On the Types and Causes of the Tragic Plots in Chinese Homosexual Films Shot at the Turn of the Century

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Abstract: *From the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, the tragic plots inherent in Chinese homosexual films are the key elements that guide the overall trend of the films and endow the films with artistic appeal. Reconstruction of self-identity, disillusionment of love ideal, humiliation of body and mind and the end of life journey are the four types of the tragic plots of Chinese homosexual films shot at the turn of the century, represented by four classic films, "Farewell My Concubine", "Behind the Forbidden City", "Fleeing by Night" and "Lan Yu". The antagonism of personality structure, the collision of different sexual orientations and the game of group discourse are the three causes of the tragic plots of Chinese homosexual films shot at the turn of the century.*

Keywords: The turn of the century, Chinese films, Homosexual, The tragic plots.

1. Introduction

With the evolution of human civilization, the public's tolerance and recognition of homosexual groups is increasing day by day. A film is an art form with great humanistic care and the attention and presentation of homosexual in films is more eye-catching than ever. The homosexual reflection in Chinese films has been rare before the 1990s, but after the 1990s there was an upward trend [1]. It is particularly noteworthy that from the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, Chinese homosexual films generally contained a series of tragic plots. This article takes the four classic films "Farewell My Concubine" (1993), "Behind the Forbidden City" (1996), "Fleeing by Night" (2000) and "Lan Yu" (2001) as examples, reviews and explores the types and causes of the tragic plots of Chinese homosexual films shot at the turn of the century.

2. The Multiple Types of Tragic Plots in Chinese Homosexual Films Shot at the Turn of the Century

2.1 Self-identity Reconstruction: Between Hesitation and Confirmation

"Sexual orientation" refers to the individual's persistent psychological or behavioral difference preferences for people of different genders [2]. For homosexuals, recognizing and accepting their own same-sex orientation, organizing their personal life as a homosexual, and interacting positively with society [3] is a very difficult process of self-identification. In Chinese homosexual films shot at the turn of the century, it is extremely difficult for the protagonists to reconstruct their self-identification of gender identity and sexual orientation. Therefore, many plots of Chinese homosexual films shot at that time contained a strong sadness of self-identification reconstruction.

In the film "Farewell My Concubine", the protagonist Cheng Dieyi was abandoned by his mother since childhood,

accompanied by drama, and lived on drama. Although he was a man, he has to pretend to be a female on the stage, which is hard for him. When the young Cheng Dieyi performed "Si Fan" in the film, he often sang "I am a girl by nature, not a boy" as "I am a boy by nature, not a girl" by mistake. It can be seen that it is difficult for Cheng Dieyi to accept the translocation of gender. Although he thought he was Yu Ji later, the reconstruction of gender identity in his youth was still an indelible tragedy in his life.

In the film "Behind the Forbidden City", the policeman Xiao Shi arrested Alan, a homosexual man who came to the park to have sex with another man. While being in the same room with Alan and listening to Alan's experiences, Xiao Shi gradually found that he loved Alan and he didn't know if it was right. He started the journey of reconstruction of sexual orientation identity. In the film "Lan Yu", the wealthy businessman Chen Handong originally regarded his intimate relationship with men as a game, but because of college student Lan Yu, he fell into a simple and deep homosexual love. At this time, the shackles of social image and the weight of family responsibilities dragged Chen Handong into a whirlpool of self-identification. Chen Handong had tried to enter the palace of marriage with a woman, but his married life made him more and more depressed. In the end, he divorced his wife due to disagreements on values. Afterwards, in sharing weal and woe with Lan Yu, Chen Handong gave up resistance, re-examined himself, and completed his self-identification with difficulty.

2.2 Disillusionment of the Ideal of Love: Between Existence and Disintegration

In homosexual films, the same-sex love that antagonizes tradition is destined to be tragedy [4]. The ideal of love is the core element of the plot development of Chinese homosexual films shot at the turn of the century, and its disillusionment has a strong tragic meaning.

Taking "Farewell My Concubine" as an example, the protagonist Cheng Dieyi grew up under the care of his senior fellow apprentice Duan Xiaolou since he was a child, and

had a crush on Duan Xiaolou. At the same time, because of Cheng Dieyi's artistic attainments, he regarded himself as Yu Ji, so he loved Duan Xiaolou as deeply as Yu Ji loved Xiang Yu. In short, the person Cheng Dieyi loved was both the senior fellow apprentice in his life and Xiang Yu on the stage. But as far as Duan Xiaolou was concerned, life and drama were different. When he acted "Xiang Yu", he understood, accepted, and cherished the love of "Yu Ji". As a friend, he couldn't give Cheng Dieyi the love he needed. Therefore, Cheng Dieyi's ideal of love in the film is doomed to disillusionment. The "love" in the film "Behind the Forbidden City" has changed from Alan's unrequited love to a potential and unfinished two-way "love" between Xiao Shi and Alan. This "love" only existed, but didn't develop. It stopped abruptly when Xiao Shi had a desire for Alan, just like a newly born baby was strangled in the cradle. In contrast, the same-sex love in "Fleeing by Night" can be considered to have taken shape. When the returnee Xu Shadong, who was a cellist, and his fiancée Wei Ying'er were enjoying the Kunqu Opera "Elope at Night", the actor Lin Chong went into their world of love. From then on, they formed an entangled relationship. Wei Ying'er and Xu Shadong both loved Lin Chong, and Lin Chong loved Xu Shadong deeply. However, Xu Shadong's cowardly escape made it impossible for him and Lin Chong to see each other again, which created an eternal love tragedy.

2.3 Physical and Mental Humiliation: Between Forbearance and Resistance

Homosexual behaviors and heterosexual behaviors both contain "higher position" and "lower position". This makes the "molesting" behaviors that exist in heterosexual groups also exist in homosexual groups. Through the plots, it is not difficult to find that the tragedies of "self-identity reconstruction" and "disillusionment of love ideals" encountered by the protagonists of Chinese homosexual films shot at the turn of the century have caused them to fall into a spiritual dilemma that is difficult to break through. Then, the protagonists who are humiliated physically and mentally undoubtedly suffer from both physical and mental suffering.

Let's take the example of the film "Farewell My Concubine". Cheng Dieyi was "coveted" by an old eunuch when he was young. The old eunuch ordered people to take Cheng Dieyi into the bedroom, put his urine in a crystal container, threw him on the bed, and gave a sharp and piercing cry. At this point, the camera was turned, and everything that happened afterwards was hidden from the screen. It is conceivable that when young Cheng Dieyi was faced with the ravages of the old eunuch, he suffered indescribable in his body, and he felt frightened and helpless in his heart. For another, a series of bad things Lin Chong experienced in "Fleeing by Night" deserve more sympathy. Because he was thirsty in the middle of the night, he went to the courtyard to drink water. He met his senior fellow apprentice who was squatting alone in the corner. During the conversation, he learned that another senior fellow apprentice "Xiao Jiu" was called into

the room by the master. Lin Chong was silent for a moment, rushed into the master's bedroom angrily, and killed him by mistake. After Lin Chong pushed open the door of the master's room, he said "How many more people are you going to molest?", which is quite thought-provoking. From Lin Chong's previous silence and thinking to his resentment, rage and query, it is not difficult to speculate that he had also been molested by his master. Xiao Jiu's experience evoked Lin Chong's memories of the past humiliation. These memories quickly ignited the anger in Lin Chong's mind, causing him to lose his mind, and even kill his master by mistake. It can be seen that those unspeakable shame experiences were entrenched in Lin Chong's mind.

2.4 The end of Life Journey: Between Internal Cause and External Force

The tragedy of death can span across genre, media, time and space, and it brings the most direct and profound stimulation to the audience. The presentation of death in Chinese homosexual films shot at the turn of the century made the films even more heartbreaking. On the one hand, ending with the death of the protagonists, leads the tragedy to the ultimate and insoluble, but on the other, it also gives the characters eternal artistic charm.

Cheng Dieyi killed himself and woke up from the dream of his life. He withstood the tests of life, went through the difficult years of self-identification reconstruction, accepted the reality that Duan Xiaolou would not fall in love with him, and gave up drug addiction. He could have spent the rest of his life in a normal state, but he still chose to die as Yuji on the stage in Yuji's way. Cheng Dieyi's death does not seem to be reasonable in reality, but just as what was mentioned above, he was born for the drama, and lived because of the drama. After he had experienced the sufferings in the world, he woke up from the dream, broke free from the shackles of "Cheng Dieyi" and became Yu Ji completely. Lin Chong killed his master and he fled. After he had experienced hardship, he resolutely went to the United States to find Xu Shadong, but he was imprisoned for "illegal immigration", and finally dead forever because of the desperate waiting and endless pain. If Cheng Dieyi's death is the result of his willingness, Lin Chong's death is the wane of his body and mind after wiping out of his hope. Compared with the aforementioned films, Lan Yu's death came unexpectedly. Chen Handong and Lan Yu broke through the real dilemma and were determined to stay together for a lifetime. This is originally a beautiful and warm ending. However, the director used Lan Yu's death to put a sad end to the film, which the audience did not expect. Compared with Cheng Dieyi's suicide and Lin Chong's death, Lan Yu's unexpected death makes us feel that our fate is uncertain. However, from the perspective of film narration, Lan Yu's death is the best ending of the film [5]. Lan Yu's death not only freed the film from the shackles of stylized plots, but also reflected the creator's deep understanding of the relationship between life and art.

3. The Multiple Causes of Tragic Plots in Chinese Homosexual Films Shot at the Turn of the Century

3.1 Personality Structure Confrontation: Between the Id and the Ego

The primary cause of the tragic plots of Chinese homosexual films shot at the turn of the century is the confrontation between the Id and the Ego. Sigmund Freud divided the individual's personality into three parts: "Id", "Ego" and "Superego". He thought that the "Id" was only related to things that directly met the needs of individuals, and followed the principle of happiness, while the "Ego" met the needs of the "Id" by considering the reality of the situation, and followed the principle of reality [6]. For the protagonists of Chinese homosexual films, it is their original desire to enjoy same-sex love with homosexuals and they follow the principle of happiness and meet the needs of the "Id". However, as Karl Heinrich Marx said the essence of human beings is not an abstract thing inherent in a single person but the sum of all social relations in terms of its reality [7]. When the obligation to procreate and established social norms are at odds with the Id's pursuit of happiness, the protagonists, who are driven by the principles of reality, suppress the Id's demands, disguise themselves in behavior, and make compromises to the reality. Although the long-term suppression of the Id is relatively "safe", it also makes it difficult to satisfy the Id's needs for happiness. As a result, in the long-standing confrontation between the Id and the Ego, Chinese homosexual films shot at the turn of the century were shrouded in the shadow of tragedy.

Taking "Fleeing by Night" as an example, Driven by the Id, Xu Shadong followed his heart and faced up to his love for Lin Chong from time to time. But he also regained his "reason" under the warning of the Ego and bowed to the constant gossip. Finally he was defeated in the confrontation between the Id and the Ego and returned to the United States alone. It is Xu Shadong's escape that creates these protagonists' tragedy that can't be changed.

3.2 The Collision of Multiple Sexual Orientations: Between the Same Sex and the Opposite Sex

Another important cause of the tragic plots of Chinese homosexual films shot at the turn of the century is the failure of the collision between different sexual orientations. When the contradictions between various love elements and multiple sexual orientations in films cannot be reconciled, the tragic plots arise.

Taking "Farewell My Concubine" as an example, the most important cause of Cheng Dieyi's love tragedy is that as a homosexual, he loved Duan Xiaolou, a heterosexual. In Duan Xiaolou's view, love should only exist between men and women. Therefore, even though Duan Xiaolou knew that Cheng Dieyi loved him, he couldn't respond to Cheng Dieyi's love positively in the worldly life. In the film, the

two sexual orientations cannot be merged with each other, and they did not retreat. They had to collide frequently. Cheng Dieyi naturally became the victim of the failure of the collision of the sexual orientations, fell step by step in the wrong love, and slid into the abyss of tragedy. Similarly, the tragic fate of Lin Chong, Xu Shadong and Wei Ying'er in "Fleeing by Night" also stems from the failure of the collision between homosexuality and heterosexuality. As the only woman in the triangle relationship, Wei Ying'er was a pure heterosexual. Unfortunately, her fiancé and beloved were not only homosexuals, but also they loved each other. As a result, the three of them were firmly bound by the net of fate in the complicated entanglement, and finally drifted apart.

3.3 Group Discourse Game: Between the Edge and the Center

From the perspective of the group base or the perspective of social function, for the two groups of homosexuals and heterosexuals, heterosexuals who account for the vast majority of the population and are responsible for reproduction are always at the center of society. Thus, homosexuals are naturally marginalized. On the one hand, the marginal discourse of homosexuals shows a desire to approach and merge with the central discourse of heterosexuals, but on the other, the two discourses are also in a game. This kind of game is the third cause of the tragic plots of Chinese homosexual films shot at the turn of the century.

Taking "Behind the Forbidden City" as an example, "The East Palace" and "The West Palace" are actually two gathering places for homosexuals. In the traditional architectural culture, the East Palace and the West Palace, as a cultural symbol, has a relationship of inclusion and subordination with the central building. It can be seen that the title of the film itself implies that homosexuals are marginalized compared to heterosexuals. When Xiao Shi, the representative of the central discourse group, began to love Alan, the representative of the marginal discourse group, the game between the marginal discourse and the central discourse entered a white-hot stage. The game ended in the victory of the central discourse. A series of tragic plots in the film are born from this.

4. Conclusion

From the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, the protagonists of Chinese homosexual films moved towards multi-dimensional tragic lives in multi-dimensional tragic plots. The multi-dimensional exploration of the types and causes of the tragic plots of Chinese homosexual films shot at the turn of the century is not only a summary and review of the aesthetic style and cultural memory of the past films, but also a vision for the creation of such films in the future. At the same time, it can also arouse the audience's attention and thinking about the real life situations of homosexuals.

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