

Feminist Criticism in the Film Wild Goose Lake

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Abstract: The film *Wild Goose Lake* is one of recent fabulous Chinese art films. It mainly tells the story that, Zhou Zenong, played by Hu Ge, kills the police by mistake and sets off on the journey of escape from arrest under great reward. In order to let his wife get the reward, Zhou Zenong finally finishes his self-redemption by death. There are two major female images in the film. One is Liu Aiai, swimming companion who wants to help Zhou Zenong get the reward of 300,000 yuan, and the other is Yang Shujun, Zhou Zenong's wife. The swimming companion image is projected on the screen as a male "lust", while the wife, as a symbolism of stable family, is viewed as the "hope" in the patriarchal society. Men strive to gain the hope represented by women to complete self-redemption, which further reinforces the patriarchal society.

1. The Presentation of Female Images in the *Wild Goose Lake*

1.1. Female Image as "Hope"

“*Wild Goose Lake* is dominated by a male world, but the killing between men leads to death, and the seemingly weak and marginal women turn out to be hope in despair, which is the answer given by the male director.” [1] The first female image of "hope" in *Wild Goose Lake* is Zhou Zenong's wife Yang Shujun. When Zhou Zenong learns that he is wanted for killing a policeman by mistake and whistle-blower will receive a reward of 300,000 yuan, his first thought is to ask his wife to report him and then get the reward of 300,000 yuan. To his wife, Zhou Zenong is a man who has not been home for five years. Yang Shujun only verbally complains about Zhou Zenong, but still possesses feelings for him in her heart. She does not betray her husband as one party of the patriarchal society, but looks forward to meeting her husband. The image of Yang Shujun as a virtuous wife and mother is presented on the screen, and Zhou Zenong leaves the reward from his death to his wife and son, which is also reasonable for men's projection of hope to women under the patriarchal society.

The second female image as "hope" is swimming companion Liu Aiai in *Wild Goose Lake*. Due to various practical reasons, Zhou Zenong cannot directly meet his wife. It is through the help of swimming companion Liu Aiai that Zhou Zenong successfully sends word to his wife. However, because of the intensive police search and betrayal and contradiction of the small group of Zhou Zenong, his wife Yang Shujun cannot directly meet Zhou Zenong and report him. Liu Aiai finds Zhou Zenong with the elder brother Hua Hua's instructions, and helps him fulfill the wish. Zhou

Zenong does not believe the woman never seen before at first. After the two people review their previous behavior, and later have sex on the boat, Zhou Zenong gradually believes Liu Aiai and places his "hope" on her.

The two female characters in the film are images helping Zhou Zenong fulfill wish and achieve self-redemption. Among them, the wife Yang Shujun is a woman who strictly follows the rules of the patriarchal society. Although she hasn't seen her husband for a long time, she still independently takes care of her son and doesn't do any unethical things against the patriarchal morality. Swimming companion Liu Aiai is a humble woman under the oppression of male power, even having no freedom. In terms of identity, she is a "swimming companion" under the support of the elder brother Hua Hua, who is open to any man's choice. In terms of ability, Liu Aiai has no ability to defend her rights as a human being. In the film, she is sexually assaulted by a factory boss without the ability to fight back. Because Liu Aiai is at the bottom of the patriarchal society and is dominated by men, men in the deep complex relationship network find the easy manipulability of women, and entrust their own desires to women for fulfillment, thus building the fantasy female image of "hope" under the patriarchal society.

1.2. Images of "Wicked" Female

In the logic of patriarchal culture, those bringing social irrationality are "demons" and "femme fatales". While attracting men, these women also arouse men's anxiety. One way to eradicate the anxiety caused by women and further confirm the identity of male subjects is to beautify women's bodies, objectify women, and transform them into viewing objects and objects for lust projection. [2] In the *Wild Goose Lake*, the "wicked" female image is mainly swimming companion Liu Aiai. When his wife Yang Shujun first meets Zhou Zenong, she uses her mobile phone to report a group of men who help Zhou Zenong find her. Although the act is forced by the police, it actually reflects the "sin" of female. After Liu Aiai and Zhou Zenong establish trust, Zhou Zenong thinks she wants to help him, but encounters her betrayal, meets old enemy in the hotel, and is even injured by the coming police.

"Swimming companion" Liu Aiai's identity and occupation are confined to the projection of a certain lust. Such a quiet, silent woman who seems to have no resistance can not only arouse the desire of men to protect her, but also stimulate men to possess her. Such a perfect image has thrown the female image into hell from the very beginning. In addition, she cheats Zhou Zenong, thus completing the presentation of her "evil". "A lot of themes come with the swimming companion. On the one hand, the protagonist faces the test, lust, money, betrayal, fear, and on the other hand, there is a certain kind of dangerous romance." [3]

Regardless of Yang Shujun or Zhou Aiai, the source of "sin" is the oppression from the patriarchal society. When they can only obey to protect their own interests, they will be regarded by the audience as evil images tending to betray men. Such "wicked" ugly female images not only exist in the *Wild Goose Lake*, but also in Diao Yanan's other works. For example, in "Black Coal, Thin Ice", Wu Zhizhen, also played by Gui Lunmei, first kills her husband who has been controlling her, and then takes advantage of various men's covetousness to her body. Such a figure is retained in Diao Yanan's works.

There are also some other female images in the film. For example, after Liu Aiai receives care of her elder brother Hua Hua, other swimming companions verbally slander Zhou Aiai. Such swimming companion images are still portrayed as "wicked" female images.

2. The Presentation of Male Images in the *Wild Goose Lake*

2.1. "Noble" Shaping of Small Characters

In the film *Wild Goose Lake*, after learning that whistle-blower will get 300,000 yuan, Zhou Zenong first thinks of letting his wife Yang Shujun get the reward to compensate for his wrong doings to her and his son. "If I had known they were policemen, I would not have fired that shot," said Zhou Zenong. His confession also prompts him to start planning his death and think about how to make his death create the maximum value for his wife and son, so images of redemption are consecutively presented. [4] "For the audience, the first thing criminals usually think about is how to escape and save their lives, but Zhou Zenong is so unusual as to make such a 'noble' move. Therefore, his choice shows the transcendence in the protagonist spirit." "One of the most important turning points for Zhou Zenong is that after having sex with Zhou Aiai on the boat, he still chooses death, always wishing that his wife will report him and get a reward of 300,000 yuan." [5] "Sex (lust) can give people rich experiences. The first is to let people develop a kind of tenderness; the second is to let people acquire a new vitality of life, thereby obtaining proof of one's own existence..." [6]. "Zhou Zenong's superego state is reflected in that he wants his wife Yang Shujun to report him and get the reward of 300,000 yuan, so that he can make up for his wrong doing to his wife and son, thus redeeming his soul with his own death. This urgent need becomes the theme throughout the film, which also makes the superego infinite." [7] "Morality develops with the development of economy, and any viewpoint that abstractly talks about morality and its development law without the foundation of social economy is wrong." [8] From this perspective, Zhou Zenong, who keeps alive without serious ambition in a remote village in the city and walks in the bottom line of the law despite great risks, is a fragile survivor who only earns enough money to support himself, a person who lingers out at the bottom of the society amid the old and the new, and a deformed product of an unbalanced and inadequate social development process. [9] Zhou Zenong's dedication and sacrifice under such economic circumstances further highlight his noble side as a "small character".

Not only Zhou Zenong is a small character on the edge of society, but also a group of young people who survive by stealing motorcycle parts are portrayed. They lack higher education, have poor family status, live in the village in the city, have no moral concept, and only want to make money. "These small characters yearn for their own identity transformation, a breath of fresh air outside the gutter. Driven by this powerful desire, the intention of crime is aroused." [10] These people form cliques and have their own groups, among which conflicts inevitably arise, and conflicts are resolved by violence. Such a group of small characters are real. They are not as "noble" as Zhou Zenong, but they also have their own things to defend, which are just not revealed in the film. Other minor figures in the film are just instrumentally displayed. In order to reduce difficulties for Zhou Zenong's actions, there is not much description given to them. Such stereotypical figures are also shaped as accessories in the patriarchal society.

2.2. Guardian of the Patriarchal Social Order

The police in the film is undoubtedly the most loyal guardian of the patriarchal social order. After getting the news of arresting Zhou Zenong, a large number of police suddenly emerge in the area "within nobody's jurisdiction", and armed police even search the mountains. Elder Liu, one of the police representatives, achieves the purpose by cheating Zhou Zenong's wife Yang Shujun that Zhou Zenong has another woman, so that Yang Shujun can reveal Zhou Zenong's whereabouts. Zhou Zenong, in a sense, is also the guardian of the patriarchal order. After learning that he is convicted, he does not want to escape, but just wants to leave the 390,000 yuan reward to his wife

and son and receive the punishment of the social order in another way.

3. Conclusion

In summary, the characters in the *Wild Goose Lake*, including the female images dominated by Liu Aiai and Yang Shujun and the male images dominated by Zhou Zenong, are the products of the patriarchal culture. Although Liu Aiai, the "swimming companion", is a little more independent among her colleagues, she still makes money as swimming companion, and even betrays Zhou Zenong for many times. To portray women as femme fatale is the product of the patriarchal society. Liu Aiai is at the bottom of the society, who is not only oppressed by the male power, but also abused by her female colleagues. Liu Aiai has no freedom or ability to choose the life she wants. At the end of the film, after she reports Zhou Zenong and gets the 300,000 yuan reward, she gives the reward to Yang Shujun, Zhou Zenong's wife, and takes the initiative to make her own choice, thus completing the transformation from "femme fatale" to "good person" under men's gaze. The wife Yang Shujun always maintains the image of "a virtuous wife and mother". She not only believes in Zhou Zenong emotionally, but also works hard to earn a living with the son even after her husband Zhou's accident. In the logic of male power culture, Yang Shujun naturally becomes the only impetus for Zhou Zenong to seek self-redemption after breaking the law. Protagonist Zhou Zenong does not think of escape alone ever since the accidental killing of the police, but wants his wife and son to get the 300,000 year reward. Such lofty ideal is particularly noble for the thief leader Zhou Zenong. Finally, with Zhou Zenong's death, the film completes the male sacrifice and self-redemption in patriarchal culture.

As an excellent film noir, *Wild Goose Lake* implies the expression of gender power in its typed narrative, which reveals some realistic expression of gender difference from the film narrative. Under this realistic expression, the analysis from the perspective of feminism can let us more clearly and deeply see the current situation of women under the domination of the patriarchal society, understand our current situation and consider how to change the current situation.

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