

The Shaping of Women's Independent Images and Contemporary Social Needs from Where the Crawdads Sing

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Abstract. With the rise of the global feminist movement and the increasingly prominent issue of gender equality, the shaping of women's independent image has become an important theme in film and television works. At the same time, the transformation of female images in Asian films also reflects the deep social demand for gender equality. This paper takes the film *Where the Crawdads Sing* as the core research object, combined with Asian female-themed films, and adopts the method of text analysis and comparative research. Through the careful interpretation of the film plot, role shaping, and artistic techniques, combined with the theoretical framework of ecological feminism theory and social construction theory, it discusses the shaping of women's independent image and its relationship with the needs of contemporary society. This research shows that the rise of feminist films reflects the social demand for gender equality and female subjectivity. Such works are not only artistic expressions, but also catalysts for social change, providing women with multiple survival paradigms and value identity.

Keywords: Female independent image, Feminism, Female film

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the in-depth development of the global feminist movement, the creation of female images in film and television works has become an important issue in the academic community and mass culture research. Existing studies mainly focus on Western feminist film theory to explore the subjectivity of female characters in narration, the deconstruction of gender power, and the image expression of female perspective. However, most studies focus on a single cultural background, lack systematic comparison of the differences between Eastern and Western women's resistance strategies, and the correlation between social needs and film expression is weak. This paper adopts the methods of text analysis, comparative analysis and literature analysis. Taking the film *Where the Crawdads Sing* as the core case, combined with the Asian female theme film, this paper discusses the shaping mechanism of female independent image, the differences between eastern and western female resistance strategies, and the interaction between film expression and social needs.

This study aims to fill the gap of ecofeminism in film and television analysis and promote the dialogue of cross-cultural feminist theory. This paper reveals the catalytic effect of film and

television works on the innovation of gender concepts, and calls for more works reflecting the real plight and strength of women, so as to promote the public's reflection on structural oppression.

2. Background and main plot of the story

Where the Crawdads Sing is adapted from the bestselling novel of the same name by Delia Owens, telling the story of Kya Clark, a socially abandoned girl who lives and grows up alone in the depths of the swamp, and ultimately faces murder charges. The film portrays the story of a woman who, through her perspective, perseveres in extreme loneliness and oppression, seeks truth, and ultimately achieves freedom.

This is a film that includes many factors such as suspense, love, growth, humans and nature. It shows the power of women's independence, and sets the background of the story in the swamp. It is elaborated from a new perspective, which not only conforms to the current trend of the rise of feminism, but also combines human and nature.

3. The shaping of female power and independent images in where the crawdads sing

3.1. Metaphorical connection between nature and women

One of the core themes of the film is the symbiotic relationship between nature and women. Kya was abandoned by society, but she found her place in the swamp. The swamp is both her shelter and her teacher. She observed birds, insects and plants; learned the wisdom of survival from them; and even published her own biological album. This deep connection with nature symbolizes the untamed primitive power of women - she does not belong to any male or social norms, but is as gentle and dangerous as a swamp.

The film hinted more than once that Kya was the real murderer of Chase, as stated in the film that "the marsh knows all about death, and doesn't necessarily define it as tragedy. Certainly not a sin. It understands that every creature does what it must to survive. And that sometimes, for prey to live, its predator must die". Kya is the prey, Chase is the predator, and the prey ultimately kills the hunter. Although women and nature are both vulnerable groups, they still refuse to succumb to fate. The long-term oppression and exploitation of men and society will not make Kya lose her will to fight, but rather the savage and primitive nature of nature gives her the wild power to resist [1]. For Kya, if she does not fight back, she will be hunted. This is the law of nature.

3.2. Gender violence and resistance

Kya's growth has always been accompanied by violence. She once had a beautiful family, but her father's domestic violence forced her mother away, and her brother and sister fled one after another. Finally, her father abandoned her and left. As Kazuko Ueno said, the patriarchal family is characterized by "patriarchal domination and obedience of wife and children"[2]. She lived in a patriarchal family since childhood, and planted the seeds of resistance in Kya's heart. This is why she chose to fight back when she was subjected to sexual violence from her boyfriend Chase, and decided to plan the whole murder when she realized that Chase would keep pestering her. Kya learned not only survival skills, but also the cruel laws of nature in the swamp from childhood. Like swamp creatures, she fought for survival.

Arielsali believes that "the core concept of patriarchy is that men represent human beings and nature, while women, children and native animals and plants are only a part, subordinate and appendage of nature" [3]. As a girl growing up in the swamp, Kya tried to resist the idea that women

are subordinate to men with the laws she learned from nature. When Chase tried to invade her, she resisted violently; when the society tried her for her "wildness", she fought back with wisdom and silence. In the court play, Kya is not only being tried for murder, but also being tried by the society for "those who do not conform to female norms". The prosecution tried to portray her as a "crazy swamp witch", while the defense stressed her innocence and vulnerability. The trial revealed how society disciplined women through law and morality, especially those who refused to obey. Kya's final acquittal symbolizes women's victory over oppression.

3.3. Self-growth in loneliness

Kya grew up alone. She had lived alone in the swamp since childhood. Therefore, she was also regarded as an alien by the residents of the town. When she tried to go to school, she was excluded. She was abandoned by her family, even by her first love. In the absence of formal education and social guidance, Kya's growth depends entirely on nature and self-study. Instead of learning how to "be a good girl", she retained her wild, intuitive and independent thinking ability. This way of self-growth provides a new survival paradigm for modern women-even if they are not accepted by society, they can live their own values.

Because she lived in the wetland, she was pushed out from her childhood. Together with the wetland, Kya was labeled as an alien. If Kya is the embodiment of wetland, the prejudice people imposed on Kya is exactly what wetland nature looks like in human eyes [4]. When she stood in court to accept the charge of killing Chase, her defense lawyer pointed out the prejudice and exclusion of the town residents against Kya, and firmly refuted the fact that "she was just a girl who lived alone in the swamp since childhood". From the perspective of introspection, he tortured the souls of the townspeople: "We reject her because we think she is an alien".

3.4. Artistic techniques in films

Compared with literary works, the film art portrays and renders the character image from multiple angles and levels with the help of music, visual space and other elements, and by means of the combination of virtual reality, freehand brushwork and realism, giving the audience a wonderful and unique aesthetic experience [5].

The girl in the swamp is narrated in a flashback way. Starting from the "Chase's death case", it narrates in the first person through the tone of Kya, and integrates the specific trial process of the case into it through the way of narration, giving the audience a strong sense of "suspense". In terms of music, compared with other suspense films, the film does not use thriller pictures or nervous music to set off the atmosphere. Instead, it presents a unique audio-visual aesthetic effect by creating a fresh and natural literary atmosphere, relying on the tranquil scenery of swamps and wetlands, and with the help of ethereal music under the narration of lyrical tone. This unique narrative style not only expresses Kya Clark's unique personality more successfully, but also endows the film with a special aesthetic impression in the way of ecological aesthetics.

4. The rise of female power in Asian films

4.1. Transformation of Asian female image: from victim to leader

The female images in traditional Asian films are often portrayed as victims of family and society. They are either mothers who suffer silently, or infatuated women who sacrifice for love, or weak women who are subject to the patriarchal system. This image dominated the Asian screen for a long

time, reflecting the passive position of women in real society. However, in recent years, such images have changed.

For example, the Chinese film *Her Story* portrays a single mother Wangtiemei, which is different from the traditional film portraying the image of a suffering single mother, but portrays an "imperfect" mother image in a humorous way. The film points out the problems of today's society through the mouths of Wangtiemei and Xiaoye - the modern society always demands too much of women, hoping that they can achieve a perfect balance between career and family. As Wuxiaoying said, women "are expected to achieve the right balance between work and family, and are required to excel in both the public sphere of economic production and the private sphere of social reproduction" [6].

Similarly, India has seen many films depicting women's awakening. The identity tag of Indian women is to teach their children and work hard and frugally. They are as valuable property for men as houses, land and sheep [7]. In *Dangal*, the two daughters broke the typical fate of rural women in India by practicing wrestling. Wrestling, as a powerful sport, is almost monopolized by men in Indian culture. However, Gita and Barbita have won one wrestling gold medal after another through hard training, breaking the stereotype that "women are equal to weakness".

The female images in these films together constitute the picture of Asian new female films: they are no longer the object of narration or the object of salvation, but the protagonist of their own stories and the leader of their own destiny. This transformation is not only reflected in the change of their social status, but also in their inner world and the awakening of their subjective consciousness.

4.2. Asian characteristics of the resistance strategy

The struggle strategies of female characters in Asian films show distinctive cultural characteristics, which is in contrast to Western feminist narrative. These strategies are deeply rooted in the cultural traditions and social structures of Asia, and show the unique path for women to strive for sovereignty in a specific cultural context.

The theory of social construction holds that the antecedents in people's socialization process will affect their gender concept through the family, and then determine their behavior choice and social practice [8]. The dominant images of women in Asian films often maintain a complex relationship with family responsibilities and cultural traditions. In *Dangal*, the daughters realize their wrestling dreams by winning their father's recognition and support. This kind of struggle is not realized by completely denying the family value, but by redefining the power relationship within the family. The father changed from a repressor to a supporter, and the daughter grew from a follower to a new creator of family honor. This change preserves the cohesion of the family and changes the distribution of gender roles.

In Asian films, women are more likely to adopt the mode of "collective assistance" to fight. In the film *Her Story*, Wangtiemei, Xiaoye and Wangmoli have formed a new type of family relationship and female friendship by virtue of geographical proximity and emotional attraction [9]. Unlike the western individual heroism style women's liberation, Asian women often strive for living space in the cracks of the patriarchal system through the establishment of mutual aid networks. This model not only reflects the cultural tradition that Asian society attaches importance to group connection, but also shows women's intelligent resistance under systematic oppression.

5. Social needs behind feminist films

Influenced by the second wave of feminist movement, feminist film theory originated in the 1970s [10]. From the second wave of feminist movement to today's fourth wave of feminism, film, as an important carrier of mass culture, has always been the forefront of gender politics. With the continuous improvement of women's education level and social status, the voice of women's independence and gender equality is getting higher and higher. Women begin to criticize the gender inequality in the past and commit themselves to changing this phenomenon. And the film can make more and more people pay attention to the gender inequality that still exists in reality.

Wangxueyan believes that "in early films, female characters are often designed to meet the vision of male desire, which is a symbol of male desire, and their image is also created to meet the psychological needs of men" [11]. Traditional film narration is often dominated by men, and female characters are often used as "the object to be told" rather than "the narrator". Feminist films emphasize the narrative right of female perspective, making women the subject of the story, not the object. This demand reflects women's demand for cultural expression autonomy.

With the issue of gender equality increasingly concerned today, audiences are eager to see more authentic and diverse female images. These films are not only artistic expressions, but also catalysts for social change. They let women see their own possibilities and let society reflect on gender prejudice.

6. Conclusion

With its unique eco feminist perspective and delicate narrative techniques, the film *Where the Crawdads Sing* successfully created a female image, Kya Clark, who grew up tenaciously in loneliness and oppression. Kya's survival and growth in the swamp symbolizes the untamed primitive power of women. By observing the laws of existence in nature, she learned to resist the oppression of patriarchy, and took a decisive counterattack in the face of gender violence. Through this image, the film deconstructs the passivity of traditional female roles and shows the subjectivity and toughness of women in extreme environments.

In addition, this paper also compares the differences between eastern and Western women's resistance strategies. The western movies tend to narrate the individual heroism, emphasizing the individual independence and resistance; Asian films, on the other hand, pay more attention to the cooperative mode of family and collective, showing women's reconciliation path in the conflict between cultural traditions and modern gender concepts. This difference reflects the unique logic of women's striving for autonomy in different cultural backgrounds, and provides a new perspective for the study of cross-cultural feminism.

The theoretical significance of this study is to fill the blank of eco feminism in film and television analysis, and promote the dialogue of cross-cultural feminist theory. In the future, the study of feminist films can further track its long-term impact on the audience's gender cognition, and explore the communication strategies of female narrative in the new media era. Through the positive interaction between art and society, feminist films will continue to inject new vitality into the cause of gender equality and human liberation.

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