

The Determination to Leave: Intergenerational Breakthrough and the Deconstruction of Symbols in Female Narration

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Abstract: This film review analyzes "*The Determination to Leave*" from a feminist perspective, exploring how women break through and reconstruct their identities amidst multiple dilemmas in the family, workplace, and society depicted in the film. By examining the transmission and reconciliation of intergenerational trauma within family relationships, it reveals the oppression of traditional gender concepts towards women and the intergenerational influences. Additionally, it studies the application of elements such as space and symbols in the film to showcase the process of women breaking free from constraints. Meanwhile, it points out that the film has limitations in gender narration, specifically in the simplistic portrayal of male characters as mere obstacles to female growth, failing to delve deeply into the complexity of gender relationships. The film's depiction of intergenerational relationships and women's workplace dilemmas holds practical significance, sparking social attention to gender equality and family relationships. Future feminist creations should break through the binary opposition in narration, construct more inclusive and realistically critical expressions, and promote social gender equality.

Keywords: *The Determination to Leave*; Feminism; Intergenerational Relationship; Symbolic Deconstruction; Gender Narration

1. Introduction

In the contemporary field of film creation, feminist films have been booming like mushrooms after rain, constantly challenging society's perception of gender issues with their

unique perspectives and narrative styles. The film "*The Determination to Leave*" directed by Yin Lichuan is a highly representative work among them. Its unique narrative perspective presents the audience with a touching story of a woman breaking free from multiple shackles and pursuing her self-worth. Simone de Beauvoir's classic assertion in "*The Second Sex*" that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" profoundly reveals the process of how social culture constructs women's identities [1]. Judith Butler further points out that gender is a "performative" existence formed through repeated social performances [2]. These theories provide a solid theoretical foundation for our interpretation of "*The Determination to Leave*". This film review will take the feminist perspective as the entry point, deeply analyze the key elements in the film such as intergenerational relationships, gender games, and symbolic systems, and explore how women can achieve self-liberation and identity reconstruction amidst multiple dilemmas in the family, workplace, and society.

The female protagonist, Li Hong, in the film is deeply trapped in the heavy constraints of the family, workplace, and society. In the family realm, traditional gender concepts are deeply ingrained, and the role expectations for women are limited to taking care of their husbands and children. In the workplace, phenomena such as educational discrimination and maternal punishment are prevalent, pushing women to the margins of social production. At the social level, the moral standard of being a "good wife and a loving mother" is like an invisible shackle, depriving women of their subjectivity. However, Li Hong did not yield to these dilemmas. Like a tenacious seed, she strived to grow in the oppressive environment. Not only did she

support the growth of the next generation, but she also completed her own transformation in the process. This narrative of breaking through difficulties provides an excellent textual example for our in-depth exploration of feminist issues.

2. Recursive Patterns and Mirror-Like Breakthroughs: The Deconstruction of Gender Structure in the Transmission of Intergenerational Trauma

2.1 Spatial Oppression and Women's Multiple Dilemmas

Lu Xun once said that if one only has the consciousness of independence but lacks the economic power to be independent and participate in social life, there are probably only two paths for Nora after she leaves home: degradation or return [3]. In *"The Determination to Leave"*, the director skillfully creates a strong narrative tension by constructing three layers of spatial oppression. In the family domain, Li Hong is oppressed by her husband's hegemonic discourse and is disciplined by her daughter's demanding filial piety, and is forced to undertake a large amount of "emotional labor". Her husband's words are like commands, brooking no doubt, and influenced by traditional filial piety concepts, her daughter takes Li Hong's efforts for granted, further increasing her mental burden.

In the workplace space, educational discrimination and maternal punishment become insurmountable obstacles for two generations of women. Due to family reasons, Li Hong missed the opportunity to receive an education and encountered many difficulties in the workplace. Her daughter, Sun Xiaoxue, even though she has a certain level of education, was eliminated due to issues such as childbirth and other reasons. Both mother and daughter were pushed to the margins of social production. The public space also scrutinizes women. The moral gaze of being a "good wife and a loving mother" is everywhere, requiring women to conform to traditional gender role norms, making it difficult for women to truly express themselves in the public domain and losing their subjectivity.

Director Yin Lichuan uses the spatial politics of road movies to solve this dilemma. Li

Hong's self-driving journey is no longer just a physical displacement but also symbolizes her philosophical escape from the "cage of the other" to a "mobile subject". During the self-driving trip, she starts a new career path through the live broadcast room, rebuilds her economic identity. The moment she holds the steering wheel, she regains the sovereignty over her own body. By adopting the method of "nonviolent non-cooperation", she gradually breaks down the traditional gender role settings for her, demonstrating the powerful strength of women breaking through spatial oppression.

2.2 The Tear and Reconciliation of Intergenerational Relationships

Psychological research shows that people's experiences, sufferings, and behavioral logics in intimate relationships can often find their roots in their original families. The "original family theory" has even become an important framework for people to explain their mate selection criteria and communication experiences. In *"The Determination to Leave"*, the complexity of intergenerational relationships is vividly demonstrated. Li Hong's mother was deeply influenced by the traditional family model and regarded the family as the core of her life. Even though she encountered many hardships in life and knew that her husband was biased and her daughter was in a difficult situation, she still chose to endure it silently and gradually lost her self-worth in the long-term self-suppression.

Li Hong grew up during a period of social change and was eager to pursue her self-worth and career development. However, the heavy burden of her original family and the unsatisfactory marriage life pushed her to the verge of collapse after repeated setbacks. She originally hoped to get rid of the shackles of her original family through marriage but unexpectedly fell into another predicament. The scene in the film where "she strokes her mother's face" is of great significance. The close-up shot magnifies this action, precisely capturing the micro-expressions of the characters and enhancing the emotional intensity. The use of an eye-level angle shows the equal emotional communication between the mother and daughter and the subtle changes in the power relationship, not only reflecting the profound influence of the

original family in intergenerational inheritance but also showing the bitterness of this generation of women struggling in difficulties and the sweetness of their ultimate growth [4]. A quarrel in the family is like the passing of a baton between generations. In the era when Sun Xiaoxue lives, the educational level of women has generally increased, and their self-awareness has gradually awakened. Through the cross-narration of Li Hong's marriage and career situation, the film clearly shows her exhaustion and helplessness after her hopes in marriage were dashed. After witnessing the failure of her parents' marriage, Sun Xiaoxue was initially dissatisfied with her mother's cowardice. But when she became a mother herself and experienced various aspects of life, she began to understand her mother's situation and took the initiative to encourage her mother to leave.

In Li Hong's original family, her father's preference for sons over daughters and her mother's submissive attitude deeply interfered with her choices in marriage and career. This intergenerational trauma is clearly transmitted between the mother and daughter. Although Li Hong tried to get rid of the shadow of her original family, she was prone to repeating the same mistakes inadvertently. Therefore, her departure is not only a personal liberation but also may be a brave attempt to break the chain of intergenerational trauma transmission, providing the audience with profound thinking and reference.

2.3 The Double-Edged Sword of Gender Game Narrative

Chinese feminist literature has always been committed to pursuing equal dialogue beyond gender differences between men and women and constructing a cross-gender social community [5]. However, *"The Determination to Leave"* has certain limitations in the narrative of gender games. The film falls into the misunderstanding of simply portraying male characters as pure obstacles to female growth, failing to deeply explore the complexity of gender relationships. Compared with the multi-dimensional portrayal of male characters in the Korean film *"Kim Ji-young, Born in 1982"* [6], and the delicate presentation of the emotional entanglement between men and women in the American film *"Marriage Story"* [7], *"The Determination to*

Leave" is somewhat lacking in the depth and authenticity of gender narration.

In fact, gender issues are diverse, and men can completely become supporters and allies of women. The simplistic portrayal of male characters as villains limits the film's in-depth exploration of gender equality issues and fails to fully showcase the diversity of gender relationships in real life. The film's depiction of women's pursuit of economic independence profoundly shows the dialectical relationship between freedom and constraints.

The plot in the film where Sun Xiaoxue was eliminated due to taking maternity leave is a vivid metaphor of this theory, deeply revealing the structural problems behind women's workplace dilemmas and triggering the audience's in-depth thinking about the root causes of gender inequality.

3. The Undercurrent of Symbols: The Reconstruction of the Signifier Chain of Women's Life History through Image Rhetoric

3.1 Spatial and Object Symbols: The Concrete Presentation of the Female Inner World

Colors and symbols carry rich meanings within the social context. They often resonate with or conflict against a wide range of gender issues, directly or indirectly exploring the gender roles and power relations in society through visual narration [8]. In *The Determination to Leave*, the abundant symbolic system endows the film with profound imagistic poetic connotations, and various props jointly construct a narrative system full of symbolic meanings.

The family space in the film serves as a concrete expression of the oppressive atmosphere. The dim tones and narrow, cramped layout imply the dull and oppressive environment within the family, as well as the constraints on women, forming a stark contrast with the heroine's inner longing for freedom. As the plot progresses, the light and shadow in the family space gradually change, shifting from the initial darkness and obscurity to the occasional glimmer of light, symbolizing the transformation of the heroine's state of mind from depression to seeing hope.

Personal items in the film, such as brightly colored scarves and delicate diaries, have

become symbols of the female self-identification and emotional aspirations. In the oppressive living environment, these bright items are like stars in the dark, embodying the heroine's yearning for freedom and beauty. Their appearance and changes in the plot bear witness to the heroine's psychological growth process, from carefully safeguarding her small joys to gradually having the courage to pursue greater freedom.

3.2 The Symbol of "Fish" and Music: Key Elements of Intergenerational Inheritance and Emotional Rendering

The symbol of "fish" runs through different stages of the heroine's life, being just like a metaphor for the fluidity and growth trajectory of a woman's life. Before marriage, her father asked her to deal with the fish, symbolizing the traditional housework role assigned to women in the original family and the constraints imposed on women. After marriage, her husband also asked her to deal with the fish, continuing this inherent expectation of women. After becoming a mother, her daughter also joined in the request to deal with the fish, further deepening the inheritance and changes between generations.

The integration of music and the environment is a crucial element in guiding the audience's emotions. According to different plots and scenes, the film employs various styles of music. When there are family conflicts, the music is tense and oppressive, intensifying the audience's sense of anxiety. When the heroine goes on a self-driving trip and gradually gains freedom, passionate music plays, enabling the audience to feel her inner excitement and hope, greatly enhancing the emotional appeal of the film.

4. The Dialectics of the Dilemma: The Entropy-Increasing Breakthrough and Local Reconstruction of Chinese Feminist Narration

4.1 The Individual Level: Inner Conflict and Growth Transformation

With the widespread dissemination and in-depth development of feminist narratology, scholars such as Lanser have continuously updated their theoretical viewpoints and proposed the theory of "intersectionality", advocating the integration of multiple

resources for text analysis to draw a new blueprint for text research practice [9]. This theory provides a new perspective for our interpretation of "*The Determination to Leave*" and also points out the direction for the development of Chinese feminist narration [10].

From an individual perspective, the repeated lines "What on earth am I striving for?" and the "self-harm" behavior of Li Hong in the climax of the film become important clues to revealing her inner conflicts. This question on the surface is a doubt about the surrounding environment and others, but in fact, it is Li Hong's in-depth exploration of her personal value in the intense collision between traditional family concepts and modern self-awareness. For a long time, she has silently dedicated herself in the family but has not received the respect and understanding she deserves. She has encountered various injustices in the workplace and found it difficult to realize her self-worth. This inner conflict and struggle reach their peak at this moment.

The film uses the narrative technique of intersecting time and space to interweave the clips of Li Hong's past life in the oppressive environment with her longing for a free future life. In this way, it vividly shows her psychological transformation process from confusion and bewilderment to gradual awakening. The memories of the past are like heavy shackles, constantly reminding her of the pain she once experienced. The longing for the future is like a bright lighthouse, guiding her forward, allowing the audience to clearly see the heroine's growth trajectory in the face of inner conflicts.

4.2 The Social Level: Multidimensional Narrative Significance

At the social level, "*The Determination to Leave*" has important practical significance. The film's in-depth depiction of intergenerational relationships reflects the collision and integration of traditional family values and modern concepts. Although there are certain limitations in gender narration, its portrayal of women's workplace dilemmas has sparked widespread social attention to gender equality issues. Relevant survey data shows that more than 60% of women encounter gender discrimination in the workplace [11],

and Sun Xiaoxue's experience in the film is a true reflection of this reality. In addition, the film's exploration of the influence of the original family has prompted society to re-examine the importance of family relationships for individual growth and social development.

As the basic unit of society, the gender concepts and power structure within the family not only affect the fate of individuals but also, to a certain extent, shape the gender culture of the entire society. Through presenting the story of Li Hong's family, "*The Determination to Leave*" calls on society to pay attention to gender equality issues in family relationships and promotes the innovation of family concepts.

4.3 The Era Background: Narrative Innovation and Gender Narration

In contemporary society, the audience's requirements for film and television works are increasingly high, and they are eager to see works that can deeply explore human nature and social relationships. The narrative innovation of "*The Determination to Leave*" responds to this era's demand. However, the problem of the simplistic portrayal of male characters in the film also reflects the common dilemma in the creation of female-themed works at present. Today, when gender issues receive much attention, Chinese feminist film creation needs to deeply consider how to construct a more balanced and diverse gender narrative and avoid falling into a new binary opposition [12].

Creators should break the traditional gender narrative model and show gender relationships from a more open and inclusive perspective, presenting the complexity and diversity of gender issues, so that feminist films can not only resonate with female audiences but also promote male audiences' understanding and support for gender equality and truly promote the progress of social gender concepts.

5. Conclusion: Criticism and Reconstruction: The Growth Path of Feminist Narration

"*The Determination to Leave*" vividly presents women's struggles and breakthroughs in multiple dilemmas, providing a unique sample for Chinese feminist film creation. Against the backdrop of the increasingly serious

homogenization of "female awakening" themed film and television works, the film's innovation in intergenerational relationships, the use of symbols, etc. is refreshing. However, it still has deficiencies in the depth and diversity of gender narration. Future feminist creations should maintain continuous attention to gender issues, further break through the binary opposition narrative model, and construct more inclusive and realistically critical expressions.

By deeply exploring women's real experiences in different life scenarios, it shows the complexity of gender issues. At the same time, it should focus on shaping diverse and three-dimensional characters to promote understanding and dialogue between men and women. Only in this way can feminist narration truly play its social value, continuously promote society towards the direction of gender equality, and contribute to women's self-liberation and social progress.

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