

Analyzing the Character Image of Cao Qixiao in The Book of Golden Locks from the Theory of Personality Structure

Jiawen Peng

College of Letters, Nantong University, Nantong, Jiangsu 226004

ABSTRACT

Based on Freud's theory of personality structure, this paper analyzes the process of Cao Qixiao's character alienation in Eileen Chang's *The Book of Golden Locks*. Through the three dimensions of ego, self and superego, it reveals the psychological mechanism by which Cao Qixiao is transformed from an innocent girl into a "cannibal" of the feudal family.

KEYWORDS

Personality Structure Theory; Cao Qixiao; *The Book of Golden Locks*; Sigmund Freud

The reason why *The Book of Golden Locks* is one of Eileen Chang's most successful novels is that it portrays Cao Qixiao as a typical artistic character. Cao Qixiao's life is incomplete at all stages: she lost her father when she was young, married a disabled husband when she grew up, had a low status in her in-laws' house, and gave birth to a child she did not even know how to get... Lack of affection and love, and lack of acceptance from her surroundings make Cao Qixiao's personality structure constantly in conflict, and ultimately out of control! --Cao Qixiao transforms from a young and innocent girl into a vicious and venomous old woman.

"For thirty years she wore a yoke of gold. With the horns of that heavy yoke she cleaved several people, and those who didn't die gave away half their lives." The original text uses this sentence to evaluate Cao Qixiao; the gold represents her desire for money, and the heavy yoke represents Cao Qixiao's confinement by her desire for money. In this paper, we will use Freud's theory of personality structure to analyze the character of Cao Qixiao in *The Book of Golden Locks*, and analyze how she puts on the yoke of money, and how she "eats people" step by step with this yoke.

Psychoanalysis, founded by Sigmund Freud in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is the cornerstone of modern psychology, and his psychoanalytic theories include the unconscious and sexual instincts, personality structure, and dream interpretation. Among them, the theory of personality structure is a modification made by Freud in adhering to the earlier theory of the unconscious and sexual instincts. The theory states that the internal structure of the personality can be divided into three levels: the ego, the self, and the superego. According to Freud, the lowest level of the personality structure is the "ego". The "ego" is always in the unconscious realm, and the "libido" contained in the "ego" becomes the source of energy for all human mental activities. The "Self" is always guided by the principle of pleasure and compels people to satisfy its pleasure-seeking requirements. From the point of view of society as a whole, these demands are often contrary to moral customs. As a result, a regulator, the ego, emerges between the ego and the social reality of the environment. The task of the "ego" is to respect the principles of reality and, on this basis, to help the "self" to realize its demands. The "ego" has to prevent the harm caused by excessive repression, and at the same time to avoid an open conflict with social morality. The highest level of the personality structure is the "superego", which is a psychological mechanism that represents the interests of society. The "superego" always represses the "ego" in the unconscious according to moral principles that are not tolerated by social conventions. In short, we can understand the "Self" as "indulgent lust", the "Ego" as "reason and prudence", and the "Superego" as "reason and prudence". The "ego" is "reason and prudence", and the "superego" is "moral sense, honor and conscience". Under normal circumstances, the ego, the self, and the superego interact with each other, are interconnected, and are unified in the individual. but there are contradictions and conflicts. The ego always tries its best to satisfy the needs of the self, and regulates the irreconcilable contradiction between the desires of the self and the morality of the superego.

Cao Qixiao's life is a gradual evolution from a victim of a feudal arranged marriage to a painful and sad master of a feudal family. This change is not accidental, but is the result of her painful choice after experiencing the loss of hope and passion. In the novel, before Qixiao is married into the Jiang family as a transaction and promised to the crippled young master Jiang, Qixiao's "ego" is moderately developed in her whole personality. Like every young girl, she has love and dreams, she pursues happiness and fulfillment, but with some moderation. She is a woman with a healthy personality. At this stage, she is mentally healthy and pure. However, having lost her father at a young age, she did not have a loving father and a strict mother to teach her, and her brother and sister-in-law who raised her never educated Cao Qixiao correctly on moral issues, and their ignorance over the years subconsciously distorted Cao Qixiao's outlook on life and values, resulting in the fact that Qixiao did not establish her "superego" sufficiently since she was a child, which was one

of the auxiliary reasons for the tragedy of her ending. This is also one of the reasons for her tragic ending.

Under the arrangement of her brother and sister-in-law, Cao Qixiao marries into a large feudal family. Because of her lowly birth, all the people in the Jiang family look down on her, and she has no human dignity. The lack of economy and dignity leaves her with only her emotions to rely on. But her emotional world is only barren, desolate and cold, no love and tenderness, but also the lack of heartfelt love, not to mention the eyes, eagerly awaiting the love of love. Qixiao had to settle for the next best thing, just ask for "normal desire", but her crippled husband could not even meet her small normal requirements. However, her marriage itself predetermines that she must repress her "own" desires. The long suppressed "libido" in one's subconscious is like a river whose main stream is blocked, and it will break through the obstacles and leak out to another dry side channel. In the pain of this abyss, Qixiao steps towards the edge of perversion. A happy life without the combination of complete sex and love makes her highly repressed, and her repressed sexual instincts make her fall in love with her younger uncle, Ji Ze. This is driven by her own desire, but also an unconscious behavior, Cao Qixiao throws away the boundaries of ethics and morality, her desire for Ji Ze is passionate and straightforward. However, Ji Ze "has long held the purpose of not messing with his own family, and after the momentary pleasure has passed, he can't hide, can't kick, and is in front of him all day long, which is a burden". This relationship is destined to go unrewarded, and Qixiao's egoistic desires cannot be satisfied.

Faced with the reality of survival, Qixiao's sense of self begins to grow on her own. The "superego" provides a role model for the ego to judge whether a behavior is good or praiseworthy, and when a person reaches a moral impasse, the superego employs guilt to punish behavior that violates the moral code. Due to poor parenting, some children do not adequately develop a superego, and when they grow up, they lack the internal control mechanisms that are needed to prevent theft and assault. " Obviously, Cao Qixiao is one of them. A woman who has exchanged money for a lifetime of happiness, a woman who lives in a family where she can obtain nothing but money, Cao Qixiao's sense of "self" suddenly awakens after the death of her husband and mother-in-law, and "today is the focus of all her fantasies since she married into the Jiang family. For all these years, she has been wearing the yoke of gold, but she has not even been able to nibble at the edge of the gold, and it will be different from now on." According to the theory of personality structure, money is nothing more than a substitute found by the ego that has been repeatedly repressed by the ego, and Qixiao's possessive desire for gold stems from the fact that the ego cannot satisfy the original desires of the ego such as the sexual desire and the desire for self-esteem and takes psychological compensation. In order to get a larger share of the money, Qixiao extinguishes the desires of her own heart, and her "ego" overpowers her "self". The conflict between "ego" and "self" is sharpened and intensified by Ji Ze's sudden visit and his dominant gesture of friendship after he has set up his own business. "Qixiao bowed her head, bathed in light, fine music, fine joy..." and "Qixiao struggled at one end and shouted at the other, yet her heart fell straight down..." is a stark contrast, showing Qixiao's struggle between 'self' and 'ego'. The satisfaction of the "ego" with the reality of life enables it to watch the performance of the "self" in a state of temporary alertness, but as long as the "self" has the slightest desire to transgress the boundaries of its desire for alertness, the "ego" will immediately make the "ego" feel the "ego's" desire to transgress the boundaries of its desire to transgress the boundaries. But as soon as the Ego has the slightest desire to transgress the boundaries, it will immediately cause the Ego to explode with fury. So "what is true and what is false?" Qixiao doesn't know. She only knows that money is safe in her own hands. From then on, she used the "dream of gold" to resist the "lustful desire", and put herself firmly into the shackles of gold.

Freud once said: "There are usually at least three ways to release the repressed libido in the depths of the unconscious: first, through the internal adjustment of one's own psychological structure, such as the ego and the superego's inhibition of the ego, gradually overcoming the libido before it is released; secondly, by projecting repressed desires onto objects of the opposite sex in order to realize the fulfillment of the desires; and thirdly, by moving the target of the projections to other parties. " Chikao's repressed "libido" can only realize its "pleasure" through indirect means. What's more, the coldness of reality makes the "superego" in Qixiao's personality gradually lose its function and limp in the corner of the personality, no longer having the spirit to repress those over-excited instinctive impulses. Changbai and Chang'an are the victims of Cao Qixiao's "ego" consciousness, which not only leads her to destruction, but also makes her "kill a few people with her heavy yoke, and those who didn't die gave up half of their lives". Cao Qixiao is transformed from the "eaten" to the "cannibal". This article takes Chang'an as an example: Cao Qixiao almost abused her 13-year-old daughter by wrapping her feet around her, making her daughter cry out; in order to completely "protect" her daughter, she appeared devilishly in front of Tong Shifang, spreading an eerie lie - her daughter was a smoker who couldn't break her addiction! In order to completely "protect" her daughter, she devilishly appeared in front of Tong Shifang and spread an eerie lie - her daughter was a smoker who could not break her addiction! Chang'an becomes the first victim of Qixiao, and is turned into an eternal desolation.

Eileen Chang once said, "Human nature is the most interesting book, which can be read in a lifetime". Cao Qixiao has the "prudence and wit of a madman", and she uses all her wisdom to keep her children under her control. This statement seems to indicate that Cao Qixiao is so vicious and perverse because of money. In fact, Cao Qixiao is not a miser who loves

money. The money in the text is a symbol of reality, the crazy pursuit of money and pathological guardianship is in fact a compromise of the ego to the self and superego, the individual's hedonistic pleasure is suppressed by the principle of reality and feudal morality. When it can not be suppressed, the ego gives pathological satisfaction to the ego, and then gold becomes the most powerful shield to guide the desire of the ego to give vent to its aberrant form.

Cao Qixiao wore a "golden yoke" and died with a belly full of hatred and resentment, but the tragedy did not end. 30 years ago, the tragedy ended, but it was only a small scene in a big tragedy, and the whole life is a long and huge tragedy, which will be staged again and again. As it is written at the end of the work, "The moon of thirty years ago has long since sunk, and the people of thirty years ago are dead, but the story of thirty years ago is not finished - it can't be finished."

About the Author

Jiawen Peng (2005.7-), female, Han nationality, Nantong, Jiangsu Province, Nantong University, College of Letters, 2023 Chinese Language and Literature (Teacher Training), undergraduate study, research direction: literature, language education.

References

- [1] Eileen Chang. The Book of Golden Locks [M]. Beijing: Beijing October Literary Publishing House, 2009.
- [2] Freud. Introduction to Psychoanalysis [M]. Translated by Gao Jueshi. Beijing: Commercial Press, 1984.
- [3] Freud. The Ego and the Self [M]. Translated by Lin Duan. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2011.
- [4] Xia Zhiqing. History of the Modern Chinese Novel [M]. Translated by Liu Shao Ming et al. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2001.
- [5] Dong, Huiqiang. Interpreting the Psychological Structure of Seven Coquettes in The Book of Golden Locks from the Theory of Personality Structure[J]. Yangtze Novel Appreciation, 2024, (27): 35-38.
- [6] YAN Entertaining Ting, HUANG Hongchun. From "Eaten" to "Cannibalizer" -An Interpretation of the Human Nature of "The Book of Golden Locks" in the Perspective of Tragedy Theory[J]. Comparative Research on Cultural Innovation, 2024, 8(11): 1-5.