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The Flux and Reflections of Female Consciousness in the Taiwanese Film *Little Big Women*

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ABSTRACT

Film, as a unique art form, profoundly conveys the essence of thought, story line, perceptual experience, emotional resonance and aesthetic pursuit through the presentation of moving images. In today's society, film-watching activities not only carry the function of leisure and entertainment, but also become an important communication channel for the director's ideological views and emotional tendencies. At the same time, the feedback mechanism of the film box office also provides us with a valuable window to understand the hot issues in society and the tendency of people's interest, which in turn helps us to grasp the pulse of social change. Taking the 2020 Taiwan box office champion *Little Big Women* as an example, this paper focuses on the portrayal and evolution of its female image, revealing the remarkable transformation trajectory from the 'unawakened traditional woman' to the 'compatible woman struggling in the traditional framework' to the 'new woman seeking independence and freedom'. This process of transformation clearly presents the transmutation of identity and the awakening of subjective consciousness of three generations of Taiwanese women in the current of the times, which not only provides a localised and vivid case study for the study of contemporary feminist cinema, but also profoundly reflects the complex interactions between the loosening of patriarchal structures and the awakening of local gender consciousness in Taiwanese society.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a number of "feminist films" have emerged in mainstream cinemas, which have deeply analysed the identity dilemma and psychological state of female subjects, effectively deconstructed the elite paradigm of characters portrayed in traditional grand narratives or consumer contexts, and won extensive attention from the market and the industry. For example, the 2019 South Korean film *Kim Ji-Young Born 1982*, with a distinctly feminist perspective, deeply criti-

cised the phenomenon of South Korean housewives gradually losing their self-subjectivity due to their over-involvement in family affairs and raising children with their husbands; in the same year, two feminist masterpieces also appeared in China. *Spring Tide*, a feature-length masterpiece directed by Yang Li Na, puts women in an alienated mother-daughter relationship within the family, and delicately demonstrates the real existential dilemmas faced by contemporary working women in complex social relationships such as marriage and family; and *Send Me to the Clouds*, a film produced by and

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starring Yao Chen, vividly portrays the plight of a contemporary urban, highly-educated woman from a distinctly feminist standpoint. The film *Sister the dark horse* at the box office of the Qingming Festival in 2021, has touched upon heavy social issues with its distinctive attribute of "her film", which has stimulated extensive discussions on female-themed films, female filmmakers and feminist trends in the community. The film is a "her film" that touches on heavy social issues.

Compared with the traditional female characters in the past, "new women" are given more autonomy and voice in today's cinema. Feminist films have been well received thanks to the breakthroughs and innovations in characterisation and narrative. There is a new trend of feminism in cinema, with the proportion of female characters and the importance of related plots increasing, which corresponds to the return and release of women's right to independent expression in the real world. If feminist thinking in the 80s and 90s was mainly focused on the academy system, today's "female consciousness" in the cultural context has fully sunk, and has become an important production indicator in the cultural industry (female themes in film, television, and publishing), as well as a popular traffic label in social media ("gender swapping, commenting on the film," "female characters", and so on). "Gender swap, over 10,000 comments"). It is true that popular culture is paying more and more attention to women's voices, but the narratives about women have not broadened as a result, and the other side of the sinking of women's consciousness is that women's discourse is falling into a labelling crisis.

As the top grossing Taiwanese film of 2020, the film *Little Big Women* is also a female-themed family film that focuses on intimacy. Unlike most films on the market, the film chooses a family where men are absent and tries to peek into the diversified relationships that exist between mothers and daughters, depicting a picture of a family through a multi-stranded narrative and a jigsaw puzzle, in which mothers and daughters mirror each other, together completing a complete picture of the existence of modern women. From this film, we can see the different attitudes of women of different generations towards "family" and "marriage", which can more directly reflect the flow and change of women's consciousness. Therefore, this article attempts to analyse and consider the changes in women's consciousness and status in Taiwan's film *Lonely Flavour*, starting from the evolution of women's images in the film.

WOMEN'S CONSCIOUSNESS AND TAIWANESE WOMEN'S CINEMA REVISITED

Definition of Female Consciousness

The roots of female consciousness, i.e., the conscious awareness of women, can be traced back to the expansion and deepening of gender consciousness. From a sociological perspective, the concept of "gender" is shaped by a social framework and not solely based on biological characteristics. Therefore, the category of gender covers not only the differences derived from the biological level, but also the conceptual system of gender constructed by the social system and cultural background ([Hollander, R, 1975](#)), and Wilcox has argued that gender consciousness contains a deep understanding of gender roles, dissatisfaction with and criticism of the established power structure, as well as a deep appreciation of the importance of collective action. It is argued that gender consciousness is in fact a dynamic continuum of development, manifested in the process of consciousness flow. Within this continuum, it can be subdivided into gender awareness, female/male consciousness, and feminist/anti-feminist consciousness, depending on where it is situated. It is particularly important that gender awareness, as the starting point of this continuum, plays a key role in enlightening the consciousness of the latter two. It is through this gradual process of gender awareness that women's consciousness can consciously emerge and deepen ([Mayne, J, 1985](#)).

With regard to the definition of female consciousness, according to Le Daiyun, it should cover three dimensions: firstly, from the social perspective, female consciousness touches on the oppression of women under the framework of social class and the awakening of their sense of resistance; secondly, at the natural level, it focuses on women's unique physiological characteristics, and in-depth studies on the impact of life experiences such as physiological cycle, childbirth and conception on women's self-perception; finally, in the cultural field, it takes men as the reference point. Finally, on the cultural level, the scholar uses men as a reference point to analyse the unique situation of women in the spiritual and cultural dimensions, and explores the marginal cultural system created by women outside the male-dominated mainstream culture, as well as the non-mainstream worldviews, emotional experiences, and narrative strategies that it contains ([Edwards, L, 2002](#)). Scholar Jue Zhang believes that women's consciousness is to awaken women to examine the realities and contradictions of their surroundings, to notice the unfairness and contradictions in the way women are treated by society, and to learn to make a series of adjustments to their ideals, realities, and needs, so that all people can be respected, and to accept that all people, regardless of their race, class, religion, age, or gender,

have value and equality. Awareness is defined as a woman's understanding of her own nature, recognition of her position and value in society, and the ability to take action to change in the face of inequality between the sexes (Ling, H, 1997).

According to Wilcox's research and analysis on how to promote the awakening of women's consciousness, in most Western European countries, women's consciousness is positively correlated with the following conditions: more education, less religious enthusiasm, younger age, and liberal ideology; Poel analysed the data of Canada in 1988 and found that women who have a higher education level and a professional job with a high social status are more likely to be women. Poel's analysis of Canadian data in 1988 found that having a high level of education and a professional job with a high social status were the two most effective predictors of women's support for the women's movement. The precondition for the awakening of women's consciousness is to be aware of society's definition of gender, and to realise that it is not the individual but the group that is oppressed by the patriarchal society, and thus to develop a sense of self. Women who are aware of their femininity generally show the ability to think independently, reflecting on the gender characteristics and responsibilities assigned by society, analysing them carefully and accepting them selectively on their own will. In the face of any form of inequality, they have a positive desire for change and strive to promote social justice and progress. Women who have awakened their consciousness have made many great contributions to cinema, social movements and literature.

The Emergence and Development of Women's Cinema in Taiwan

The concept of "women's cinema" was first coined by Laura Mulvey in 1975 and is still evolving. "Women's cinema can be defined as a film directed by a woman and aimed at a female audience, or a film where the subject matter of the video is a woman's issue. "Women's cinema is not a genre, nor a movement in the history of cinema, nor a tradition, nor a country, nor a particular graphic technique or film aesthetic. In terms of a broad definition, all types of films directed by women, covering a wide range of genres and subjects, are classified as "women's cinema". In addition, films by male directors focusing on women's themes are also considered an important part of "women's cinema". It is important to note that women's films in the broadest sense refer to video art works that focus on female characters and deeply interpret women's perspectives and viewpoints; feminist films, on the other hand, go even further, emphasising women's strong sense of independence and self-awakening (Kaplan, E. A, 2004).

In the flood of history, this land of Taiwan has experienced many different cultures and developed its own special film culture. After the civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China, many

mainland filmmakers came to Taiwan with the government, but at that time, it was impossible to produce films in Mandarin immediately, and at the same time, due to the evolution of the political situation in post-war Taiwan, there was a long period of time when excellent films from the Mainland in the 30's and 40's onwards were banned, which led to a gap between the Taiwanese audience and mainland cinema, but on the contrary, the Taiwanese directors who had returned from Japan to learn their crafts had more room to play. On the other hand, due to the unstable situation in the Mainland after the war, a large amount of capital and outstanding artists from the Mainland fled to Hong Kong, which led to the mainstreaming of Putonghua films in Hong Kong and Chinese culture before the 1970s. And Taiwanese cinema shaped itself step by step under the influence of Taiwanese and Hong Kong films made by directors who returned from Japan to learn the art.

In the early days, there were not many women working in the film environment, and men were mostly dominant until the new generation came of age in the post-war period, when things changed differently. before 1990, there were not many women's films in Taiwan, especially not many feature films or documentaries made as independent productions, highlighting the fact that women were not encouraged to work in the film environment in society in general. Influenced by the women's movement at the time, many female film artists and critics joined the discussion of "women's cinema," actively advocating the creation of women's films in the hope of subverting the longstanding disregard and discrimination against women's roles in mainstream cinema by appealing to women's consciousness, experiences, bodies, and erotic desires. In 1993, in response to the oppression of female filmmakers in Taiwan's film environment, the Black and White House Film Studio, headed by Huang Yushan, and Women's New Knowledge's Li Yuanzhen and Zhang Xiaohong initiated the co-organisation of the first Women's Film Festival in Taiwan, encouraging women's filmmaking in Taiwan, which resulted in an overwhelming response. To date, the festival has continued to discuss a wide range of topics, from the early days of the festival, when it was concerned with women's experiences of growing up, family, marriage, childbirth, lust, and identity/gender recognition, to the recent decade, when it has expanded to include the discussion of issues such as aboriginal people, labour, ethnicity, and new immigrants, which has allowed for more women's film work to be seen.

In recent years, female filmmakers have also come into the limelight. For example, in 1999, director Xiao Juzhen won the Golden Horse Award for Best Documentary with *The Legend of the Red Leaves*, and then won the same award the following year with *The Silver Hairpin*, which is a rare consecutive win for Best Documentary at the Golden Horse Awards. In 2013, Qiu Li-Kuan's first film, *The Big Tailed Bass Eel*, grossed

NT\$400 million at the box office; in 2016, director Huang Hui-Chien's feature-length documentary *Daily Dialogue*, based on mother-daughter family relationships, became the first Taiwanese documentary to win the Teddy Award at the Berlinale; in 2022, director Chen Chieh-Yao's film *HAYONG JIANG'S FAMILY* was awarded the Best Director at the Golden Horse Awards, the first Taiwanese female director to win the Golden Horse Awards in its history. The first Taiwanese female director ever to win the Golden Horse Award. With the growing popularity of Taiwanese women's cinema, Taiwanese women's cinema is gradually coming out of its marginalised state.

THE TRANSMUTATION OF FEMALE CONSCIOUSNESS AS RECREATED IN THE FILM *LITTLE BIG WOMEN*

The beginning of the women's movement in Taiwan was marked by frequent wars and deep-rooted traditional attitudes of male superiority and female inferiority, which made the path of the movement thorny and thorny, but it still sowed the seeds of hope for the germination of women's consciousness in the future. By the 1970s, the first post-war children had become adults, and women, especially those who had returned from studying abroad, stepped forward to lead the trend of reform, officially opening a new chapter of the women's movement in Taiwan. To date, the women's movement in Taiwan has lasted for about half a century, during which time, through the tireless struggle of countless men of benevolence and aspiration, as well as numerous initiatives such as legal revisions and the promotion of gender equality education, women's consciousness has gradually awakened, and they have gradually transformed from the old notion of marrying their husbands and adhering to the Three Obediences and Four Virtues into the new image of a woman who advocates for gender equality and pursues economic autonomy. The trajectory of these changes is also vividly demonstrated in literary works and films, reflecting the profound changes in women's consciousness.

Lu Xun once said, "Nala's departure is the real beginning of the problem." In view of the fact that women have long been in a relatively disadvantaged position, and even in a patriarchal society, the issue of women's self-identity has always occupied an important position, which has profoundly affected the construction of their identities. According to British sociologist Giddens, self-identity is the self-understanding of an individual based on his or her own experience and formed in continuous reflection. This identity is not an established result, but is continuously constructed and reconstructed by individuals in reflective practice (Lackey, C, 1992). Self-identity encompasses two major dimensions: the first is the in-depth evaluation and cognition of the "self", and

the second is the absorption and reflection of the evaluation feedback from the "other".

As a self-written, self-directed and self-starring film, *Lonely Flavour* profoundly depicts the journey of three generations of women in their quest for self-identity, and side-by-side outlines the trajectory of changes in women's consciousness in Taiwan. The film focuses on the life story of the heroine, Lin Hsiu-ying (played by Chen Shu-fang), and tells the story of how she raised her three daughters on her own while selling shrimp rolls for a living for more than twenty years. On her 70th birthday, she suddenly hears the news of the death of her husband, Chan Pak Cheong, whom she has not heard from for years. In order to fulfil her duty as a wife, she has to join hands with her husband's lover to prepare for the funeral. In the process, the emotional entanglements between Lin Xiuying and Cai Meilin (her husband's lover, played by Ding Ning), as well as between her and her three daughters, undergo a complex transformation from confrontation to reconciliation, and from resistance to release, with delicate and far-reaching story clues, just as the director Hsu Seung-jie said: "I intend to tell the story not only about the sorrows and joys of a woman's family, but also about the process of gradual release and growth. It's also about the process of letting go and growing up." The three generations of Taiwanese women, Lin Xiu-ying, Chen Wan-ching, Chen Wan-yu, and Chen Wan-chia, have gone from being dependent on men for their survival to realising their independence and awakening, and then to deeper self-reflection, which is essentially a process from the dependence on the Other to the manifestation of their own selves, and then to the absorption of the Other. In essence, it is a profound transformation from dependence on the "other" to manifestation of the "self", and then to absorption of the "other's" evaluation to achieve secondary growth. This process of change in women's consciousness not only reflects the evolution of women's consciousness in Taiwan, but also provides a profound look back and examination of Taiwan and even Asian history through women's perspectives.

Dependence on the Other: Traditional Chinese Women Not Yet Awakened

The film is set in 2019, when Xiuying will celebrate her 70th birthday, and her husband Chen Bochang's funeral will be held in January 2019. In the film, when the husband takes out the divorce agreement, the husband's birthday on it is born in the 37th year of the Republic of China (R.O.C.), and it is projected that Xiuying was born in 1949 or 1950, and she is a woman of the 1960s and 1970s in her adulthood. At that time, Taiwan was in the midst of an economic take-off, with the transformation of society from an agrarian economy to an industrialised one, and with the rise of home-based substitute labour, employment opportunities increased. This was a period when feminist thinking was just bud-

ding, and due to changes in the social structure, women were more receptive to employment.

However, women at that time still had a strong sense of traditional Chinese femininity, adhering to moral principles, being tolerant, persistent, and resilient, and it is clear that women during this period had a relatively strong self-identity. However, their self-identity did not transcend the times, and they did not get rid of their dependence on men as the "other". During this period, women regarded marriage as an extremely important event in their lives, as the saying goes, "If you marry someone, you will have a life of rapeseed; if you marry a good man, you will have an empty life; if you marry a bad man, you will have a life of worry." (WU, J, 2019) The general idea is that women's self-identity is not free from the times, and they are not free from their dependence on men as the "other". The idea is that if a woman marries well, she will not have to worry about food and clothing for the rest of her life, and if she marries badly, she will have to worry about the economy for the rest of her life. The play describes Xiuying's husband as a womanizer who often stays away for months at a time. Xiuying is the only one who supports the family financially and raises the children, but she still feels angry and sad because of her husband's behaviour, and she has never thought of leaving the marriage in the face of his ridiculous behaviour. As the director named the film, "*Little Big Women*". Lonely Flavour" can be interpreted as the taste of loneliness, and in Taiwanese, it means "to sell a single flavour alone", which originally referred to a restaurant specialising in only one dish and striving to make it the best it could be. Shrimp rolls" is Su-young's "Gu-yi", and her insistence on raising her children, guarding her home, and waiting for her husband's return is her "Gu-yi" in life. From the experiences and practices of Soo-young in the film, we can see the dependence of women on men in the traditional society, and the images of women in this period are mostly represented by Soo-young, who is under the surveillance of the Other and has not yet awakened to the image of the traditional Chinese women.

Beyond the "Self": Traditional Women in the Emergence of a Feminine Consciousness and Compatibility

Unlike their mother, Xiuying, who is dependent on men, Chen Wanqing and Chen Wanyu are clearly a new generation that is more independent and feminine. In the film, when Xiuying brings Chen Wanqing and Chen Wanyu to look for their father, the date on the calendar shows that it was the year "75, so they were born in 1974 and 1975, and they are women in the 1990s and 2000s when they became adults. In the course of their growing up, they experienced the implementation of the nine-year compulsory education in 1982, which enabled schoolchildren to have access to more resources for their education, and the social gap and changes before and after the lifting of martial law in

1987, which led to the gradual opening up of the society and the people's awareness. During their formative years, they experienced the implementation of nine-year compulsory education in 1982, when schoolchildren had access to more educational resources, and the gap and changes in society before and after the lifting of martial law in 1987, when the social atmosphere gradually became more open, and people were able to bravely express their own ideas and consciousness. With the alternation of old and new values, women who grew up during this period most often carry the values of traditional society. Even though there are women working hard in all walks of life, most women still regard marriage as their lifelong destination, but it is worth noting that when faced with an uncomfortable relationship, they do not always choose to stay in the relationship and most often turn away from it decisively. Therefore, the women of this period have the conditions for self-reliance and are more capable of confirming their "selves".

In the film, the growth of Chen Wanqing and Chen Wanyu is a process in which the "self" is constantly manifested and surpassed, while the "other" is gradually withdrawn. At the beginning of the film, Chen Wanqing takes the initiative to ask her husband for a divorce because she is unwilling to live with discomfort due to their incompatible concepts; while Chen Wanyu, the second sister, seems to be happy, but she is full of uneasiness about her marriage. She is sensitive to her husband's mood changes due to his occupational characteristics and the influence of his family of origin, and misunderstands that he is having an affair and wants a divorce. With her stable job and social status, Chen chooses to leave with dignity rather than endure. Both sisters' attitudes and solutions to the relationship between husband and wife conflict and deviate from their mother, Xiuying, who adheres to the tradition of marriage. However, in dealing with their relatives, Chen Wanqing and Chen Wanyu still retain the characteristics of traditional Chinese women as represented by their mother. For example, at their mother's birthday party, her mother only cares about her son and male relatives in front of her family and friends, without mentioning and caring about their lives. The women also just smile at them and take the initiative to accompany the drinks and order songs, revealing their deep understanding and heartache for their mother's strength and loneliness, and feeling distant despite their concern. However, it is worth noting that they are distant and polite when facing their uncle, who is at odds with their father, especially when the uncle criticises their father, they are brave enough to refute him and do not blindly follow their elders, demonstrating the awareness of a new woman and the courage to confront. However, in the banquet, after rebuking their uncle, they still hold a frightened and uneasy attitude and behaviour. This scene reflects their long-held discontent and struggle under the constraints of traditional morality.

From the bodies of Wanqing and Wanyu, we can see the influence of traditional social concepts on them. Even if they are dissatisfied with their elders, they are less likely to clash with them, they still have the traditional female toughness in their work, and they are willing to work hard in their marriage. They have the hard work of the previous generation, but they also have a budding sense of femininity, fighting for their own rights and interests, not willing to compromise themselves. In the face of the alternation of old and new values, they choose to follow the old traditions first, but use the new values to create a new path for themselves that is different from that of the previous generation.

Pleasing the "Other": Women in Search of Economic Independence and Freedom

If the growth of Wanqing and Wanyu is the departure of "Nala", then the experience of Chen Wanjia is the process of how "Nala" solves new problems after her departure. According to the plot of the film, it is deduced that Jiajia was born 10 months after Suying took Wanqing and Wanyu to the hotel to look for their father, so it is deduced that Jiajia was born in 1987, and her adulthood is set in the 2010s and 2020s. The year Jiajia was born coincided with the declaration of martial law. From 1949, when the KMT's war situation deteriorated during the civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, the KMT retreated to Taiwan with its army and began a 38-year period of martial law. During the period of martial law, the people's basic rights to freedom of expression as stipulated in the Constitution, such as the freedoms of assembly, association, speech, publication, and teaching, were severely restricted, and there were bans on the party and the press. As a result of these policies, the media and people's thoughts and speeches were strongly monitored by the Taiwanese authorities until 1987, when martial law was lifted and party bans, newspaper bans, and constitutional amendments were opened up; the media and newspapers competed with one another, artistic creation was no longer restricted, and the educational environment became pluralistic and free. Women born and raised during this period were more courageous in expressing their inner thoughts, and more persistent in pursuing personal freedom and economic independence in the face of traditional social demands.

In the face of conflicts with her mother, Wan Jia is always able to express her own ideas directly and expresses her dissatisfaction with her mother's insistence on her own views, whereas such intense and direct conflicts are less common in Wan Qing and Wan Yu. When accompanying her mother to the funeral parlour to discuss her father's funeral, Wan Jia tries to express her father's last wish, but her mother thinks that she knows her husband better than Wan Jia and insists on her own way, and finally Wan Jia reveals that she had contact with her father's lover, Cai Meilin, and that it was her father's last wish to organise the funeral cere-

mony at home. Wan Jia's bold and outspoken behaviour is not only shown in her relationship with her mother, but also in the face of her uncle's repeated criticisms of her father's degradation, Wan Jia's reaction is not as stoic as that of her second sister, Wan Yu, who asks questions directly in her mind.

In contrast to her sisters Wanqing and Wanyu's understanding and acceptance of her mother, Wanjia is a woman on a journey of reconciliation with her father. Wan Jia's reconciliation is not a return to the domination and shelter of the Other, but a refinement of her own self based on the evaluation of the Other. At the end of the film, the mother says to Wanjia: "I've missed the restaurant, but now you are the boss", "I'm very happy that you can take care of me at home, but you have to know that I can't be here forever, and you should find someone to be your companion", in which we can feel her recognition of Wanjia. In the dialogue, one can feel the mother's recognition of Wanjia and her worry about Wanjia's unwillingness to go into marriage. In Wanjia, we can see that she grew up in a culture full of democracy and freedom, educating men and women with equal rights, she is brave to express herself, and in the face of generational conflicts, she tries to communicate to resolve them and expresses her own ideas firmly; in the face of her career, she works hard and decisively like her mother's character, but she is no longer bound by the traditional values of the society, and she chooses to enter into a marriage during the trial stage, for her marriage is only one of the choices in her life. For her, marriage is just one of life's choices. The three sisters begin to try to reconcile with the absence of a father in their upbringing, and find a way out of their respective predicaments. For women in the 21st century, the independence of the "self" has been completed, but the problems of life cannot be solved once and for all. The reconciliation between the three sisters and their father is an attempt by modern women to complete the second growth of their own selves and solve their own problems through the observation of the "other".

ISSUES AND REFLECTIONS BEHIND THE FLUX OF FEMALE CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE FILM LITTLE BIG WOMEN

Gazing and Setting Limits: Women's Path to Independence and Self-Realisation

In recent years, with the boom in the film industry, a series of films depicting the successful escape of women have been released. However, these escapes do not always show a substantial increase in women's power and status. Instead, they often reveal women's disadvantaged position and urgent need for empowerment in specific situations, reflecting women's powerlessness and decline in certain fields, and highlighting

social prejudice and women's deep-seated plight. Mr Lu Xun, with his profound insight beyond the times, profoundly pointed out in *What Happened After Nala's Departure* that: "After Nala's departure, she was faced with no other choice than whether to fall or return. Only with an awakened heart and financial independence can she get out of her predicament."

In the film *Little Big Women*, there is a sense of irony in the fact that the happy return of the female characters comes at the expense of their "family legitimacy". From a certain perspective, this is both a demotion of female identity and a shift in gender power, revealing the shadow of pseudo-feminism. The film ultimately attributes women's happiness to the symbolic existence of male identity, which further reinforces women's dependence at the level of social consensus, thus highlighting the dilemma of women's self-identity and value realisation. Beauvoir's view is particularly thought-provoking here: "Women are always products of construction and moulding, not autonomous beings." This object consciousness profoundly affects women's passive position in life, which is difficult to be easily shaken. Take *Little Big Women* as an example, it not only shows women's resilience and perseverance in identity politics, but also reveals a deep desire for male recognition and regard, as well as the resulting sense of loneliness. Therefore, we need to be cautious about the definition of female-themed films. We should not easily label a film as "feminist" simply because it is narrated by a woman, or because it fully displays the elements of a female narrative. Instead, we should analyse the family relationship, power structure, patriarchal mechanism, identity politics, women's consciousness and their survival situation within the film, and examine whether it truly embodies the essence of feminism from a rational perspective. The anti-feminist narrative qualities of *Little Big Women*, which revolves around male "phallocentrism", undoubtedly provides us with profound reflections and inspiration.

Bound and Burdened: the Reproduction of Family and Parent-Child Relationships

In recent years, psychologists have begun to shift the focus of attention from the direct external influences such as the mother's upbringing style to the internal psychological influences that shape the external behaviour, and have begun to pay attention to the influence of the mother's values, concepts of upbringing, her own developmental needs, and other internal psychological influences on the children's personality, that is to say, to the influence of the mother's feminine consciousness on the children's personality characteristics. Childhood experiences can have a deep impact on a person's personality and behaviour. The degree of self-differentiation of parents also affects the self-differentiation status of the next generation. It also explains that, although everyone has a different family story, they share the same historical background of growing up,

and parent-child conflict under the alternation of generations occurs in every family, and the degree of self-differentiation also affects the parents' attitudes toward their children. Faced with the influence of the general environment, it is common in Taiwan for families to have a mother who represses her emotions and sacrifices her life's dreams to dedicate herself to her family. However, it is also often the influence of the mother's level of self-differentiation that causes the children to feel the heavy love from their mother.

In the film *Little Big Women*, the death of the father reunites the daughters, who have not been home for a long time, but it also brings to the surface parent-child issues that lie deep within the relationship. With the death of her husband, the family's solid family order is suddenly disintegrated, and the traditional family ethics are severely challenged, leaving the family structure on the verge of falling apart. In order to stabilise the foundation of the family, Xiuying resolutely takes on the important role of the head of the family. In the process, the role of the mother is endowed with the expectations and will of the father, and her image is particularly complex and torn under the double expectations, revealing an almost obsessive bondage to her daughters in the depth of her care.

As the first child in the family, Wanqing is born in the expectation of her parents, so her every move is the focus of their attention, and her emotional connection with the family is deeper. In the course of Wanqing's growth, she experienced many quarrels between her parents and accompanied her mother in the process of catching an adulterer. The turbulent family relationship seriously affected Wanqing's low degree of self-differentiation, and she was unable to cut off her emotions from her reasoning, and experienced emotional truncation, and moved away from her hometown to other counties and cities to work and live. Influenced by her family of origin, Wanqing is extremely insecure when dealing with relationships, and whenever the anxiety in a relationship is elevated, she wants to get out of the relationship. As the eldest daughter, Wanqing understands everything that goes on in the family, and her similarity to her father often makes her the scapegoat in the "father-mother-daughter (Wanqing)" triangle, with her mother acting as an outlet for her emotions. Wan Yu is in the middle of the family, and with an older sister above her, she gets less attention in the family and needs to spend a lot of effort to attract her parents' attention, so her emotional connection with her parents is weak. Growing up, Wan Yu actively tries to study and divert her parents' attention by performing well in order to stop their conflicts and arguments, and for this reason suppresses herself to become what her mother likes. In the process of developing self-differentiation, she is less influenced by her family than Wan Yu, but she still unconsciously pursues the recognition of other people's work or emotions, and unconsciously passes on the pressure she has endured to the next genera-

tion. Emotional truncation can also be seen in Wan Yu, who as an adult chooses to work in the county and city furthest away from her home, preferring to be separated from her own husband rather than return to Tainan to work. Wan Jia is ranked the oldest in the family in the position of hand and foot, and with the huge age difference, Wan Jia is the most favoured child in the family, and her parents' attention falls back on the youngest child, who has a deeper emotional connection with her parents. Due to her father's absence from home, she was less likely to encounter strong parental quarrels in her growing up process, and thus was more naive and lively in her character, presenting a straight-talking personality. In the process of developing self-differentiation, they were less influenced by their families, and were able to differentiate between emotion and reason, and were less likely to be influenced by their mothers' emotions, and were more healthy and independent in their personality development. In the triangular relationship of "father-mother-daughter (Wanjia)", the mother had to bear more pressure in the relationship due to the father's prolonged absence. When facing Wanjia, the mother could not restrain herself from complaining about her husband. Wanjia is aware of her mother's moods and often hears the dissatisfaction and complaints about her father from the adults, and subconsciously believes that she is indirectly responsible for her mother's unhappiness. As a result, Wanjia becomes the "substitute spouse" in the relationship, also known in psychology as the "chosen child", a child who has a deeper connection with one of the parents and usually has to bear the emotional burden of the parents.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In the vast river of time, everyone is an indispensable trickle of water, and the art of film is like a mirror that reflects the richness of an era through the journey of a drop of water. *Little Big Women* is not only a film that delicately depicts the life trajectories of several female characters, but also a magnificent epic that spans seven decades and three generations in search of identity. Director Xu Chengjie, with his unique perspective and profound thinking, skillfully integrates personal experiences into the grand narrative of the changing times,

realising a harmonious and unified narrative framework of characters, history and geography, and constructing a collective memory that is closely connected and shares the same destiny. In this community of destiny, the era and the region become the macro stage for shaping the destiny of the characters, while the characters themselves are the protagonists on the stage, not only active shapers of the times, but also faithful witnesses of history. At the same time, the film deeply analyses the emotional conflicts behind a family's trivialities, prompting the public to reflect on how traditional Chinese ethics should be effectively dealt with in the midst of the waves of modern Western civilisation. By showing in-depth communication and understanding between family members of different generations, the film effectively alleviates internal conflicts and contradictions, thus providing the audience with an opportunity to examine the dialogue between traditional and Western ethics, and highlighting the inheritance and new interpretation of traditional "family culture" in contemporary society. Against the background of the increasing integration and mutual understanding between Chinese and Western family cultures, we should uphold the Eastern position of reconciliation and tolerance, and strive to bridge the differences and barriers between Chinese and Western cultures, and actively build a platform for equal dialogue between family values and individual values, in order to explore new paths to achieve harmonious coexistence between the two sides.

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