

The Predicament and Redemption of Motherhood in Chinese and Korean Movies

Taking "Lost, Found" and "Missing" as Examples

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Abstract—This study uses a feminist perspective to reflect on the predicament of motherhood/mother role in different social classes and cultural contexts in China and South Korea through the analysis of the mother role in "Lost, Found" and "Missing", and further ponder over the redemption road of women in contemporary social culture. According to the changes of social and economic development and gender ideology, mother image is divided into four types: "gentle mother", "scientific mother", "single-faced mother" and "autonomous mother". Based on this, two major kinds of mother role have been constructed in the films, and then explore the conflict between the four mother image values contained in it, and summarize it into the ubiquitous writing of the dilemma of different groups of mothers in modern society. The self-redemption and female mutual rescue presented in the film are not only the torture and reflection of mother's morality and survival predicament in the mainstream context, but also the imaginative performance index of women breaking the predicament, thus giving the film the symbolic value of contemporary social culture.

Keywords—*female film; motherhood; gentle mother; single-faced mother*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Chinese film "Lost, Found" and the Korean film "Missing" are based on the same script. The core story frame comes from a story about "finding", whether the straightforward "find you" appeal in Chinese film or the highlighted "missing" expression with suspense color in Korea film, its main dramatic structure is reflected in the suspense reasoning of the lost and find daughter in surface narrative and the traceability of the life of another woman in deep narrative. The double narrative structure creates a strong suspense of action and the watching drive for audience, and completing a female fate puzzle in a relatively concentrated time and space relationship. Both films use suspense type narratives, which are generally consistent in terms of character relationships, key scenes, narrative processes, and editing techniques. The detailed local creation based on the different social realities, cultural contexts, and aesthetic habits of the two countries constitutes the difference between the two films. The similar culture and value judgment of the East Asian cultural circle make the

cross-cultural comparison method not applicable to the comparative analysis of the two films, and the two films are juxtaposed under the feminist theme, analysis is used to draw helpless, confrontational, struggling, and persistent Mother image from different strata, regions, and cultural backgrounds, and then reflect on the predicament of the motherhood/mother role of contemporary Asian women. It becomes a symbolic symbol for understanding contemporary social culture, and it has humanistic care value and social practical significance.

II. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE "MOTHER" ROLE IN FEMALE FILM

Female film refers to a film that presents and reflects on women's living conditions from a female perspective and female psychology. The "mother" constructed in oriental female film is often used as an image being praised and become an ideal symbol of sacrifice, forbearance, compassion and romance in social culture. Feminism believes that the motherhood/mother role is constructed by history and society. How a woman to be as a mother is not just a biological natural behavior, but a common shape of mother's ideology created by social, economic, political, cultural, demographic, medical and other factors. Chinese scholar Tao Yanlan analyzed the image of mother constructed by the Western mass media and pointed out that with the changes in social economic development and gender ideology, the image of the ideal mother has gone through four stages: "Gentle mother" in the late 1880s in order to coordinate with the requirement of gender division of labor during the transitional period of capitalist industrialization; "Scientific mother" in the late 19th and early 20th century from traditional society to modern society which emphasizing medical and expert support; In the 1980s, women entered the labor market in large numbers, and the patriarchal society is also full of anxiety about women going out of the family while accept it unwillingly. In this period, the mass media popularized the "single-faced mother" of the duality of working mothers and full-time mothers; From the 1990s to the beginning of the 21st century, the "autonomous mother" which emphasize freedom, independence and autonomy began to enter the public field of vision. This kind of image construction supported by consumerism enabled

women not only to be allowed to pursue individual values, but also to pursue individual values. The "independent" image is based on family needs and satisfies the welfare of the child, the so-called "happy mother is the source of family happiness."

The above four mother images are the basis for the main female characters in the film. The "gentle mother" represented by Han Mei and Sun Fang has become the romantic ideal mother who gives support and comfort to the children through the whispering lullaby. At the same time, such a mother is subject to the backward economy and the times become the representative of the lower social stratum. The drama setting that contains the inevitability of social development has caused her to lose her autonomy as a mother. The traditional way of parenting is rejected by modern medicine, and "gentle mother" cannot become a "scientific mother" and can only resort to medical authority. The working mother represented by Zhiyuan and Li Jie is eager to become an "autonomous mother", but this self-selected paradox makes it impossible to present the image of the perfect integration of female value and parental responsibility, but can only be reduced to "single-faced mother" who struggled between life and work. The Chinese version of the film sets up another full-time mother role — Yu Min in order to highlight the female reflection, which constitutes another dimension of "single-faced mother". And they all face their own predicament in life.

III. THE PREDICAMENT OF GENTLE MOTHER: SUFFERING WOMAN AND BOTTOM WRITING

The suffering women who have been devastated by life for various reasons are a female image often written by the Oriental Screen. Women who are subject to economic impoverishment, class oppression, social discrimination, and family suppression, all kinds of pressure and destruction make their destiny to the extremely sadness and misery. But even so, they did not lose the kindness, integrity, and lenient heart. This is the common feature of the suffering female image in the Eastern films, and it is an important character pedigree in the creation of female-themed movies, such as Sun Fang in "Lost, Found" and Han Mei in "Missing".

The image of suffering women is often involved in all aspects of social life, showing the multifaceted destruction to women by society. In the film, Sun Fang and Han Mei enter the brothels to sell their bodies, and the motivation for planning revenge comes from sick children. In the Korean film international human trafficking, in the Chinese film the trading marriage in order to achieve the class flow, became the beginning of the female tragic fate. In the social culture of prefer sons to daughters, the sick daughter becomes a catalyst for magnifying female tragedies. At this time, the males in the family not only did not become the ideal father in traditional sense, not to mention a super-heroic all-around husband, the male even turned into an accomplice to destroy female and a destroyer of a young life. In the medical system symbolizing modern civilization, due to the inability to pay medical expenses, she was expelled from hospital. The social authority represented by the patriarchal power and the affluent class neglected the qualifications of the poor mother

and the plundering of living resources became the main driving force for Han Mei and Sun Fang against the pressure of the father.

The suffering women in the Eastern screen are not encouraged to fight against their fate. Although the female tragedy includes the class factor, it is more reflected in the social reality and individual destiny of sex discrimination and preferring sons to daughters in gender culture. The Vietnamese bride who has the similar mercenary marriage like Han Mei lives in a dull and smooth life because of her husband's care; Sun Fang's fellow villager also lived a simple ordinary life with her husband because she gave birth to a son. These two female characters are both important driving forces and narrators of the story development, but it is also a metaphor for the individual contingency of female tragic fate. The film does not deliberately reinforce the female tragedy caused by the class, but instead blame it for the injustice of fate. They have no way out and can only choose forbearance. The ultimate object of revenge can only be the husband who caused all these personal tragedies. In the Korean version, Han Mei killed her husband with the help of another man. In order to strengthen Sun Fang's tragic fate, the Chinese version set it as a humiliation-fighting-manslaughter. Killing a despicable husband adds the enjoyability to the film, and also it becomes an imaginary catharsis under the empathy of female tragedy. It can be said that in the narrative of suffering women, mother is placed in the interweaving of goodness and evil, hope and despair, and becomes a limited, helpless and traumatic social symbol of bottom society.

IV. THE PREDICAMENT OF SINGLE-FACED MOTHER: WORKING WOMEN OR HOUSEWIFE

Another representative female image portrayed in the film is the image of a middle-class working mother represented by Li Jie and Zhi Yuan, and this type of women has higher education background and a higher social status. They seem to have entered the male-controlled society and have achieved certain status, but still they have to endure the martyrdom and embarrassment from men. As a successful lawyer, Li Jie is a powerful women and professional success in Chinese society, but still she has to attend different business dinners and deal with the sexual harassment from male customers. As a TV program producer, Zhiyuan also has suffered from the blame of male bosses and grievances against female workers. Even when they lost their children and report the case to the police, the male policeman, who is the representative of the state's public authority, expressed dissatisfaction and disfigurement with women and their works. The Chinese police questioned why Li Jie report the case one day after the child was missing, and the South Korean police not only questioned the authenticity of Zhiyuan's report, but even showed a clear difference in attitude between Zhi Yuan and Zhi Yuan's husband. At this time, Li Jie and Zhi Yuan were helpless, their qualification as a mother was questioned, their success at work turned into a circumstantial evidence of women's dereliction of duty.

The difference between the two versions lies in the mother's role in the workplace — Zhi Yuan was portrayed as a TV programme producer, this professional setting is in line

with the national condition of developed TV entertainment industry in Korean, it is easier to arouse the public's recognition of this role. In Chinese version, Li Jie, played by Yao Chen, was portrayed as a lawyer which has more control power in the society, representing a successful working mother, thus eliciting a role in the narrative - the wife of her divorce agent, Zhu Min. Zhu Min has a high degree of education and returned to the family to become a housewife for the sake of children. This role has been set as a trapped image abandoned by her husband and denied by society. Responsible for family care work cannot be her female value which recognized by her husband and family, but it is difficult to step into the workplace again. Zhu Min and Li Jie are mutually distressed and together they wrote the dilemma of modern Chinese women between workplace and family.

Female individuals struggling in social and media discourse begin with the self-seeking for multi-faced mothers, but trapped in the social reality for single-faced mothers, they either focus on career, or return back to family, and they become the other shore in each other's imagination. The practical significance of the film is that the female images of Zhi Yuan, Li Jie and Zhu Min are more objective and authentic, and they are no longer the "mothers" in the media's imagination, but the real "mothers" in life. At this time, humanity and the power of morality can no longer solve their predicament. The single-faced mother's predicament can no longer be solved by simply "balancing family and work". The shaping of perfect mother like "hot mom" in the mass media simplifies the choice of mothers' dilemmas to easy and free personal choice, which actually ignores the struggle of the mother in a structural predicament.

V. MOTHER'S REDEMPTION: SELF-REDEMPTION AND FEMALE MUTUAL RESCUE

As a realist film that reflects on women's survival predicament, its significance is not only to show women's survival status in different stratum, but also to arouse the concern of women in society, to reconcile the contradiction between women's rights and motherhood myths, and to help women find correct and effective redemption road, so that to give women the courage and confidence to break through the predicament. From this perspective, the Korean version of the film "Missing" and the Chinese version of the film "Lost, Found" have a dual meaning similar to the film's narrative structure. "Missing" is not only the missing character in the narrative, but also the mother's psychological missing under the structural dilemma in society, missing the meaning of existence as a female individual, missing the value of the role as a mother carrying maternal love. The tracking narrative mode formed by "Lost, Found" not only expresses and satisfies the "purpose pursuit" instinct of human beings, but also represents the process of self-searching, searching for female destiny and female identity during the process of "daughter search". Whether it is Sun Fang and Han Mei who are the searching object, or Li Jie and Zhi Yuan who are the searching subject, the women at this time have got rid of the weak female identity of the traditional gender norms in obedience, resignation, and man-oriented. They have become a woman trying to grasp her own destiny. This courage and

motivation to break away from the traditional shackles come from the cultural discipline of "women are weak, but they will become strong once became a mother", and it also arises from the enlightenment and awakening of women's self-consciousness in modern society. Although this awakening may be accompanied by the pain of life and the regret of destruction, it is this pain that gives women the power of self-redemption.

Han Mei and Sun Fang gave up revenge and decided to take the children away and start their own life again, and then jumped into the sea after returning the children, pushing the tragedy effect of the film to the extreme, successfully completing the theme criticism of the film and the self-redemption of women. The sea has become a symbolic symbol of women returning to spiritual homes while expressing the strong accusation and condemnation of social reality. If kill her husband and steal other people's child embody the "evil" that a women have done under the despair and helplessness of losing her own child, then jumping into the sea as a symbolic signifier, reorganizes the ethical order of women as mothers, and completes the purification of character and self-redemption in moral sense through the aesthetic representation of the language of film picture. If the gentle mother represented by Han Mei and Sun Fang still need to rely on "self-sacrifice and dedication" to complete self-redemption, then Zhi Yuan and Li Jie, who have modern female character, finished their self-redemption through the awakening of female consciousness — Women can only rely on women to complete the rescue. Zhi Yuan rescued Han Mei after she jumped into the sea, and Li Jie helped Zhu Min to regain custody by giving up her defense.

VI. CONCLUSION

As a female-dominated film, it does not regulate female characters by shaping perfect all-round mothers, nor does it intend to morally criticize and accuse them through contradictions between full-time mothers and working mothers. The display of different social classes serves more of the ubiquitous writing of the dilemma of female group. Compared with the one-way expression of maternity love in the Korean version "Missing", the Chinese version "Lost, Found" adds a reflective female perspective, and through the final court statement, completes the interrogate and reflection of moral dilemma and survival of the mother in the mainstream context.

At the end of the film, both two films showed a positive warm ending. The Korean version showed a hug with mother and daughter in the warm sunshine, in the flashback of the Chinese version, Sun Fang sat under the sun-filled ginkgo tree, promises to her unborn baby: "Mom loves you, mom wants to give you all the best things!" The fixed lens visually strengthens the power of maternal love, and the luxuriant ginkgo tree in the ascending movement is a metaphor of vitality of maternal love. Although the film does not give a perfect solution in practical significance, the gentle, firm and confident female gesture gives a woman a free choice of liberalism with a generalized symbolic image.

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