

Female Tragedy in White Deer Plain from a Psychoanalytic Perspective

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Abstract: With the development of feminism, women's discourse has gradually risen, while women's emancipation in China has been even more difficult in terms of ideology due to the ravages of thousands of years of feudal concepts. With the help of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, this paper puts the characters in the background of the *White Deer Plain* and analyses their typical female images. From the perspective of personality structure theory, Tian Xiao'e is regarded as the representative of the "id", Bai Zhao's and Lu Leng's are regarded as the representatives of the "ego", and Bai Ling is regarded as the representative of the "superego". It also incorporates feminist theories to realistically and intrinsically analyse the tragic fate of women in the *White Deer Plain*. This paper exposes the "cannibalistic" nature of the male-dominated feudal society to enrich the reader's knowledge of the female characters in *White Deer Plain* and to understand the value of women's awakening.

Keywords: *White Deer Plain*, psychoanalytic theory, feminist theory, tragic, portrayal of women

1. Introduction

Mr Chen Zhongshi, author of *White Deer Plain*, wrote on the title page Balzac's famous words: "The novel is considered to be the secret history of a nation." Many people think that in order to understand China, one has to read Fei Xiaotong's "Native China", and that it is only when one understands the countryside that one can understand China. The author also believes that in order to understand "Native China", one has to read "*White Deer Plain*", a masterpiece of Chinese vernacular literature, to understand the traditional Chinese society of settling down and acquaintances, and to understand the order of rituals and the pattern of differences that sustained the traditional society. Mr Chen Zhongshi has condensed the history from the end of the Qing Dynasty to the beginning of the founding of the PRC with his deep and absurd strokes, creating a masterpiece of realism with epic qualities, and vividly portraying the tragic fate of women on the *White Deer Plain*, who have been struggling against and submitting to the same fate under the feudal carving knife for thousands of years. In today's world where women's identity and role are constantly being explored, the proposition of female tragedy and resistance still has a realistic significance that cannot be ignored.

As one of the peaks of Mao Dun Literature Prize "*White Deer Plain*", the academic research on it is very complicated and numerous, but it is mostly concentrated on its patriarchal culture and male

characters, and the research on female image is still small in quantity. There are even fewer works that interpret the inner factors from the spiritual analysis method. Therefore, with the help of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, this paper analyses the typical female image of *White Deer Plain* from the perspective of personality structure theory, and explores the development of feminism, in order to enrich the field of research on women of *White Deer Plain* on the one hand, and enrich the readers' cognition of the female roles in *White Deer Plain* on the other hand, so that they can understand the preciousness of the women's awakening.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory

In *The Ego and Id*, Freud divides the structure of the personality into three parts: the ego, the id, and the superego [1].

1. id

The "id" is the instinctive me, at the bottom of the personality mind, driven by the animal instincts inherent in human beings, completely in the subconscious, especially the sexual impulses. The id is a chaotic world, which contains a messy, unstable, instinctive and repressed desires, and hides all kinds of undeveloped instinctive impulses that are not allowed by the ethical and legal norms of modern human society. The id follows the "pleasure principle", is not subject to rational constraints, and blindly pursues fulfilment [1].

2. Ego

The "ego" is the reality-facing me, developed through acquired learning and exposure to the environment, and is part of the structure of consciousness. The ego is the regulator of the id and the external environment, and it adheres to the principle of realism, which seeks to satisfy the needs of the id as well as to curb behaviours that are contrary to the norms of society, the code of ethics and the law. The ego is responsible for engaging with reality and is the arbiter between the ego and the superego, the executor of the personality. In the face of reality, the primitive impulses of the ego are curbed as much as possible by logic and reason. The reality principle temporarily terminates the pleasure principle [1].

3. Superego

The "superego" is the moralised and idealised self, which is mainly expressed in the ability to exercise "self-criticism" and "moral control". It is the opposite of the ego. It is also differentiated and developed from the ego, which is the recognition of parents' moral behaviour in childhood, the emulation of social models, and the gradual formation under the influence of cultural traditions, values and social ideals. It consists of moral ideals and conscience, which are the driving force behind the nobler actions of human life, and it follows the principle of ideals, defining standards of moral behaviour through self-exemplars (i.e. conscience and self-ideals). The "superego" represents a defender who strives for perfection and is described as the higher direction of human life [1].

2.2. Feminist Theory

Feminism is a social theory and political movement created and initiated in pursuit of women's freedom and equality. As early as 1791, Olympe de Gouges published the Declaration of the Citizenship Rights of Women and Females, after which the women's movement emerged and "women's rights" gradually became one of the core discourses of the times. Since the end of the Qing Dynasty, Western feminist discourse has entered the Chinese context and gained wide dissemination, and has had a far-reaching impact on the emancipation of women and even the modernisation process in modern China [2].

Feminist theory aims to understand the nature of inequality and focuses on sexual politics, power relations and sexual consciousness. Feminist political action has challenged issues such as reproductive rights, abortion rights, education rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, pay equity, voting rights, representation, sexual harassment, sexism and sexual violence. Feminist themes include discrimination, stereotyping, objectification (especially of sexuality), the body, oppression and patriarchy.

3. Analysis

With the help of Freud's psychoanalytic theory and feminist theory, this paper analyses the typical female images in *White Deer Plain* in depth, and corresponds the typical female images with the personality structure, while the characters in *White Deer Plain* are all full-bodied and three-dimensional, and they all have three kinds of personalities to a greater or lesser extent. Therefore, based on the most prominent features of their personalities, the author regards Tian Xiao'e as the representative of "id", Bai Zhao's and Lu Leng's's as the representatives of "Ego", and Bai Ling as the representative of female "Superego".

3.1. Tian Xiao'e, the Representative of "Self"

Under the pen of author Mr Chen Zhongshi, Tian Xiao'e's most prominent characteristic is synonymous with "sex". As a "rare and beautiful woman", Tian Xiao'e was initially Guo Juren's (a old provincial graduate in Qing dynasty) concubine and was forced to use her vagina to give Guo Juren jujubes for aphrodisiacs every day. In order to retaliate, she took out the dried jujubes and threw them into the urinal every day to get back at the hated person in "her own way", a behaviour that is not bound by morality and is not kind enough. This kind of behaviour is not subject to moral constraints and is not kind enough, reflecting Tian Xiao'e's "shallow evil" out of her human instincts. She also follows her heart and seduces Heiwa, who the newly hired long-time labourer of her family, in order to pursue her own free and beautiful love, for which she is not afraid of the cold eyes of the world. She and Heiwa truly love each other, in fact, is a kind of life under the feudal repression of the suffering life needs, is the expression of the inner instincts, and has nothing to do with the secular concepts and traditional culture. Tian Xiao'e and Heiwa's love, can not be tolerated in the Lu san (Heiwa's father), and even more can not get the recognition of the Bai Jiaxuan (White Deer village patriarch), but they are steadfastly sticking to the poverty of life in a side of an oasis, hibernating in a dilapidated kiln outside the village. Later, in order to save Heiwa's life, Xiaoe, who is inexperienced in political struggles, is lured into a huge conspiracy by Lu Zilin (a big family parent in White Deer Village). In the conflict between the Bai Family and the Lu Family, she has the misfortune of once again acting as a sexual tool [3]. She willingly follows Lu Zilin's design to seduce Bai Xiaowen (Bai Jiaxuan' son) and pull him down from the sacred position of patriarch, and underneath her despicable tactics lurks the inner instinct to take revenge on Bai Jiaxuan [3]. Tian Xiao'e, who purely pursues the pleasure of her nature, not only shows a happy and enjoyable gesture in her adulterous behaviour with Lu Zilin, but also to Bai Xiaowen, who gradually turns from the initial purpose of "sex play" to genuine love, and develops from the temptation of pure lust to the exchange of love. Her behaviour follows her heart, and her perverted love for Bai Xiaowen contributes to her courageous punishment of Lu Zilin: "Lu village official, you remember that I also remember that I pissed on your face, and I pissed on village official's face! [4]" Peeing on De Zilin's face is a counterattack to De Zilin's instruction to "pee on the patriarch's face". Tian Xiao'e has three sexual exchanges in the book, so it is difficult for the reader to consider her in terms of the traditional female "three obediences and four virtues", and the inner basis of her behaviour is the "id" personality that purely pursues the "pleasure principle".

In the book *"White Deer Plain"*, the three men who "hooked up" with Tian Xiao'e. Heiwa, in the eyes of others, was only "compelled by a whore." and could still go out to break into the world. Lu Zilin, who was peacefully dreaming on the broken mat in the old kiln, and Bai Xiaowen, who was also under Tian Xiao'e's dexterous hands, sucking on opiums. and falling head over heels. While men are always forgiven sexually, women are forever confined to the prison of "slut".

The "sluts" represented by Tian Xiao'e were actually subjected to double discrimination and humiliation, and the oppression and discipline came not only from men, but also from women themselves [5]. For example, when Tian Xiao'e was tortured in the ancestral hall, "men and women struggled and crowded to grab the stabbing brushes, calling out, 'Beat, beat, beat! 'Beat this shameless bitch to death!' [4] "These women are obviously the perfect works under the regulation of male power, they boast of their tameness and chastity and form a community of interest with men, while fearing that their men have been seduced by this whore, which threatens their own survival interests. Through his portrayal of the female group, Mr Chen Zhongshi inadvertently highlights the notion that women are deeply confined under the patriarchal ideology.

In the eyes of the people of the White Deer Plain, Tian Xiao'e is a lecherous woman, a loose woman, for which she is tragically killed by Lu San. She died in the power and bloody ferocity of traditional culture and morality, and even more so in the sexual possession and deprivation established by male-centredness. Sex is the only thing that her "id" can control in the feudal net of bondage, and it is also her only weapon against the world. She does not understand that sexual revenge hurts not only men, but also women themselves. Tian Xiao'e's life stands in opposition to feudalism, a "dagger" that is not subject to rational constraints under the male discourse, and her "id" orientated personality expression has long doomed her to a tragic fate. With the help of magical realism, the author makes Tian Xiao'e possess Lusan San after her death, and asks the invisible black hand of the male-dominated society: "Who have I messed with in White Deer Village? I didn't steal a single piece of cotton, I didn't steal a handful of straw, I didn't curse an elder, I didn't shove or poke a doll, why can't I live in White Deer Village? [4]" This sentence is like a dagger to the feudal society, no one can explain her, she will not know, in fact, she is covered in an established social network, her identity and reputation, has long been doomed to be a concubine, as a whore, so that the violent death in the murder.

Mr Chen Zhongshi said that when he wrote that Lu San stabbed the steel blade of the pike into the back of Tian Xiao'e's heart, and she looked back and screamed "Da Ya", his eyes went black, and it took him half a day to recover. Casually wrote on a skein of paper: "The pain of life, the pain of living, the pain of dying." Tian Xiao'e is a typical character of tragic fate in *White Deer Plain*, a woman with heavy guilt and incomparable beauty, who is both hateful and pitiful. In order to pursue free love, she invariably touches the cultural forbidden zone of the times, and is destined to be incompatible with the old system which is strictly against heaven and humanity. Tian Xiao'e represents the sexual impulse to get rid of the repression of moral constraints, which is defined by Mr Chen Zhongshi as "a rebel who fights purely out of human instincts", and is a typical embodiment of the personality of the "id".

3.2. Representatives of the "Ego" - Bai Zhao's and Lu Leng's

The ego follows the principle of reality to reconcile the social norms and the needs of the self, if the two are properly coordinated, the person is harmonious, healthy and happy, such as the Bai Zhao's (Bai Jiaxuan's mother); if not properly coordinated, the person is more divided, and there will be internal conflict and suffering, such as the Lu Leng's (the wife of Lu Zilin's eldest son).

In the text, Bai Zhao's is a caring motherly figure, a compromiser and a conformist who actively panders to traditional rituals, and she is willing to be a co-conspirator of the male discourse without realising it [6]. When five daughters-in-law die in succession, Bai Jiaxuan advises her to put off the

search for her relatives. When five of her daughters-in-law die in quick succession, Bai Jiaxuan urges her to put her search for a relative on hold, while Bai Zhao's says, "A woman is nothing but the paper on which windows are glued; when it is torn and rotten, it is uncovered and then glued with a new layer. [4]." Being a woman compares her own group to something cheap and inferior, highlighting the identity that has long been lost under the suppression of traditional thinking and male power. In Bai Zhao's view, women are the tools to carry on the family line, and their daily work and routine is to organise the household chores, the three obediences and the four virtues..... This is the embodiment of the loss of women's identity under the traditional feudal constraints, and this kind of thinking, which is passed down from generation to generation, has become the mainstream thinking of the feudal society, and has a wide range of social significance, and this kind of contradictory "ego" personality is precisely the most common personality manifestation of the majority of the feudal women. This kind of contradictory "ego" personality is precisely the most common personality manifestation of the majority of feudal women. Bai Jiaxuan, the son of Bai Zhao's, as the patriarch, has been adhering to the principles and bottom line all his life, embodying the result of the triumph of human higher reason and morality over the lower desires and impulses, and demonstrating the personality characteristics of the "superego" dominant. In front of such a representative of the "superego" as Bai Jiaxuan, Bai Zhao's consciously assumed the responsibility of the "ego". In matters of the sexes, Bai Zhao's consciously assumes the role of "regulator of the ego," taking orders from her "superego," keeping a watchful eye on the movements of the people around her, and immediately reporting to her "superego" as soon as she discovers them. She is "under the command" of the "superego", always paying attention to the movements of the people around her, and reporting to the "superego" as soon as she discovers them, such as Heiwa's rebellion and Bai Xiaowen's budding desires [7]. This kind of supervision due to long-term repetition, and eventually become Bai Zhao's unconscious performance, so that Bai Zhao's active catering for the "ego" image solidified in the personality.

Lu Leng's, on the other hand, is a victim of passive acceptance of tradition and change, and is doomed to tragedy despite her adherence to feudal rites. The major reason for her tragic fate is her tragic marriage. Her husband, Lu Zhaopeng (Lu Zilin's eldest son), who had difficulty in accepting the traditional arranged marriage under the new thinking, left home, leaving Lu Leng's "widowhood", unable to feel any happiness brought by the marriage, but forced to accept all the fetters and shackles brought by the marriage. Lu Leng's youthful age, longing for her husband's love and care, but with Lu Zhaopeng far away, she can only repress their own desires, and ultimately lost in the desire. Lu Leng's sexual desire has been repressed for too long, and she envies Tian Xiao'e for being able to enjoy free and unrestrained sex, but she herself has been trapped in the pain of not being able to obtain it due to the constraints of traditional concepts [8]. Lu Leng's struggles to satisfy her sexual desires and to follow social morals and ethics, and the trigger that intensifies this conflict points to her father-in-law, Lu Zilin, who is the unifier of power and sexual desire. Lu Zilin's sexuality is unchanged, drunkenly raping and teasing her, Lu Leng's heart of sexual desire has no place to relieve, they have fantasies about the eunuch, "she is powerless to block those temptations and know very well that these are all sins [4]." In the end, because of the normal desire and emotion is bound by the traditional concept of mental collapse, the will to survive was completely destroyed, and got "lecherous madness", and under the patriarchal society, the biological father in order not to be ridiculed not hesitate to mute his own daughter, Lu Leng's last in the tortured after the description of the withered death. Lu Leng's is the epitome of a patriarchal cannibalistic society. The "invisible black hand" emphasises the chastity of women but destroys normal desires and human nature, killing many "Lu Leng's", while Lu Leng's is actually a madman who attempts to relate to the "carnivalised" discourse in an insane way. Lu Leng's is actually attempting to dialogue and fight with men by means of madness and "ecstatic" discourse, trying to

find a balance between self-needs and social morality, and seeking an outlet for her "ego" personality, and ultimately falling into the trap of it.

Bai Zhao's and Lu Leng's respectively embody the "ego" personalities of active pandering and passive acceptance under the principle of reality, and they are neither able to pursue pure pleasure and sexual pursuits like "id" nor free themselves from bondage towards a new and positive path of progress like "superego". They are destined to live in the torment of this great contradiction, and the only thing that determines their happiness lies in whether or not they are able to accept this impermeable net.

3.3. Bai Ling, the Representative of "Superego"

Bai Ling (Bai Jiaxuan's daughter) is the embodiment of Chen Zhongshi's "White Deer Spirit", who has the courage and boldness to break through the feudal constraints, as well as the intelligence and atmosphere to distinguish between right and wrong through the cultivation of modern civilisation and advanced education. She actively accepts the new things and ideas, and strives to strive for a brighter future for herself and for the society, which is also the author's ideal image of a woman. Bai Ling's rebellious behaviour is a gradual awakening of female consciousness, which is clearly manifested in her determination against feudal ethics. She was against foot-binding, and when her father forbade her to go to school in the city, she threatened to die, and in the face of her family's arranged marriage, she wrote a letter of withdrawal with panache: "Do you have to marry me to kill you? [4]" In the face of political differences, Bai Ling firmly followed her own ideals, demanded social progress and equality between men and women, and was willing to pay for the beliefs she pursued, believing that "whoever stands in the way of the Chinese revolution will be trampled down [4]". In the face of love, she is independent and opinionated, and falls in love with Lu Zhaopeng, who nurtures a common revolutionary ideal, and becomes a revolutionary partner, fighting side by side, showing the image of a new woman who pursues the revolution. Even if the resistance ends in failure, Bai Ling, the image of a woman summoning the hope of the revolution and announcing a new ideology of women of the White Deer Plain, still shines in the revolution, embodying the "superego" personality under the principle of ideals. The "superego" personality under the ideal principle is embodied.

Under the influence of advanced knowledge, rationality became the mainstream of Bai Ling's thinking, and she rebelled against the constraints of ethics and morality at the spiritual level, gradually growing into a new woman with culture and ideals, boldly rebelling against ethics and pursuing light. Bai Ling's free and noble soul seems to be incompatible with the feudal ethics, so she has no choice but to join the revolutionary trend, trying to fight for her own value to have more say. In the course of the revolution, women are still subjected to the heavy regulations of the male society, unable to escape from the spell of traditional ethics. Even the most courageous and fearless women are not destined to be able to control their own destiny. Bai Ling, as a rebel, is doomed to perish, and her tragic fate of being buried alive by her fellow party members in the maelstrom of the party struggle deepens the tragic colours of this noble "superego" image. Bai Ling, an intelligent, well-intentioned, bold and resolute woman, was unable to compete with the political party disputes under patriarchal rule, and her death proves that women's gradual advancement into the core territory of men will ultimately be ruthlessly suppressed and crushed by the male-centred political discourse. Although Bai Ling still has some shortcomings compared with the representatives of "superego" such as Mr Zhu and Bai Jiaxuan, as a rebellious soul born in a patriarchal family, she is an alternative woman who rises up under heavy pressure, showing more possibilities of advanced women, and her glorious personality mainly consists of moral ideals and conscience, reflecting the motivation for more noble actions in human life. Her glorious personality is mainly composed of moral ideals and conscience, embodying the motivation for noble actions in human life, and she can

be regarded as the representative of the "superego" of all the female figures in *White Deer Plain*, and the embodiment of the "ideal self" of women.

4. Discussion

Mr Chen Zhongshi wrote in his handbook for the creation of *White Deer Plain* that when he saw the part of Lantian County Records dedicated to recording the deeds or names of chaste women, he was surprised to realise that chastity is sublime and heavy, and that these women, with their lively lives, adhered to the "morality" and "chastity" rules set for them in the moral regulations and had gone through a long and brutal ordeal in exchange for a few centimetres of position in the County Records [4].

Simone de Beauvoir once said, "A woman is not born a woman, she is made a woman [9]." Ancient Chinese society was a typical patriarchal society, and the traditional ancient women were preoccupied with the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues", and in the countless roster of female role models highlighting feudal morality, they were nakedly exposed to the ravages of their nature as women. For thousands of years, Chinese women didn't know how to fight back, they were submissive and lived under the authority of patriarchal male power. Bai Zhao's role as the "enforcer" of traditional etiquette; Lu Leng's role as the "unfortunate one" of morality and etiquette; Tian Xiao'e is not understood by the White Deer Plain, and eventually fights to the death in the struggle against the White Deer Plain; Bai Ling, as a rebel against the strict rituals of the old society, dies a heroic death in her tenacious struggle against the old society.

In *White Deer Plain*, those who strictly observe the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" of women are Bai Zhao, Bai Jiaxuan's mother; Xiancao, Bai Jiaxuan's wife; Lu Leng's, Lu Zhaopeng's wife, as well as thousands of other unnamed women in the White Deer Plain. These women are a passer-by in the family before they get married, and after they get married, they are the tools for their husband's family to pass on the family name. Most of the women who die in front of their husbands are the ones who vacate a vacant seat for the next nameless woman, while the women who die behind their husbands are just barely lucky enough to be the free babysitters for their children and grandchildren. These nameless women silently nurture the White Deer Plain, and they also nurture the men who condition themselves with all sorts of grandiose excuses. Thousands of selfless dedication, patience and resignation as the direction of life, burning their own instrumental value, suppressing their true desires, in order to be "lucky" in exchange for a cold and silent moral house of cards, they are more with the respect and piety of a martyr to uphold the norms of women's morality and the interests of the male power. When the women on the altar are worshipped by the tradition, it is also the full presentation of their own tragedy [10].

5. Conclusion

To sum up, *White Deer Plain* vividly shows the tragic picture of women's existence in feudal society. Whether it is Tian Xiao'e, the representative of the "id" who expresses her own desires, or Bai Zhao's and Lu Leng's, the representatives of the "Ego" who respects the traditional rituals, or Bai Ling, the "superego" representative who rebels against the traditional statute, all these vivid female figures These vivid female figures can't escape the mission imposed on them by history, they will be the victims, the sad ones and the appendages in the male-dominated society, they are the voiceless ones, taking the traditional statute as the direction of their life, trampling and sacrificing their personal nature as their final destination.

The significance of the novel lies in reflecting the objective reality of life through the shaping of characters. Therefore, the significance of *White Deer Plain* reveals, to a certain extent, the difficult path of modern Chinese women towards true independence and the search for deep-seated

emancipation. Legal provisions do not mean the real emancipation of women, nor do political slogans mean the rise of women's status. To this day, many people will still think that softness, gentleness, sensuality and delicacy should be the qualities of women. If women want to be emancipated and pursue moral, social and psychological equality, they have to get rid of the deep-rooted sense of male objectification, and get rid of the shadows and shackles of traditional concepts such as "only women and small people are difficult to raise", "a woman's lack of talent is a virtue" and "women are a scourge" and other traditional concepts. They should not use feminism as a slogan to engage in purely binary gender confrontation, but should also re-examine themselves, re-understand themselves, establish their own independent personalities, and become free human beings. Feminism is a perspective, not a label, and women should not be suppressed and do not need to be exalted; they should be expansive and free, thinking is resistance, and small is vast. For this reason, women should speak out, millions of times.

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