

The Lack of Female Consciousness as Exemplified by the Female Characters in The Others

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Abstract: Female issues are hotly debated no matter what time of the year it is, Jiang Heji's novel *The Others* published in 2023 is a novel about women's issues, and his women's images are three-dimensional and vivid, and the novel itself is very innovative, Jiang Heji takes the more sensitive issues of sexual assault and domestic violence as a subject matter of writing, and builds up the real lives of three women: Kim Zhenya, Yang Xiuzhen, and He Youli through the subjective perspectives of different characters. This paper tries to base on the female images in Jiang Heji's *The Others*, to systematically explore the female images in Jiang Heji's *The Others* by using the methods of interpretation and close reading of the text, to analyse the reasons for the lack of female consciousness of the female images in the novels, and to discuss the consequences of the lack of female consciousness of female images in the novels, so as to find ways to solve the problem of the lack of female consciousness.

Keywords: Jiang Heji, female image, female consciousness, feminism

1. Introduction

Female-themed literature is a hot topic nowadays, partly because of the awakening of female consciousness, and partly because more and more people want to pay attention to female and speak out for them [1]. Jiang Heji's novel *The Others*, published in 2023, won the 22nd Korean National Literature Award. Jiang Heji takes domestic violence, sexual violence, and bullying as the themes of the book, and subtly restores the real lives of three girls from different people's perspectives. The women in this novel are three-dimensional, although they are all in difficult situations, they are either domestically abused or sexually assaulted or are called crazy women, liars, hoovers, but at the same time, they are pitiful. But at the same time, there is a dark side to them, they are not noble, they are not completely kind, they are not perfect victims, they lie and spread rumours in their favour, and they even turn away from their friends when they are bullied and ostracised and ask for help.

The female characters in *The Others* actually lack a sense of femininity. For example, the women choose to remain silent numerous times when they are abused, and begin to doubt themselves when they are called crazy women, examining themselves to see if they are really the crazy women they are talking about. Gradually, women begin to suspect each other and abuse each other, and men and women also appear to attack each other. But what exactly caused their lack of women's consciousness, what disadvantages this lack of women's consciousness would cause, and what ways

should be used to solve the problem in the face of the lack of women's consciousness, all these are worthy of our further investigation.

2. Causes of the Lack of Female Consciousness

With the rise of feminism, the theme of female consciousness is also gradually attracting attention. Nowadays, the status of female is constantly improving, no matter it is film and television works or literature, the image of female mostly tends to be stronger, because in this era, women have the same power as men to choose their career and spouse, and even female are better than male in some aspects, but there are a lot of female who still try to determine their own value through the male's recognition of them, or they still rely on men to find their sense of security [2-3]. However, many female are still trying to determine their own value through male recognition of them, or they still rely on men to find their own security, which are all manifestations of the lack of women's consciousness. This paper attributes the causes of the lack of female consciousness to three points, namely, society's evaluation of women, the confinement of female thoughts and behaviours under the patriarchal ideology, and the influence of the Confucian doctrine of the good wife and good mother in Japan [4-6].

2.1. Social Evaluation

Nowadays, gender stereotypes of female still often appear in social media and people still pay too much attention to female appearance and body, these social evaluations of women may have a negative impact on their sense of self and lead to a lack of female consciousness. Female may not be able to feel confident or find a sense of identity in society, and they may doubt their own abilities and worth because the cultural and social environment in which they live is biased or devalues their worth and abilities.

Kim Zhenya in *The Others* has been subjected to violence by her boyfriend many times, and finally on the fifth time of domestic violence, Kim Zhenya couldn't stand it any longer and called the police and posted her boyfriend's domestic violence on the internet. At first, the public was on the same side as her, but after the screenshots of the chatting that was unfavourable to her appeared, most of the people on the internet turned to questioning her, accusing her, and hurling abuses, and even people who have never met her before told her that *You bad woman, go to hell. Female who deserves to be beaten up. Stupid* [7]. So it seems that people on the internet think that Kim Zhenya deserved the violence she received, and every single one of these Every comment here is a social comment, and when Jeong-ah is in the middle of such comments, she internalises herself with these comments and thinks that she may be as good as the comments. Later, Kim Zhenya says, *Instead of being looked at through tinted glasses by other people, I should give up seeing myself* [7]. When Kim Zhenya is faced with domestic violence and the social judgement of strangers in society, she no longer thinks of fighting back; Kim Zhenya is afraid of being looked at differently by others because of her judgement, but she cares more about the social judgement, she is afraid that people will leave her, that she will be abandoned and become worthless. This is undoubtedly the lack of Kim Zhenya's female consciousness caused by social evaluation.

2.2. The Confinement of Patriarchal Ideology

Dai Jinhua mentioned in his thesis *Visible and Invisible Female: Female and Female Cinema in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* that *Female are not the moon, and do not rely on reflecting male light to illuminate themselves* [8]. However, throughout history, the ideas of male chauvinism and male superiority have always existed and severely suppressed women's status, restricting women's abilities and choices. These concepts have always believed that men should have more power and

advantages in the social, political, and economic aspects, which has kept female in the state of being subordinate to male. Male have always had the absolute right to speak, and women's choices have not really been free. This has led to a lack of self-awareness and self-evaluation among female [9].

Kim Zhenya's boyfriend Li ZhenXie in *The Others* repeatedly treats Kim Zhenya like a pile of clothes to be ravaged, but Kim Zhenya still feels that her boyfriend loves her, but he's just become a little different, and Kim Zhenya makes excuses for him, thinking, *Maybe he's just tired, or maybe it's the stress of being in a slump that his boyfriend can't handle* [7]. She even thinks, *Could I be the cause of his loneliness? Maybe I'm to blame* [7]. As Kim Zhenya thinks about these words, even though she is a very capable woman at work, she is at this moment so tightly imprisoned by patriarchal thinking that she even attributes her boyfriend's violent behaviour towards her to herself, and she forgets the violent violation she has suffered. Kim Zhenya's leader, a man who claims to be a feminist, boasts that he is a feminist and says, *You're ruining a good man's life*, and *Why are you so ignorant* [7]? This so-called feminist man is still talking about women, and the idea of men being superior to female is not only deeply rooted in the mind of Kim Zhenya, but also in the mind of this feminist male. The idea that male are superior to female is not only deeply rooted in the heart of Kim Zhenya, a female, but also in the body of this feminist man. At this moment, Kim Zhenya had many answers in her mind, but she chose to remain silent at this moment. This is a reflection of Kim Zhenya's confinement by the patriarchal ideology, and it is the confinement by the patriarchal ideology that makes her lack of female consciousness [10-11].

2.3. The Theory of "Good Wife and Good Mother"

The "good wife and good mother" theory is a traditional concept that stresses that female should be family-centred and serve their husbands and children [12]. This conception holds that female value lies mainly in their roles and responsibilities in the family, rather than in their development and achievements in other fields. Premier Zhou Enlai once said in his article *On Virtuous Wives and Virtuous Mothers and Motherhood*. *Of course a mother should be virtuous and a wife should be virtuous, just as of course a father should be virtuous and a husband should be virtuous, and this has become the same as the unchangeable truth of the Divine Principle* [13]. However, when 'good wife and good mother' became a fixed and linked term, its meaning changed and it became a shackle used by the patriarchal society to bind women. After the Meiji Restoration, Japan began to implement civilisation and enlightenment, and Japan wanted to build a modern nation. At that time, Japanese enlightenment thinkers and people with insights recognised the important role of women in nation building, and believed that women could serve the country and the nation by raising their children. However, it was clear that women's status had been firmly confined to serving their husbands and raising their children. Serving the country and the nation but essentially having no political status. This theory may have a negative impact on women's self-perception and consciousness, leading them to doubt their own abilities and values [14].

Kim Zhenya's grandmother is a kind-hearted person, but when confronted with the daughter of an unmarried woman in the village (Chun Zi), she can't help but smack her lips, *She's going to be just like her mother, and will cause people to suffer* [7]. It can be seen from this statement that the term "a good wife and a good mother" can't be separated from "a good wife" and "a good mother," and that in Jeong-ah's grandmother's eyes, Chun-ja is an "infamous" nuisance in her village, who drank alcohol at the age of fifteen and then became pregnant and had a baby, Yang XiuZhen, and that since she isn't a "good wife and a good mother," it is only natural for her child to be just like her, and to cause people to suffer.

Kim Zhenya's mother in *The Others*, on the other hand, is unwilling to let Kim Zhenya do any more chores at home and pampers her, but when Kim Zhenya starts dating a man, she loses all her care, which is completely different from what she had at home before, as her boyfriend's repeated

violence pushes her down to the bottom of the barrel, causing Kim Zhenya to have self-doubt. It is clear that Kim Zhenya's mother is playing the role of "good wife and mother" at home, and that her behaviour is influencing her daughter so that Kim Zhenya is able to make excuses for her boyfriend and look to herself for the reason even after she has suffered three instances of domestic violence.

3. Disadvantages of the Lack of Female Consciousness

The lack of female consciousness will bring a series of disadvantages to both individuals and society, for example, it will cause aphasia for female, and for female as a large group, the lack of female consciousness will cause female groups to be split up, and for the society, it will even cause gender antagonisms between men and women, which will lead to the situation of attacking each other.

3.1. Female Aphasia

Female aphasia refers to the fact that female have long been under the influence of the male value system, and have consciously internalised male-centred value standards under the patriarchal cultural system, thus losing their self-awareness and becoming subordinate to the spokespersons of male value standards. These female who lack a sense of femininity and thus "lose their voices" may have had the will to speak for themselves, but they have gradually begun to choose to shut up in the face of male inducement or the judgements of others, because they have no recourse but to accept them.

In the novel *The Others*, He Youli thought she was in a relationship with Kim Dongxi, but when they met, they only had sex and did nothing else. When He Youli wanted to end the relationship and run away, Kim Dongxi started to use coercion to force her to have sex with him and even if He Youli didn't want to do it, the other party would ignore her resistance. Later, He Youli even got sick and got cervical cancer, which was physically extremely painful and agonising but the man simply ignored He Youli's pain and was extremely affectionate to her after forcing her to have sex, and in the process, she had also asked for help from someone, a teacher who often held feminist courses but the teacher asked He Youli if she was a seducer and even asked her to have sex with him. However, the teacher asked He Youli if she was *seducing the other person* and even told her *not to make trouble by talking about love* [7]. This teacher was even a female teacher, and she did not lend a helping hand in the face of her female classmate's trust and request for help, but instead, she said hurtful words. In the midst of Dong Hee's coercion and the teacher's indifference, He Youli could only choose to shut up because she was still being left alone, and she could only choose to write down the date of her sexual assault in her diary.

Kim Zhenya was the same, her boyfriend would force her to have sex when she didn't want to, during her physiological period, or when she wasn't feeling well, and he would satisfy his own desires from him, and Kim Zhenya even though it was hard for her to do so, still thought that this was what she would do, what she wanted to do. She thought that was being in a relationship. That's why she never told anyone about her predicament, saying, *After all, it's not as if a robber came out of an alley with a knife and told me to take off my clothes, or that he wouldn't stop even though I resisted to the death* [7].

3.2. Segregation of Female Groups

Chizuko Ueno suggested that *female own misogynistic tendencies*, as in the story, the three victims, that is, the three female protagonists, struggle with each other and abuse each other, and in the process, the female who are lacking in female consciousness do not only fight with each other, but also with themselves, and they try to distort themselves into victimisers and others. They try to

distort themselves into victimisers and others. This kind of self-struggle and mutual struggle makes the female group constantly fragmented.

There are three parts to this novel, and in the first part, the author, Jiang Heji, keeps throwing mysteries at the readers, and it is only in the second part that the truth begins to surface, and the real lives of the three female protagonists and their connections are revealed to the readers. It turns out that the three of them are not the perfect victims as portrayed in the first part. In the second part, we can see that the three female protagonists are in a situation where it is difficult for them to move forward, and that the three of them, who lack a sense of femininity, abandon each other and even hurt each other, pushing each other, who are already battered and bruised, into an even more desperate situation. The result is the fragmentation of their female community. After leaving Seoul and returning to her hometown of Anjin to recuperate, Kim Zhenya discovers the secrets of many of her former friends, and it turns out to be a long-term destruction of female, in which the perpetrators are of course male, and the victims, though female, are unconsciously accomplices to the male. This is the case with Kim Zhenya, who was unaware of feminism until domestic violence was inflicted on her, and unconsciously became an accomplice in many things, and was even unaware of the fact that she had been victimised for a long time. It is in the process of pretending to be unaware of it, and keeping herself out of it, that the female group is gradually being cut off, and in fact, it is the gender relationship that is cutting off the relationship between the two genders. They are unconsciously competing with male for male, and in doing so they are antagonistic to and even fearful of their friends, and in the end they are even fearful of turning away from friends and relatives of the same sex who might otherwise be able to help them.

From close friends to a trio with a gap between them, the situation of the three of them is actually very difficult, and their situation is actually the predicament that we women in East Asia are facing, and women can't stand a chance of winning on their own. At this point, Mr Jiang Heji also suggests a new path for female to save themselves, which is the escape route depicted in the third part of the film. Victimised female can't fight with each other any more, and the group's fragmentation is not a way of salvation at all, and victimised female need to unite and not to turn themselves into others.

3.3. Men and Women Attack Each Other

In the chapter of *The Others*, Li Kangxian mentions *Bullshit. Men can't help it, and I have as much contempt for that as I do for a female student crying 'because I trust him'. It's not a problem derived from an inability to hold back sexual desire, it's a problem that happens when male think they don't have to hold back sexual desire* [7]. In fact, as Li Kangxian says, men and women turning on each other has to do with sex, but it's more about power. Men and women who attack each other are actually using sex and power to establish a submissive relationship, a kind of oppression of the weak by the strong [15].

For example, as a professor, Kim Dongxi dated Kim Zhenya for four months when he was a student, but later on, after Kim Zhenya domestic violence incident broke out, he went and anonymously attacked Kim Zhenya by calling her a liar. This is not the case with Li Kangxian. He hates Li Kangxian and even despises her, but he still rushes to be Li Kangxian's assistant. He is willing to do anything for Li Kangxian because she is his mentor and he needs to be recognised by Li Kangxian.

In the film *Ruan Lingyu*, there is a line that says *Just because a woman stands up doesn't mean that a man has to fall down, we can all stand up together, the world is big enough*. Nowadays, the phenomenon of misogyny and phobia is getting more and more serious in our society, and it seems that there is only one way: men deprive women of their right to speak or female deprive male of their right to speak. It seems that the only two scenarios are male depriving female of their right to

speak or female depriving male of their right to speak. This mutualisation of men and women can increase antagonisms and tensions between the genders to the extent that mutual trust and co-operation between men and women is further weakened. It can also lead to a deepening of gender discrimination and gender inequality, which can lead to greater tension and disharmony between men and women.

4. Conclusions

At this point, the article has analysed the various reasons for the lack of female awareness and the disadvantages caused by the lack of female awareness. In order to solve the problem of the lack of female awareness, it is still quite crucial to promote gender equality and break the constraints of patriarchal thinking [16]. To recognise the negative impact of patriarchal thinking on female consciousness, and to rectify this inequality through real action, society should encourage female to participate in all fields, enjoy equal work opportunities, encourage female to develop their skills and talents, and encourage female to shine in all sectors. We need to take positive action to promote gender equality and break down the stereotypical image of female in society, and to boost female self-confidence so that they are no longer restricted by their gender. Helping female to escape from the plight of female lack of awareness is an eternal issue.

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