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Inside and Outside the Village Walls: Patriarchal Order and the "Deviant Son" in Pai Hsien-yung's Crystal Boys

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Abstract. After 1949, large numbers of mainland Chinese migrants moved to Taiwan with the Nationalist government. The Juancun, the residential communities where they gathered, thus became important social spaces that preserved migrant culture, family order, and identity. This study takes Pai Hsien-yung's Crystal Boys as its research object and examines how patriarchal order within the social space of the Juancun contributes to the construction of homosexual identity. Employing a qualitative research methodology, this study is based on close readings of the father-son relationships of Li Qing, Wang Kuilong, and Fu Wei, while considering the intersection of Juancun culture, Confucian patriarchal order, and sexual modernity in Taiwan. The study finds that the underlying tensions of these different father-son relationships all arise from the challenge that homosexual identity poses to traditional patriarchal expectations of the "son", yielding the figure of the deviant son and thus revealing some social values embodied by a broader cultural context.

Keywords: Juancun, patriarchal order, Crystal Boys, homosexuality, father-son relationship

1. Introduction

After 1949, the retreat of the Nationalist government to Taiwan brought a large number of mainland Chinese military personnel and their families to the island. In order to accommodate the population, "*Juancun"(* 眷 村 *, juancun),* literally means military dependents' villages, were established throughout Taiwan [1].

The communities provided not only places to live, but also social and cultural environments built on military order, migration, family structures, and a continued sense of attachment to an imagined mainland homeland. Family and social relationships were inherently connected to the values of authority, discipline, and collective attachment so that the village served as a crucial site for the immigrants.

Existing scholarship on Taiwanese literature in the postwar period might be understood as broadly falling into two relevant categories. The first focuses on Juancun literature from the standpoint of migration, displacement, and collective memory, examining how immigrant neighborhood remembered and reconstructed their sense of belonging in Taiwan [2]. The second, particularly in the case of Pai Hsien-yung's Crystal Boys, has primarily approached the novel from a queer studies perspective, including studies of how the English translation has reshaped the queer identity of novels and Huang's analysis of identity formation and politics of sexual shame in the

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novel [3, 4], focusing on homosexuality, marginalization, and the formation of individual sexual identities. While many of these studies have offered necessary insight into both migrant communities and gay identities, comparatively little attention has been paid to how patriarchal authority within the Juancun affects the formation and redefinition of postwar immigrant identity, specifically in the context of Crystal Boys.

By rereading Crystal Boys starting from an entryway in Juancun, this study intends to argue that paternal authority should be viewed not merely as one-on-one family relationship, but rather as a symbol of the values and authority structures of the community. From this perspective, the "Deviant Son" challenges not only his father but also the entire value system represented by the Juancun. By applying qualitative close reading, therefore, this study analyzes expressions of paternal authority, father-son relationships, and the functions of the Juancun as a symbol in the novel, aiming to further explain how the figure of the "deviant son" is produced through the confluence of patriarchal structures within the traditional family and the social context of postwar migrant communities.

2. Patriarchal authority and expectations for sons in crystal boys

2.1. Literature review

Existing scholarship relevant to Crystal Boys might largely be divided into three areas. First, studies of the *Juancun* literature generally center around migration, nostalgia, diaspora, and collective identity. As has been stated earlier, Taiwan transformed into a place for many postwar migrants. Migration was more than merely a relocation to a new land; it created contact between different cultures and constant cultural negotiation. Migrants maintained the traditions and values of their homelands while having to negotiate their original culture with local Taiwanese culture. Migrant identity formed after the war consisted of a first generation that recreated memories of its homeland and second and third generations that negotiated between their mainland origins and present Taiwan context of shifting identity [5, 6]. Though this scholarship made the *Juancun* an influential field for postwar migrant studies, it provides little exploration of how such a process influences the gender relations within each family in a *Juancun* community.

Second, scholarship on Crystal Boys can be situated within broader discussions in gender studies of how marginalized identities are produced through normative frameworks. From this perspective, marginalization is caused by the differences among groups with different sexual orientations. Heteronormativity, by treating heterosexual relationships as the normative and legitimate form of intimacy, establishes a standard through which non-heterosexual relationships are defined as different, deviant, or socially unacceptable [7]. Within the Taiwanese context, Huang situates Crystal Boys in the emergence of sexual modernity, showing how male homosexuality was shaped by changing relations among sexuality, state regulation, and social exclusion [4]. More recent scholarship likewise emphasizes the novel's representation of marginalized homosexual subjects and its historical reflection of Taiwanese society [8]. While these studies illuminate how Taiwanese gay men were positioned at the margins of a heteronormative social order, they pay less attention to how this marginalization is reproduced within the family.

Third, studies have directly addressed father-son relationships in Crystal Boys. As Hung notes, father-son relationships are on collision course with both self-realization as a person and the destruction of the family structure within this text [9]; while Tseng more explicitly explores the relationship between Homosexuality and Paternal authority and expatriation in Crystal Boys [10]. Though such research shows that the Father figure is an important one in the narrative, the interplay of paternal authority with the unique historical structure of the Juancun still remains undefined and

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this study integrates the two elements to read through Crystal Boys by exploring the nexus of Juancun, patriarchy and homosexuality.

2.2. The conflict between feudal patriarchal system and modernization

This study examines patriarchal authority within the social space of the *Juancun*. In Crystal Boys, male homosexuality presents a challenge to the traditional family order, which depends on expectations of masculinity, filial obedience, and family continuity, a structure derived from the hierarchical structure established in Confucian society by the principle of "ruler and subject, father and son" (君臣父子, *Junchenfuzi*). Within the family, the father holds authority and command, while the son is expected to obey and continue the family line, that is, play the role as a successor to the father. Such values concerning fatherhood and family were carried into family relations during modernization in Taiwan [11, 12]. As homosexuality gained increasing visibility in twentieth-century Taiwan, however, such kinds of expectations were put into question. According to Damm, the 1970s were marked by a period of major change in discourse in regard to same-sex desire [13]. Meanwhile, Huang places Crystal Boys within the context of emergence of sexual modernity in Taiwan [4].

The nature of this conflict is obviously demonstrated in the relationship between Li Qing and his father. His father stands for an older generation committed to conservative moral values, while Li Qing resists the masculine and family roles expected of him. Their conflict is therefore more complex than a disagreement between father and son as Li Qing's homosexuality violates the patriarchal definition of what a son should be.

The other two pairs of father-son relationships present different reactions to this conflict. Wang Kuilong's relationship with his father exemplifies how paternal expectations persist in affecting personal desire within a family. Fu Laoyezi, after rejecting Fu Wei and failing to see him before his death, later turns to caring for younger homosexual men who have the same situation as his son. Thus, his relationship with the "youth-birds" can be understood as a belated response to the loss of his son. As seen in these dynamics, these relationships together allow homosexuality to uncover the boundaries of a patriarchal order that defines and controls the son through obedience, masculinity, and family continuity.

2.3. Discussion

Li Qing, Wang Kuilong, and Fu Laoyezi's son each choose a different path. Li Qing eventually finds a stable life, and Wang Kuilong makes a new beginning, while Fu Laoyezi's son, rejected by his father, that is, unable to receive his father's acceptance, loses his life irretrievably. These very different outcomes are not surprising because their endings were determined long before they reached them, and the source of that determination lies in their respective fathers.

Li Qing's father represents the traditional Chinese father, strict and often given to moral instruction. He has a sensitive and gentle side, but he is unable to express it, especially to his own son, thereby maintaining the family model of "ruler and subject, father and son" discussed above. Under the influence of these traditions, Li Qing himself tends toward "moderation"(中庸, Zhongyong) [14]. Moderation, a concept rooted in Confucian culture, can be generalized as "not leaning toward either extreme" and requires people to make balanced judgments and take actions in daily life and real situations. After the closure of Anle Township, he neither finds acceptance from his family nor a stable place to belong. Instead, he continues to search for his identity between conflicting understandings of himself.

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Wang Kuilong's father is the embodiment of uncompromising authority, and Wang can only break free from him through extreme and violent means. Once the constraints imposed by his father disappear, Wang no longer needs to live in such an extreme way. Even after stabbing A Feng to death and experiencing exile, however, he continues to carry a sense of guilt and remains tormented by his memories.

Fu Laoyezi has an exceptionally high reputation and raised Fu Wei on his own to be an outstanding young man. After Fu Wei's homosexuality is exposed, he calls his father because he knows that identifying as homosexual means carrying an unforgivable sin in his eyes. Having no one else to turn to for help or comfort, he calls his father as a last resort. In fact, he is asking his father for recognition and forgiveness. Fu Laoyezi, however, responds with anger and refuses his request. After Fu Wei's death, Fu Laoyezi devotes himself to helping young people like his son, attempting to compensate for and reflect on his past failings. During the war, he had executed soldiers like his son, but after his son's death, he began to repent. At first, this may have stemmed from his inability to let go of his son and his sympathy for young people who, like Fu Wei, had no one to turn to. Yet after maintaining this work for decades, he gradually comes to recognize the deeper dilemma underlying their experiences.

According to Continuing Bonds Theory, a well-known psychological concept, "We propose that it is normative for mourners to maintain a presence and connection with the deceased …" [15]. This scientifically and systematically explains why Fu Laoyezi remained immersed in the pain of losing his son throughout the rest of his life after his son's death, providing sufficient motivation for his charitable acts. Furthermore, in the case of the death of a loved one, "We propose that rather than emphasizing letting go, the emphasis should be on negotiating and renegotiating the meaning of the loss over time" [15]. Through decades of reflection and remorse, Fu Laoyezi came to recognize the cruelty of having failed to offer his son support at the time. He therefore extended a helping hand to young people who were in circumstances similar to those of his son, using his abilities to help them as much as possible, as a way of "negotiating and renegotiating the meaning of the loss." This was not accidental; rather, he defined charity as a way of making amends for his son's death, as if by continually helping others, he could allow his son to feel this warmth and, in some way, prevent his son from dying.

In a context where a homosexual identity is not recognized, father-son relationships take on a more complicated character. On the one hand, these sons need recognition from the authority represented by their fathers. They know that homosexuality was not an identity approved by the values they received while growing up, and therefore they seek protection and comfort from their fathers. On the other hand, they are also eager to challenge and ultimately overturn paternal authority in pursuit of values such as freedom and dignity that have yet to gain wider acceptance. As a second-generation immigrant, Pai Hsien-yung's writing combines the son's critical perspective with the father's capacity for empathy.

3. Conclusion

This study takes the Juancun as an important historical and social space through which to understand Crystal Boys, and reexamines the father-son relationships in the novel and their influence on the construction of homosexual identity. Through a discussion of Juancun culture, the Confucian patriarchal order, and sexual modernity in Taiwan, this study argues that fathers in the novel are not merely sources of authority within the family, but also represent broader social values and power relations. The conflicts between fathers and sons therefore cannot be understood simply as family disputes or as individual acceptance or rejection of marginalized sexual identities, in this case,

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homosexual identity. The large-scale migration to Taiwan means that potential conflicts between the cultures of the migrants' native land and their host land were bound to emerge. Migrants from mainland China brought with them a cultural baggage shaped by the social values of their place of origin, within which homosexual identity, particularly male homosexuality, could be seen as a challenge to the traditional patriarchal order. Within the family model shaped by the Confucian hierarchy of "ruler and subject, father and son", the son was regarded as the father's successor and was expected to take responsibility for the continuation of the family. The perceived mismatch between the male roles expected by their fathers and them therefore came into fundamental conflict with these Confucian values. In a cultural environment where homosexuality was poorly understood, gay men could face similar conflicts in negotiating their identities.

The analysis of the three father-son relationships between Li Qing, Wang Kuilong, and Fu Wei further reveals different outcomes of this conflict. Li Qing continues to search for a balance between his father's traditional authority and his own identity. Wang Kuilong breaks away from the authority represented by his father through extreme means, yet remains unable to escape the guilt and memories left behind by this conflict. Fu Wei, meanwhile, is rejected by his father when he most needs his recognition, while Fu Laoyezi, after losing his son, gradually comes to understand the group he once rejected through his efforts to help other homosexual young men. Although these three relationships lead to different outcomes, they all demonstrate how patriarchy defines the position of the "son" and how homosexual identity challenges this definition.

Therefore, the "deviant son" in Crystal Boys is not a naturally given identity, but one defined within a particular historical and cultural context. The father's expulsion of his son from home is an expression of paternal authority, reflecting the exclusion and oppression imposed by the ruler of the family on a son, a member of a sexual minority in this case, who fails to conform to the established order and meet the expectations associated with his role as a father's heir. Within this conflict, the question becomes how "deviant sons" should choose their own paths amid internal ambivalence in their search for a fuller understanding of their identities. On the one hand, homosexual young men seek recognition and protection from the system of authority represented by their fathers; on the other hand, they must challenge this system in order to construct their own identities. As a second-generation mainlander, Pai Hsien-yung approaches this contradiction with both critical distance and empathy, allowing Crystal Boys to move beyond a simple representation of gay identity.

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