *Seductive Literature: Speakers of the Sino-Japanese War* (2018) that the author of *The Police Newspaper* (No.111, February 1938) listed a number of charges including “it is deeply cruel by depicting the Japanese soldiers killing enemy combatants and non-combatants wantonly” and “depicting the scenes of Japanese soldiers violence against Chinese women in order to satisfy sexual desire”. The above two charges refer to the following circumstances.

“Hello! Girl,” a soldier said with a malicious smile. ... Her swollen chest, which heaved with heavy breathing, clearly caught the eyes of the four soldiers. At the moment, they felt a manic passion, a wild impulse to do everything possible to bully this rebellious woman. ... Other soldiers tore her underwear. In an instant, the woman’s white body was suddenly exposed naked in front of them, blinding them so much that they could hardly face it. ... Private first class Kondo handed the gun with his left hand and pulled out the dagger at his waist, then slowly rode on the naked woman, who closed her eyes. In a moment when he looked down to the woman, a strong emotion welled up in his mind again, which was an inexplicable anger or sexual desire, as if it were an impulse from the depths of the abdominal cavity. Silently, he raised the dagger in his right hand and stuck it into the woman’s breast. The snow-white body moved almost like bounce. Grasping the dagger with both hands, she groaned in pain, struggling hard like a sampled mantis suppressed by thumbtacks, and soon became still^[2].

The above quotation is a special scene describing Japanese soldiers abusing and killing Chinese women, which rarely appeared in Japanese literature during the Anti-Japanese War. The “girl” at the beginning of the quotation is the “soldiers’ Chinese” formed along with the Japanese troops entering China in large numbers. At first, the word “girl” only refer to young Chinese women. However, just like the implied meaning in the quotation, it gradually became the substitution of “beautiful girl”, “hunting women”, and “rape” among the Japanese army, as Japanese army’s rape of local women became increasingly rampant after the Lugouqiao Incident. In another word, “girl” has gradually become a word full of sexual implications. In addition to the above quotation, the repeated plot of Japanese soldiers hunting “girls” in *Soldiers Alive* is the best evidence. On the other hand, the impulse of “an inexplicable anger or sexual desire” swelled in the chest of Private first class Kondo exactly shows the dual otherness of “Chinese girl”. She is not only the target of “anger”, the potential spy of “enemy country”, but also the target of “sexual desire” and sexual violence. The Japanese soldiers, who regarded Chinese life as worthless, then brutally killed the civilian “girl” who cried over her mother’s death. Tatsuzo Ishikawa was able to write such a thrilling novel just because he slept and ate with the lower-level soldiers who occupied and stationed Nanjing, and actively listened to their combat experiences, thus getting a glimpse of the true side of the war, which is full of blood and cruelty.

In addition, Tokushi Kasahara mentioned in *Japanese Army in Asia* (1994) that the Anti-Japanese War period was an era when Chinese women were constantly facing the danger of sexual violence and when a large number of women died for it. According to the historical data quoted by Kasahara in his other book, *A history of disputes over the Nanjing Massacre*, “many Chinese people who live in the suburban villages of Nanjing were killed by the Japanese invaders before they could take refuge”,—the above quotation happens to the countryside, on the way to Nanjing by the Japanese army, and women’s corpses with “breasts cut open, chests pierced and private parts naked” can be seen everywhere^[3]. As breast symbolizes the nurturing of new life, the act of “damaging breasts” is regarded as the symbol of gender discrimination and national conquest consciousness that is intended to cut off the “newly born” of Chinese. This record is also consistent with the plot of Kondo piercing the woman’s breast in the above quotation. It can be seen that the description on the scene of Japanese soldiers abusing and killing Chinese women in *Soldiers Alive* is true and typical.

However, the naked “authenticity” in *Soldiers Alive* enraged the Japanese army headquarters and led to a ban on sale. As a unique case since the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War, the “pen disaster incident” of Tatsuzo Ishikawa has warned other writers involved in war literature since then (at least until Japan’s defeat in 1945). Then, in the war literature whose “authenticity” is strictly controlled and concealed, the image of Chinese women has presented a completely different appearance.

2. “Pure love” and friendship

Contrary to the first Akutagawa Prize winner Tatsuzo Ishikawa, who encountered fatal failure in his writing career

due to the “pen disaster incident”, the sixth Akutagawa Prize winner Ashihei Hino has become a popular writer with his novel *Mugi to Heitai* set against the background of Xuzhou Battle. Taking this as an opportunity, Hino has published the same series of *Tsuchi to Heitai* and *Hana to Heitai*. In the novel *Hana to Heitai*, Hino described the love story of private first class Kawara and Yingying, a Chinese girl who was instigated by Kawara to fall off the donkey’s back and was injured—Kawara, who visited Yingying from time to time due to remorse, gradually fell in love with her. In addition to Yingying, Hino created characters of Chinese girls Yujin and Miaoyue, who always brought laughter to Japanese soldiers and later became nurses in a Japanese hospital, and Qinglian, who has an affair with “me”, the monitor.

As mentioned above, since the “pen disaster incident” caused by *Soldiers Alive*, the “prohibition of writing women” has become a strict rule stipulated by the army department. Clearing knowing this rule, Hino boldly created the above-mentioned female images with the lucky mentality of “trying to test the extent to which the communication and love between soldiers and local women prohibited by the orders in the review”. As expected, “the cables from the report department of the base camp pointed out that, ‘What’s the following story of Kawara and the girl named Yingying? If this question is not solved, you don’t have to write then. ... If this level of pure love will break the rules of censorship, then there’s no way to discuss in-depth issue between men and women. As a result, not only Kawara and Yingying, but also Qinglian and I gave up our relationship in halfway in *Soldiers Alive*. However, I have tried my best to express it within the scope available” (Volume II of *Selected Works of Ashihei Hino*, Sogensha; 1955). In other words, during the process of describing the communication and love between the Japanese soldiers and local women in Hangzhou, Hino had to be alert to the strict monitoring from the army department at any time. The suppression from the external environment, the special status as a soldier, the nationalism tendency accompanying it, and the lack of international perspective inevitably lead to the deviation of the image of Chinese between reality and that in *Hana to Heitai*. First of all, taking Yujin and Miaoyue as examples, these two “girls” are undoubtedly a spiritual comfort and a “doll” providing temporary happiness and relaxation for Japanese soldiers who are tired of daily exercises and guard. Praises such as “like a flower” and “a peerless beauty” describing their appearance are exactly what “Hana” really means in the title of the novel. Compared with them, Yingying does not have a single line, and description of her characters are extremely sketchy and vague. As for singer Qinglian, there is such a description in the novel.

When she began to tell the story of the past, she was full of vigor and vitality, as if lost herself in her own story. The elegance emanated from her self-cultivation has disappeared from that moment. Incredibly, she looks like a person who went back to ancient times.^[4]

In “my” opinion, Qianlian is a woman with modern culture but more Chinese classical and traditional temperament. Qinglian, who often walks along the West Lake with “me” and is familiar with the allusions of representative figures of the West Lake culture such as Su Dongpo and Su Xiaoxiao, is more like a female echoing the ethereal and elegant image of the West Lake.

As Ryuichi Narita pointed out in his discussion of the relationship between private first class Kawara and Yingying, “the group of Kawara/Yingying is exactly that of male invaders/female victims and is a typical composition of colonial rule” (Supplementary: how is “history” narrated—criticism of “national story” in 1930’s, 2010). By extending Narita’s claim again, it can be seen that the common ground of the above-mentioned Chinese female images is rooted in the asymmetric power relationship in the multiple binary oppositions of Japanese soldiers/local Chinese women = male/female, combatants/non-combatants, occupation/under occupation. In this asymmetrical power relationship, the Chinese women in *Hana to Heitai* are deprived of their reasonable self-consciousness, ethnic and national consciousness. Hideo Kobayashi, who went to Hangzhou to present Akutagawa Prize to Ashihei Hino, once clearly wrote that, “Hangzhou is the center of the Anti-Japanese War, with a large number of amazing air-raid shelters” (“Hangzhou”). In *Hana to Heitai*, the “anti-Japanese spirit” that Hideo Kobayashi felt in Hangzhou and the irrepressible fear of local Chinese women facing soldiers dressed in the uniform of the Japanese invading army are all replaced by friendship or “pure love” as Hino called it, which is totally incompatible with bloody battlefields. Different from the content of Chinese women being humiliated and killed in *Soldiers Alive*, the theme of *Hana to Heitai* is turned into friendship and warmth. However, in the same historical context, the opposite direction of extreme authenticity must be falsification and distortion to cover up the truth.

3. The constructed “smile”

While Ashihei Hino's *Mugi to Heitai* received rave reviews, Hiroshi Ueda was successfully famed as "two stars of soldier writers" with Hino through the war novel *Koujin*. Both of the two writers were not only soldiers sent to the Chinese front, but also keen on proletarian literature. In view of this, Hiroshi Ikeda believed that Hiroshi Ueda's literature, represented by *Koujin*, kept away from "literature simply supports war, militant nationalism and expressions of hatred". He also emphasized that the work was closely related to the past of Hiroshi Ueda as a proletarian literature writer (The perspective of "foreign lands": The colonial experience and literature). According to the author's opinion, the experience as a proletarian literature writer has only cultivated Hiroshi Ueda's concern for the public, but not given him the international sense of connection and macro perspective that a proletarian writer should possess. Moreover, this experience suffered from the erosion from nationalism. Such a strange collision made the characters he created incomplete and distorted.

Before analyzing the text of *Koujin*, it is necessary to sort out Ueda's military route in North China. From October 1937 to the spring of 1938, as a soldier of the 6th railway company, Ueda moved to the battlefield of the Zhengtai Railway in Shanxi Province and was responsible for the railway operation after the company occupied the it. Ueda himself clearly recorded at the end of *Koujin* that "in Showa 13 (that is 1938, noted by the author), in Lingshi, Shanxi Province". According to the author's investigation, the Zhengtai Railway at that time passed the following stations, namely Shijiazhuang, Huolu County, Jingxing County, Niangziguan, Yangquan, Shouyang County, Yuci County and Taiyuan from east to west, which are mentioned in *Koujin*. What still requires confirmation is what the Japanese army did along the Zhengtai Railway and at Lingshi mentioned at the end of *Koujin*. Relevant data collected by Tokushi Kasahara indicated that countless Chinese women were humiliated, raped and killed by Japanese army who carried out the policy of "Burn all, kill all and loot all" in the border region of Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei border region and Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan. Referring to Kasahara's investigation, from October 1937 to February 1938 during the composing of *Koujin*, there was a lot incident of abusing and mutilating Chinese women by Japanese soldiers in counties or villages along the Zhengtai Railway, including Shijiazhuang (October 1937), Jingxing (October 1937), Yuci of Shanxi Province (November 1937) and Lingshi (February 1938, which exactly matched with the time at the end of *Koujin*). For some details of the incident, Chen Xuqing's doctoral thesis "Memory of Heart: Suffering and Struggle—An Oral History of Anti-Japanese War in Shanin" (Zhejiang University; 2005). Although it is still impossible to determine whether the railway troops to which Ueda belongs were directly involved in the above-mentioned incident, it can be imagined that Ueda should at least have heard of it. However, even under such historical background, the text of *Koujin* is still trying to confuse right and wrong.

Peace once again filled the streets of Yangquan. ... Residents who were plundered wantonly by the remnant soldiers in the chaos of the war have strengthened their trust in the Japanese army. According to my familiar official in charge of propaganda and comfort, not only (residents, noted by the author) were robbed of things, but also many women were abused. Although I knew they were remnant soldiers who were extremely ungoverned in the war, I was still quite surprised by their unrestrained behavior.^[5]

To sum up, the material plunder and the abuse of women in Yangquan have all become the acts of the Chinese "remnant soldiers". Under this background, Jin Cuilin, an 18-year-old "girl" who was tricked to Shijiazhuang and became a prostitute, appeared at the beginning of the novel: she nervously inquired about the Japanese soldiers' methods of returning to Beijing, but she quickly got acquainted with them because of their "kindness" and "consideration". When she met "me" again later, "she cried with surprise and joy and hugged me tightly." Like the two sisters Yujin and Miaoyue in *Hana to Heitai*, Jin Cuilin's "smile" to me has been constantly featured and enlarged. In other words, the "girl" in *Koujin* not only lost the national consciousness and thought, but also the due hostility and fear to the Japanese soldiers were secretly exchanged and reconstructed into the goodwill and kindness implied by the stereotyping "smile". On the other hand, "my" attitude towards the "girl" is limited to superficial sympathy.

4. Conclusion

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir pointed out that, “women are the soul of family, and also the soul of a larger group of cities, counties or countries.” Therefore, “it is through women that foreigners try to possess the soul of a certain region.”^[6] This common symbol of women is becoming more and more obvious in the relationship between the two sides of the war. In the Anti-Japanese War, the asymmetrical antithesis composition of Japanese male soldiers/local “girls” = conquer/be conquered is self-evident. Tatsuzo Ishikawa showed the violence and cruelty in this antithesis composition to the readers in *Soldiers Alive* instantly and frankly. While highly praised by contemporary Chinese intellectuals, the authenticity in the whole text has caused dissatisfaction of the Japanese government and brought disaster to the writer himself.

In sharp contrast to Tatsuzo Ishikawa, who was in deep trouble because of his portrayal of Chinese people being tortured and killed, Ashihei Hino has attracted much attention for his description of Japanese soldiers being plain and strong in *Mugi to Heitai*. The success of *Mugi to Heitai* stimulated Hino’s enthusiasm for creation, so he was eager to try the female descriptions banned by the Japanese army headquarters, but was warned during the creation process. *Hana to Heitai* was completed under such a complicated background. This work, focused on the “long-distance love” in Japanese-occupied Hangzhou, presents the communication and love between the Japanese soldiers and local women, which coincides with the Japanese army’s policy of “propaganda and comfort”.

In the meanwhile, another “soldier writer” Hiroshi Ueda, who was also addicted to proletarian literature like Hino, published *Koujin*, a war novel with the background of the Zhengtai Railway. The same points of Hiroshi Ueda’s work with Hino’s *Hana to Heitai* is that not only has the fact of Chinese women being assaulted by Japanese soldiers in the war covered, but also their sense of identity and even the complex emotion to females from the aggressor country has weakened or obliterated. In other words, a reasonable range of thought and resistance of the Chinese women in the Anti-Japanese War has been completely removed, thus becoming the “other” who pose no threat to the Japanese soldiers in the works. This trend in Japanese war literature continued until the post-war period of freedom of speech.

Note: The Japanese documents cited in this paper are all translated by the author.

References

1. Li Yannan. The “Chinese image” in modern Japanese literature [D]. Jinan University; 2005.
2. Tatsuzo Ishikawa. *Soldiers alive* (in Japanese). Tokyo: Kawade Shobo Shinsha; 1956.
3. Tokushi Kasahara. *A history of disputes over the Nanjing Massacre* (in Japanese). Iwanami Shoten; 1997.
4. Ashihei Hino. *Hana to Heitai: A record of police station in Hangzhou* (in Japanese). Social Criticism Publishing; 2013.
5. *War literature*. Toto-shobo; 1965.
6. Simone de Beauvoir. *The second sex* (Joint volume). Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House; 2014.