

Between Family and Society: How Does *The Determination to Leave* Reconstruct the Gender Power Map?

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Abstract: This thesis focuses on the film *The Determination to Leave* directed by Yin Lichuan and deeply analyzes how the film reconstructs the gender power map. By depicting Li Hong's experience of resource deprivation due to son preference and emotional neglect in her original family, her marriage becomes an intergenerational replication of the original trauma, leading to self-cognition deviation. Through plot elements such as violent scenes and self-driving tours, the film uses pain narrative and symbolic systems to metaphorize women's awakening, achieving a spiritual breakthrough from physical trauma and an identity reconstruction from spatial oppression. The choice of Li Hong's daughter, Sun Xiaoxue, reflects the intergenerational transmission of awakening. With its unique narrative and audio-visual language, the film reveals the issue of gender inequality in family and social structures, providing profound thoughts and inspirations for promoting the innovation of family concepts, gender equality in the workplace, and the inclusive development of society. At the same time, by adding a new chapter titled "Cultural Field: The Implicit Discipline of Gender Power", it further explores the operation mechanism of gender power at the cultural level and deepens the interpretation of the film's theme.

Keywords: *The Determination to Leave*; Gender Power; Trauma from the Original Family; Women's Awakening; Intergenerational Transmission

1. Introduction

In the intertwined world of film and light and shadow, the film *The Determination to Leave* directed by Yin Lichuan is like a sharp scalpel,

precisely and delicately dissecting the survival texture of women within the complex structures of family and society. Taking women's self-awakening as the narrative core, the film focuses on the trauma brought about by the original family. These lingering wounds are like hidden tumors lurking in the dark, subtly yet profoundly influencing the trajectories of women's lives. At the same time, it provides extremely valuable thinking dimensions for reflection and reconstruction at the social level. Different from traditional "sentimental dramas," *The Determination to Leave* boldly breaks through the creative stereotypes, abandoning the narrative style of excessive exaggeration of suffering, and instead shifts the narrative focus to the awakening and reshaping of women's subject consciousness [1]. Through carefully arranged plots and delicate emotional portrayals, the film leads the audience on an exploration journey that reaches deep into the soul. By means of the unique narrative and audio-visual language of the film, it deeply analyzes the intricate relationship between family and society, stimulating the audience's in-depth thinking about a series of important issues such as women's living conditions, family relationships, and social justice.

2. Tracing the Source of Trauma: The Shadow Projection of the Original Family

2.1 Son Preference: Resource Deprivation under Structural Oppression

The famous visual theorist Arnheim proposed in *Art and Visual Perception* that visual forms can directly affect the audience's psychology and further promote the construction and generation of the meaning of images [2]. At the beginning of *The Determination to Leave*, the camera focuses on Li Hong's youth, unreservedly showing the systematic

oppression exerted on women's growth by the idea of son preference. Li Hong longed to change her destiny through the college entrance examination. However, the deep-rooted gender prejudice within her family was like an insurmountable high wall, mercilessly blocking her path to education. This plot is not only a key turning point in Li Hong's personal destiny but also a vivid portrayal of gender inequality in family resource allocation.

The director skillfully uses dark colors and oppressive compositions to enhance this sense of oppression. For example, in the scene where Li Hong curls up in a small and dim room, surrounded by her younger brother's toys while she can only read old books in the corner, through the narrow spatial composition and dark tones, an oppressive atmosphere is created. This not only intuitively presents the oppressive environment Li Hong is in but also implies the marginalized status of women in the family power structure. From a sociological perspective, in real rural families, the probability of male offspring receiving higher education is generally higher than that of female offspring. This data fully confirms that the depiction of the gender inequality structure in the film is not fictional but a true reflection of the phenomenon of son preference in real society.

Echoing the plot in the film *Sister* where the elder sister An Ran sacrifices her medical dream for the family, both films deeply showcase the dilemmas and struggles of women under the concept of gender discrimination [3]. However, *The Determination to Leave* goes a step further. Through unique audio-visual languages, such as the close-up shots of Li Hong's subtle expressions when facing family injustice and the use of environmental sound effects to set off the oppressive atmosphere, it more deeply reveals the harm caused by gender inequality to women. This harm is not only reflected in the deprivation of material resources but also leaves an indelible trauma on women's spiritual level.

2.2 Emotional Neglect: Silent Violence and Self-Identity Crisis

In family life, Li Hong not only suffered obvious resource shortages but also long-term emotional neglect. There are many "empty shot" scenes in the film. For example, when Li Hong tries to express her thoughts at the dining

table but is ignored, the camera lingers for a long time on the silent dining table, and her father always turns his back to the camera, leaving her only with a cold back. These scenes symbolize the alienation and indifference of family relationships. Growing up in such a loveless environment, Li Hong gradually fell into the predicament of "learned helplessness." According to psychological theories, individuals who are long-term neglected often form the mindset that "their own needs are not important." This mindset is like an invisible shackle, severely restricting Li Hong's ability to express her emotional needs in adulthood. In married life, facing her husband Sun Dayong's neglect and blame, she often chooses to endure it silently, swallowing her words back and finding it difficult to establish a healthy emotional connection, thus falling into a self-identity crisis. Through these delicate depictions, the director vividly presents the long-term negative impact of emotional neglect on women's psychology, allowing the audience to deeply feel the severity of this "silent violence."

Compared with other films that reflect family emotional neglect, *The Determination to Leave* is more unique in its expression techniques. It does not show emotional harm through intense conflicts but in a calm yet highly tensioned way, such as Li Hong's silence and daze when she is alone, as well as her numb reactions to the surrounding environment. This enables the audience to more empathize with the erosion of emotional neglect on women's hearts, thus triggering a profound reflection on the importance of family emotional communication.

3. The Sorrow of Growth: From the Marriage Dilemma to the Collapse of Self-Cognition

3.1 The Marriage Dilemma: Intergenerational Replication of the Original Pattern

Li Hong's married life seems to be a continuation and replication of the trauma from her original family. In the scene where her husband Sun Dayong angrily smashes the crystal vase, the director uses slow motion and the sharp sound of the glass breaking to vividly show the oppression of male power on women's hearts. This scene echoes the plot in the Korean film *Kim Ji-young, Born in 1982* where Kim Ji-

young is scolded as a "neet mom," jointly revealing the common problem of "father absence in child-rearing" in East Asian society [4]. In this family structure, women not only have to bear heavy household chores but also endure their husbands' indifference and suppression mentally, making it difficult for them to obtain equality and respect.

Li Hong continued the submissive and sacrificial pattern formed in her original family in her marriage. She silently took on all the household chores and tried her best to meet the needs of her family but ignored her own feelings [5]. This intergenerational transmission of the marriage dilemma trapped her in a cycle of pain and made it difficult for her to break free from the shadow of her original family. Through this plot, the director deeply exposes the constraints of the traditional family structure on women and triggers the audience's in-depth thinking about the issue of gender equality in marriage. Compared with similar themed films, *The Determination to Leave* pays more attention to showing the psychological change process of women in the marriage dilemma, from the initial forbearance to the gradual confusion and struggle, allowing the audience to see the real survival state of women under the traditional marriage model.

3.2 Self-Cognition Deviation: From "Accessory" to "Hollow Person"

Li Hong, who has lived in a depressing environment for a long time, has experienced a serious distortion of her self-cognition. When choosing a vase, the guilt that she can hardly hide in her heart, as well as details such as sacrificing her career for the family, all reveal her tendency of "self-objectification." The director skillfully uses the mirror image as a symbolic element. For example, when Li Hong looks in the mirror repeatedly but always deliberately avoids looking directly into her own eyes, this detail metaphorizes the split in her identity. Under the shackles of traditional family concepts, she regarded herself as an accessory of the family and devoted herself wholeheartedly to the roles of wife and mother but gradually lost herself in the process. However, her deep-seated desire for independence also made her fall into a self-conflict and become a "hollow person" spiritually.

This deviation in self-cognition not only

seriously affected Li Hong's private life but also greatly restricted her development in society. By creating the character of Li Hong, the director deeply reveals the destructive impact of the trauma from the original family on women's self-cognition and calls on society to pay attention to the real situation of women in family and society and help them rebuild a healthy self-cognition. Compared with other films that explore women's self-cognition, *The Determination to Leave* closely combines women's self-cognition issues with family and social environments, analyzing the root causes of the problems from a more macroscopic perspective, making the film more realistic and socially critical.

4. The Light of Awakening: The Double Breakthrough of Film Techniques and Symbolic Systems

4.1 Violent Scenes: Pain Narrative and Awakening Metaphor

In the climax part of the film, the plot where Li Hong picks up a knife and attempts to end her own life becomes a key turning point in her self-awakening. The director uses close-up shots to clearly show the trembling tip of the knife and Li Hong's pale face. At the same time, the background music suddenly stops, creating a suffocatingly tense atmosphere. This treatment breaks the excessive consumption of sad emotions in traditional tragedies and transforms physical pain into a symbol of spiritual awakening. As Judith Butler said in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, physical trauma can become the starting point for reshaping subjectivity [6]. Li Hong's self-harming behavior, seemingly a desperate compromise with life, is actually a strong cry for her self-worth and a brave resistance to long-term oppression.

The director gives the self-destructive behavior a rebellious meaning. Through this narrative method centered on pain, not only does it enhance the emotional impact of the film, but it also endows Li Hong's self-awakening path with profound connotations. Different from other films that use violent scenes to show women's resistance, *The Determination to Leave* does not simply pursue visual stimulation but pays more attention to exploring the psychological motives and spiritual meanings behind the violence, allowing the audience to

see the difficulties and courage of women in seeking self-liberation in desperate

4.2 Self-Driving Tour: Spatial Liberation and Identity Reconstruction

The self-driving tour plot in the film is not just a geographical escape but also symbolizes the psychological leap and breakthrough of women. Through wide-angle shots, the director shows the continuous roads, vast natural landscapes, and the equal cooperation among team members, forming a sharp contrast with the narrow and oppressive family environment. Here, the "wheels" symbolize women's yearning for freedom, and the "steering wheel" implies women's control over their own dominance. During the self-driving tour, Li Hong gradually learned to express her thoughts, played a role in team decision-making, and felt equality and respect.

This new experience prompted her to start re-examining herself and reconstructing her self-identity. The awakening symbol system constructed by the director vividly shows the transformation process of women from oppression to freedom and from subordination to independence, providing a feasible path for women's awakening [7]. Compared with other films that use travel as a symbol of growth, the self-driving tour in *The Determination to Leave* places more emphasis on women's self-discovery and growth in group interactions. Through equal communication and cooperation with others, women gradually regain their confidence and realize their self-worth, making the theme of the film more abundant and profound.

5. Cultural Field: The Implicit Discipline of Gender Power

5.1 The Infiltration and Internalization of Traditional Gender Culture

In *The Determination to Leave*, the dilemmas faced by Li Hong are rooted in the long-term infiltration and internalization of traditional gender culture. From a macro perspective of social culture, the patriarchal cultural system has long dominated, placing women in a subordinate position. This cultural concept is disseminated through various channels such as family, education, and media, subtly influencing every individual. In the family, the education and growth

environment that Li Hong received from a young age made her take for granted concepts such as son preference and women's self-sacrifice. The internalization of these concepts made her lack the awareness of resistance when facing unfair family resource allocation and emotional neglect. Instead, she continuously suppressed and compromised herself. For example, when she lost the opportunity to take the college entrance examination because of her younger brother, she did not fiercely resist but silently accepted it, which is exactly the result of the discipline of traditional gender culture. In the field of education, gender biases may also exist in teaching materials and teachers' attitudes, further strengthening women's perception of their subordinate status [8]. And gender stereotypes in the media, such as the stereotypical portrayal of female characters, are constantly deepening the influence of this cultural concept.

5.2 The Double Standards of Public Opinion towards Women

Public opinion often has double standards in judging women, which is also reflected in the film. When Li Hong silently gives in her marriage, public opinion may regard her as a model of a "good wife and loving mother." However, when she tries to pursue herself and express her needs and ideas, she may face doubts and pressures from all sides.

When Li Hong decides to go on a self-driving tour and attempts to break free from the shackles of her family, people around her may think that she is "irresponsible for the family" and "willful." This pressure from public opinion essentially represents a suppression of women's breaking through traditional gender roles. Society expects women to take on family responsibilities and perform well in society at the same time. However, in actual judgment, there are many restrictions on women's behavior. This double standard reflects the implicit operation of gender power at the cultural level, making it difficult for women to achieve self-worth.

5.3 The Reinforcement of Gender Power by Cultural Symbols

Many cultural symbols in the film also invisibly strengthen the gender power structure. For example, traditional family ceremonies and festival customs often center around men, with

women in the position of assistance and service. In some family gathering scenes, male elders hold the dominant position, and women are responsible for preparing food and taking care of others. Such scenes are not only a portrayal of daily life but also a reinforcement of the gender power relationship by cultural symbols. Furthermore, cultural symbols such as clothing and accessories also have gender implications [9]. Li Hong mostly wears simple and conservative clothes in the family, which not only reflects her living state but also implies her status in the family. During the self-driving tour, her clothing gradually becomes more relaxed and casual, and this change also symbolizes her breaking through the constraints of traditional gender culture[10]. These cultural symbols repeatedly appear in daily life, deepening people's perception and acceptance of the gender power relationship, allowing the cultural concept of gender inequality to continue.

6. Conclusion: The Hopeful Light of Intergenerational Awakening

Sun Xiaoxue, Li Hong's daughter, is a typical representative of the intergenerational transmission of women's awakening in the film. She learned lessons from her mother's bumpy experiences and resolutely broke away from the old trajectory of fate. In her adolescence, after witnessing the unequal relationship between her parents, Sun Xiaoxue firmly supported her parents' divorce. This behavior fully reflects her profound reflection and brave challenge to the traditional family structure.

When more and more women, like Li Hong and Sun Xiaoxue, awaken, they will converge into a powerful force, driving profound changes in multiple fields such as family concepts and the workplace environment in society. In the family field, people will pay more attention to equality and respect among family members and completely abandon traditional gender prejudices. In the workplace environment, women will obtain more fair development opportunities and break through gender barriers. At the same time, through the analysis of the implicit discipline of gender power in the cultural field, we can also more clearly understand that change requires not only

individual awakening but also reflection and innovation of the entire cultural system. This comprehensive transformation from family to society and from individuals to the cultural level will lead the whole society towards a more inclusive and equal direction. *The Determination to Leave*, by showing women's awakening and resistance, not only voices for women but also provides thinking and inspiration for social progress, having important practical significance and contemporary value.

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