

Analysis of the “Chinese-Nora” ——The Reason for the Chinese Women’s Social Plight

Shiyi Fan^{1,*}

¹Wuhan City College Faculty of Foreign Language, People’s Republican of China 241000

*Corresponding author. Email: gaoming@cas-harbour.org

ABSTRACT

The runaway woman has always been a classical literary theme. Song of Youth is a classical story about run-away women. However, it is not hard to find out that those women could be trapped in another plight when they left home from the story of Lin Daojing who is the heroine of Song of Youth.

This paper will analyze the reason that contributed to women’s after-home plight from an economic patriarchal structure perspective. This paper points out that the reason for the plight of run-away women is always related to the economic issues. Through analyzing the fiction text, the plight of run-away women is mainly caused by the existence of patriarchal relations in paid work.

Keywords: *Chinese literature, feminism, patriarchal, modern literature*

1. INTRODUCTION

Written by Yang Mo, a Chinese female writer, Song of Youth was first published in 1958 and adapted into the film in the following year. This is the story of the transformation of a young female intellectual----- Lin Daojing. The story was set in the 1930s. Lin was the daughter of a landlord but her mother was a poor tenant who was forced to be the concubine and committed suicide after giving birth. Lin was educated and influenced by the new ideas of the May 4th cultural movement, so she escaped from her family when her mother tried to force her to marry a rich bureaucrat. She encountered a young male college student named Yu Yongze. Yu possessed a strong sense of justice, like a young chevalier. Lin fell in love with him.

However, Lin found Yu was actually a hypocrite and he always tried to lock her in the kitchen after their marriage. Lin felt confused and at a loss. She was trapped in a difficult situation. In this bitter environment, Lin accidentally befriended a group of progressive youths. Among them, Lu Jiachuan, a communist, inspired her revolutionary spirit. After experiencing a series of things such as peasant struggles and being arrested and imprisoned, Lin Daojing grew from an ignorant intellectual to a revolutionary fighter. She was also realistic about her personal values. The story of Lin Daojing is actually a reflection of Yang Mo herself. It is not hard to find out that there are many

similarities between the author's experience and that of the heroine. This story, to some extent, epitomized the plight of a female intellectual in the 1930s. This research mainly focuses on the study of reasons that why left-home women are difficult to support themselves. The research will take the story of Lin Daojin as an example to analyze the reason from the perspective of patriarchal structure in society and hope this research could figure out the approach to solve the problem of women’s self-reliance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The previous research of the heroine mainly focuses on the aspects of an embodiment of Lin’s rebellious spirits and her female consciousness. The helplessness of females and the limits of time are also mentioned.

Xiang Yunfu and Tian Xiangbin analyzed the rebellious spirits of Lin Daojing from three aspects: the resistance and subversion of the centrality of male power, the deconstruction of male-centric discourse and the construction of a female discourse and the combination of personal and national liberation[1]. In their articles, the Subversive Path of Lin Daojing--An Interpretation of The Song of Youth from a Feminist Perspective, their systematically and chronically analyzed the resistance awareness of Lin. Lin Daojing's departure from home to pursue free love is a defense against feudal rituals. Leaving Yu Yongze is a rebellion

against the patriarchal view of the family. From being silent at the beginning to shouting slogans in the front section of the procession at the end, it is a deconstruction of the traditional image of women. In a word, they affirmed the defiant spirit of Lin Daojing and the path she had chosen.

Nevertheless, Guo Zhongyan and Xia Mingyan pointed out that Lin's choice was a desperate choice considering about the time she lived in their paper *A Brief Discussion of Lin Daojing's Feminine Consciousness in the Song of Youth* [2]. Lin made her choice out of the purpose of survival. In *Publicity and Depression*, they revealed that the experience of Lin is actually a presentation of The paradox of female subjectivity: Depression-Publicity-Depression. The first depression is her original family which presented feudalism. Her escape is an embodiment of Publicity and subjective awareness. Nevertheless, she fell into depression again after marrying Yu Yongze and encountering Lu Jiachuan and Jiang Hua. Marriage is a choice with no choice because she couldn't find a job in this society. Besides, Lin talked to the two communists with an attitude of admiration, effectively putting herself in a subordinate position. Also, the leading role of those two men is very obvious. Therefore, those two reckon that the sense of subjectivity of Lin Daojing is not yet well developed and is constrained by society.

This paper will further argue for the heroine's plight, focusing on the short-lived marriage of Lin and Yu. This paper will analyze the reasons that contributed to marriage and the imperfection subjectivity of Lin from an economic patriarchal structure perspective.

3. AN ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS BEHIND THE PLIGHT OF THE WOMAN

As a daughter of a landlord, Lin possessed the privilege of receiving education. Therefore, Lin was influenced by new ideas of the May Fourth Cultural Movement. She was actually a "New Woman" who dared to fight for her own freedom and rights. After the introduction of Ibsen's plays: *A Doll's House* on May 4th cultural movement, many young girls started to intimate Nora and escape their families for the rights of freedom of love. Lin was actually a Chinese Nora. She escaped from home because she didn't want to marry a rich bureaucrat as her mother wished. She tried to escape from the original family which followed the traditional patriarchal clan system. Lin also realized the importance of economic independence. When Yu held Lin's hands and proposed in the film, Lin rejected it politely. She said that she didn't want to marry so soon, she wanted to find a job and be an independent and free person instead of being subordinated. Economic independence is very important for women. It indirectly refers to the capability of production in a society. The second sex mentioned that the reason why a man can be

considered as an independent individual is that men are firstly regarded as producers who can work for the group. Their existence is justified by the work they did for society [3]

Therefore, housework chores within the family done by women cannot have the same function to justify the existence and the independence of women. So if women want to identify themselves as an individual instead of an appendage, they need to work. In conclusion, Lin's determination to find a job indicated her sense of independence.

Nonetheless, finding a job was not an easy thing for Lin Daojing. In the movie, we can find that she really had done everything she could. Lin even queued in the rain to get a job. She failed at last and there are three reasons.

The first reason is already presented in the movie: there were too many job seekers at that time. In a shot, the line of job seekers was even out the door and Lin had to give up after seeing such a long queue. The huge number of job seekers makes it more difficult for people to find a job.

The second reason is the existence of patriarchal relations in paid work. In the field of paid work, the most important specific aspect of patriarchal relations in industrialized modern countries is occupational segregation and it exists in every social structure [4]. Women have fewer job opportunities and they are excluded from better positions that are usually considered skillful and belong to men. This is because women are usually considered suitable for other less skilled jobs because men dominate women and they have the right to place and interpret women's value [5]. Men could perpetuate their economic advantages and the privilege of taking a better position by devaluing the women.

The third reason is not presented in the movie, but in the book, Lin found a job as a bookshop staff because of the introduction of her classmates. But she had to resign because of sexual harassment. So she had to give up and marry Yu Zongze. Though it was not an ideal choice, it could help her survive in such a society. That is why many women marry, they think they will benefit from it [4]. Even the author Yang Mo herself said it was the society that didn't give talented women jobs [4].

After the marriage, Lin found out that the prize of a guaranteed life is the loss of liberty. She even couldn't use the money to help poor people. When she tried to give money to poor tenants, she was scolded by Yu Yongze because she didn't earn any money. This plot also verifies the importance of working for women. Once women give up working, the chance to construct equal dignity [3]. Also, traditional marriage is also a kind of exploitation. Husbands possess wives' labor products which includes enfants and housework. New

born children are usually titled with father’s family name, not mother’s. However, wives are not rewarded with money, all they have just some empty praises like “a qualified wife or mother” [4]. Therefore, it is obvious that when women try to escape from the very first abyss which is a patriarchal family, they could hardly find a

job and support themselves because of the existence of patriarchal relations in paid work. Lastly, they will find themselves trapped in the family again and bear the suffering of another form of exploitation. It is a continuous tragedy.

Table 1 Gender differences in household work time in 1996 China[8]

1996 China						
Categories	Male (hour: minute)		Female (hour: minute)	Difference (hour: minute)	Percentage of males (%)	Percentage of females (%)
	Week average	1:24	2:16	0:52	38.18	61.82
Work days	1:02	1:47	0:45	36.69	63.31	
Rest days	2:21	3:29	1:08	40.29	59.71	

Table 2 Gender differences in household work time in 2016 China [8]

2016 China						
Categories	Male (hour: minute)		Female (hour: minute)	Difference (hour: minute)	Percentage of males (%)	Percentage of females (%)
	Week average	1:18	2:10	0:52	37.50	62.50
Work days	0:53	1:36	0:43	35.57	64.43	
Rest days	2:20	3:37	1:17	39.22	60.78	

Ironically, “New Woman” was firstly related to political issues in 1890s. However, it started to become a fashion icon not only in the western world but also in the east. In the U.S, new concepts like “flapper” emerged in the 1920s which referred to girls who worn short dresses and cut short hair [7]. In China, the concept of “new woman” was also be alienated. Though it did contain some political meaning, “new Woman” started to become a mode of fashion—young girls who wear Qipao with art-deco pattern and perm their short hair. Its interior meaning had been simplified. On the one hand, women could hardly find a decent job to support themselves. On the other hand, the image of women who brave strive for their political rights has been cured as young fashion women printed on the poster and become a fashion trend. Women not only have to suffer the exploitation of patriarchy but also the commercialization of the capital.

4. CONCLUSION

Overall, this paper analyzes the reason for the plight of “run-away” women. The conclusion is that though those women who have already realized the inequality between the two genders and the paternal control over them. Although they had courage to against the family which is a cage to imprison them, they could hardly find a position to support themselves in society due to the existence of patriarchal relation in paid work. Without the financial support, those women either go back home or be corrupted. The spirit of independence couldn’t save them without the financial support. Patriarchal structure in paid work is the reason why there are so many tragedies happened to those kinds of women. Future study could focus on how to solve the problem of patriarchal structure in paid work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Linzhen Wang. This paper could not be written without her teaching. What she had taught not only promotes me to think but also gives me the most precious inspiration to write this paper.

Besides, my gratitude would go to Ms. Sun and Ms. Han who give me valuable direction and opinions during the process of writing. This paper could not be finished without them.

Last but not the least, I want to thank to my parents who always support me and my friends Audrey who always offers her help. My family and friends have always helped me whenever I have been in trouble.

REFERENCES

- [1] Yunfu Xiang and Xiangbin Tian. ". Lin Daojing's Path of Subversion – An Interpretation of Song of Youth from a Feminist Perspective " Journal of Hubei Radio & Television University, Journal of Hubei Radio & Television University 2008(04): 57
- [2] Zhongyan Guo, and Mingyan Xia "Publicity and Repression—— A Brief Discussion of Lin Daojing's Feminine Consciousness in the Song of Youth " Legal System and Society Legal System and Society 2009(02): 300
- [3] De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Jonathan Cape, 1956: 416,461
- [4] Walby, Sylvia. "THEORISING PATRIARCHY." *Sociology*, Sage Publications, Ltd 1989(vol. 23, no. 2): 221, 222, 223
- [5] Beechey, Veronica. "On Patriarchy." *Feminist Review*, Sage Publications, Inc. 1979(no.3): 70
- [6] Yunchang Li. " Stories about my partner Yang Mo." *YanHuang ChunQiu YanHuang ChunQiu* 2002(07): 37.
- [7] Harris, Kristine. "The New Woman Incident: Cinema, Scandal, and Spectacle in 1935 Shanghai." *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*, edited by Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1997: 287
- [8] Tong Tian, Qiyang Wang and Jiajia Wei. "A study of gender differences in domestic work" *The World of Survey and Research The World of Survey and Research*2018(11): 6