

Analysis of Love in Chinese Culture from Movies *The Treatment and Saving Face*

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ABSTRACT

Bases on movies *The Treatment and Saving Face*, this paper mainly talks about love in Chinese culture from Chinese films. To be specific, it analyzes that how the uses and existences of elements of love, Chinese cultures and the environment with conflicts in culture can strengthen the power of love, which turns out to be heated topics in most Chinese movies. By working out characteristics of ways film shows love, directing movies with relative subjects can be easier for directors.

Keywords: *love, conflicts in cultures, Chinese culture, Ethnic Chinese*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Treatment talks about the misunderstanding caused by Chinese traditional treatment scrapping. Dennis Xu, the son of Datong Xu who lives in America and love this country very much, was found scar on his back. The scar was the result of scrapping, but was seen as the evidence of Dennis Xu's parents' long-term neglect and abuse because the Americans didn't know this treatment. Luckily, Datong Xu's friend John Quinlan finally discovered the innocuity of scrapping and made this film have a happy ending.

Before talking about *Saving Face*, the special concept of "face" in Chinese culture should be explained. It is the seeming dignity of someone, or human being's self-awareness or social evaluation of value factors such as identity, dignity, honor and external image price which is known from others. In *American Heritage Dictionary*, it is explained as "value or standing in the eyes of others; prestige" [1].

Saving Face talks about two love stories that were not recognized by other people. Wil was a young doctor who lived in Chinatown. One day when she came back home, Wil saw her mother Huilan Gao sitting outside her house. It turned out that Huilan Gao got pregnant but did not want to confess that a young man did that, so she was driven away from her home by his father who cared about his reputation. Wil also had a sensation that was not agreed by other people - to be specific, individuals in Chinatown. She lost her heart to the dancer Vivian but was not brave enough to keep her by

her side when Vivian's father told Wil that Vivian didn't want to go to Paris to seek for a better career because of Wil. Fortunately, both Wil and Huilan Gao gave up face and exposed their feelings to their true loves and this film had a happy ending.

Both film reveals the conflict in cultures between Americans and Chinese and the important role love plays Chinese culture. This paper will first give clear classifications and characteristics of aspects of this emotion showed in both films, then it is going to explain how love works in reconciling conflicts of cultures in both. After that, this paper will point out the benefits of directors of choosing these people as main characters.

This paper also points out how directors can take advantages of elements of love and Chinese culture to improve their movies.

2. LOVE IN FOREIGN LAND

Protagonists in both films belong to Chinese culture and lives in America and the protagonists all show love that carries strong Chinese characteristics. In addition, loves in these two films both collide with culture.

2.1. Classifications of love in two films

Saving Face shows inter-generational love and lesbian, while *The Treatment* reveals affection between family members. What is quite interesting is that, these two types of love sent and received completely different

attitudes from people who represent traditional Chinese culture.

In *Saving face*, these people are other older people who lives in Chinatown. It is shown that Chinese people have the strong mind of collectivism, as shown in the ancient Chinese Confucianism—it lays stress on people’s mutual relationship with in a group and claims that interpersonal ethic relationship which includes benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, faithfulness, loyalty and filial piety is the basis of organizing a whole country. These thoughts has penetrates in Chinese people’s life according to the general mode in Chinese culture, which includes the emotional dependence between each other [9]. This can explain why Chinese people, especially the older ones who are effected deeply by Chinese culture since a very young age, turns out to gather together in Chinatown. Unluckily, although assembling together bring them feelings of security, the influence of feudal thoughts coincides to become obvious. They showed clear discrimination toward woman who do not follow the feudal thoughts of ancient Chinese towards woman (Women are placed in a secondary place by default, the society treated them as men’s propositions since the very beginning, as shown in Chinese language [2]). As a result, part of women’s freedom is taken away since their birth. For example, some of their choices of pursuing a better life or emotional sense of belonging which shows the trace of independence are always being gossiped by others. There are many good cases in point in *Saving Face*. When these people knew Huilan Gao got pregnant, they couldnot stop talking behind Wil’s back and they isolated Huilan Gao by not coming to her party. Vivian’s mother had suffered from the similar pain. After she divorced, she didnot want to come outside because she was afraid to face other people’s bad words about her.

Saving Face criticized some bad aspects of Chinese culture, most of which are not advocated but hard to be eliminated from the older ones considering they are more affected by these cultures. Luckily, as our society progresses, these feudal thoughts are gradually being gave up. The lifting of Chinese women’s position can definitely show this. According to *Equal Development and Sharing: The Development and Progress of Women's Cause in new China in the Past 70 Years*, in 2018, women accounted for 22.2% of leading members in public institutions nationwide, 1.6% higher than in 2015. In 2018, women accounted for 27.2% of all Party members, 16.7% higher than in 1956. The proportion of women deputies to Party congresses has gradually increased, and women accounted for 24.2% of deputies to the 19th National Congress of the CPC, 14.9% higher than that in 1956 [3].

In *The Treatment*, these people are Xu’s family members, who showed affection toward their loved ones

and reacted to each other’s’ love. The most obvious sort of love is the affection between parents and children. In order to let their son Dennis Xu develop well in America, Datong Xu and his wife stopped using their mother language - Chinese since a long time ago. Moreover, in the last segment of the movie, Datong Xu climbed to the ninth floor outside the wall of his apartment just to send his son a Christmas present. The ties of kinship is highly supported by Chinese culture in this film. Datong Xu lied to the judge that he scrapped his son’s back in order to let his father live safely in America, and when his friend asked him the reason, Datong’s wife answered, “because he is a Chinese”.

There is one characteristic of Chinese culture - kinship is all-important. Chinese culture of Xiao (love towards the elderly) is quite impressive and this film talked not only about Xiao but also expanded it to the love between every family member. Due to this close bond, Datong’s father detected his son’s and daughter-in-law’s sadness and encouraged them to confess; due to this close bond, when Datong and his wife was trying to escape from their anxiety by getting drunk, Datong shouted to his wife when she degrades herself.

2.2. The role of love in the collision of cultures

In Xinhua Dictionary, love is explained as the deep sincere emotional power offered. It has been an attractive and profound topic in all art works. It works in many ways, which includes healing people who is mentally hurt, not only roles in those works but also audiences; leading individuals to a better life, not only the ones on the screens but also those ones in reality. For instance, the popular Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama’s art works is deeply influenced by the power of love and that’s why she has gained so much popularity. During her childhood, Yayoi Kusama suffered from her mother’s indifferent attitude and her father’s peek of sickness, both of which constructed a surrounding lack of love. As a result, Yayoi Kusama’s early art works are fulfilled by tense dots, which displays the explosion of love deficiency. Luckily, as time goes on, she receives both popularity and recognition from the crowd, so she felt love and actively spread this positive emotional power to the world by bright colors [4].

When it comes to the conflicts in culture, love becomes both the troublemaker and the cement according to these two films. It created emotional conflicts but at last made happy endings, the difference is in the process, caused by Chinese culture, as mentioned before.

In *Saving Face*, Lesbian and inter-generational loves are comparatively new thoughts and were not adapted quickly. However, as the protagonists finally made their

decision, they used love to fight against all opponents and they made it.

In *The Treatment*, the course is relatively smooth so the difficulty in accepting it did not exist. Those Chinese used love to cure each other and moved those foreigners.

3. AS FOREIGN CITIZENS IN CHINESE ORIGIN

3.1. Benefits of choosing this group of people in aspects of showing culture and love

Both films choose ethnic Chinese as main characters, who are placed in the conflicts between Chinese culture and American culture, which is always highly cared about because of the competition. It is both movies and other artworks to please their Chinese audience when this surrounding is chosen because they are able to satisfy some values of Chinese.

In *Saving Face*, the ending that both Wil and her mother got their loved ones win the favor of the youth who recognized the freedom of love. This wave is even heated in these years. Luckily, it is shown that Chinese society is more and more comprehensive to homosexual individuals. According to a research made by CCTV in 2008, 61.1% people showed the attitude of understanding and supporting [5]. As the internet penetration rate grows and the number of young people increases in this day and age [6], based on the theory that younger the people and higher the internet penetration, the more comprehensive attitude will be shown toward the homosexual groups, the data can be more optimistic today [7]. There is no doubt that family has always been a welcoming topic in China by most of Chinese, the director of *The Treatment* caught this selling point and made this movie successful even though some of its plots are considered unreasonable by some scholars. It is thought that the director utilized Chinese audiences' potential self-identity by Datong Xu's identity, and the ending is too rigid due to the ignorance of American culture's bright side - Datong Xu's guardianship was taken away because those Americans hoped to protect his child and they did not know Chinese traditional treatment scrapping. However, it is admitted that choosing ethnic Chinese as the main characters do have the cavity of attracting Chinese audiences' attention [8].

In an environment with culture conflicts, at least one of the cultures' characteristics will be shown clearly. In *Saving Face* it is the part of Chinese out-dated culture which is necessary to be criticized, including feudal spiteful criteria towards woman. While in *The Treatment*, the director shows Chinese special kinship within its culture. What is more, as the conflicts have become obvious in, for example, some characters' depressions, the power of love is strengthened. In *The Treatment*, the

director even use this method to highlight Chinese kinship again and moved audiences a lot.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper lays stress on love within Chinese culture which is shown in different forms by analyzing the movies *Saving Face* and *The Treatment*. It talks about different kinds of loves - inter generational love, lesbian (in the movie *Saving Face*) and affection between family members (in the movie *The Treatment*). Further more, it introduces and explains both reactions from the roles in films and audiences by showing their attitudes.

In addition, the benefits of choosing ethnic Chinese as main characters are mentioned. Bearing in a place with in cultures from China and foreign countries (America in *Saving Face* and *The Treatment*), this group of people is the best choice to show the differences in culture and the directors' attitude can be easily found, any of which will not be ignored.

The most obvious shortcoming is the lack of film references. *Saving Face* and *The Treatment* displayed two types of love that are radically different from each other. Kinship in *The Treatment* is an ancient affection between families which is widely supported, while lesbian and inter general love in *Saving Face* are comparative new concepts which have not totally become part of traditional affection in Chinese culture. This difference makes it easy to compare these elements in film, but hard to find their common points in the relationship with Chinese culture. In further researches, the writer will focus on more films about similar topics to work out accurate connections between them.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Mengyue Geng.

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