

Dwelling In The Fuchun Mountains: A picture scroll of modern cities in China

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ABSTRACT

Gu Xiaogang is a Chinese independent film director. In 2017 Gu Xiaogang directed his feature film *Dwelling in the Fuchun mountains*, which was screened at the Cannes Film Festival. In *Dwelling in the Fuchun mountains*, Gu Xiaogang shows through his lens the landscape of Jiangnan and the conditions of the people living in Hangzhou. However, underneath the rapid development of modernization, we will find the confusion of people and the plight of women in the modernization of Hangzhou hidden in the scene. At the same time, this paper also focuses on the director's presentation of oriental aesthetics. But when the author integrated traditional painting into film narrative, the form is more than realistic, so that the film is inverted in terms of narration, which does not conform to the theme of the director showing us the modern change of the city.

KEYWORDS

Modernization; Femininity; Chinese culture; Traditional society

At the 2019 Cannes Film Festival, *Dwelling In The Fuchun Mountains* became a high-profile feature film. The film was shortlisted in the Critics' Week section and the Best Director and Best Feature Film awards at the First Youth Film Festival (a prestigious Film festival in China). It is worth noting that the director of *Dwelling In The Fuchun Mountains* is Gu Xiaogang, a young director with no academic background. With his keen observation of traditional Chinese painting and Chinese society, he has created a world like ink painting with the characteristics of Chinese landscape. As Gu Xiaogang said in an interview with Chinese reporters "Chinese culture is expressed and presented in different media materials. For example, in ancient times, there are Musical Instruments, chess, calligraphy, painting, poetry, wine and tea. All artistic media are a kinds of language. Due to the fate of "Dwelling in Fuchun Mountain" in my hometown, we entered this culture from traditional Chinese painting and wanted to develop Chinese culture." Moreover, *Dwelling In The Fuchun Mountains* brings to mind the director Edward Yang's *Yi Yi* (2000) and Hou Hsiao-hsien's *A City of Sadness* (1989). It also alludes to the whole society through the family, but the historical background depicted in *A City of Sadness* is centered on the February 28 Incident in Taiwan, showing the joys and sorrows of common people in the grand history. By contrast, *Yi Yi* is similar to *Dwelling In The Fuchun Mountains*, focusing on the changes of Chinese families at the micro level. However, the characters and narration in *Dwelling In The Fuchun Mountains* are not as good as those in one. On the one hand, this paper will analyze the modern China, which appears to be vigorous on the surface, but behind the development at the same time triggered collapse of traditional ideas and the dilemma of new ideas for many people in the society, also proliferated the sense of homelessness and wandering. On the other hand, when the director integrates traditional painting and film narrative, the form is more than realistic, so that the film is inverted in terms of narration, which does not conform to the theme of the director showing us the modern change of the city.

1 Contemporary Chinese spiritual crisis predicament

Before discussing the modernization of modern China in the film, I would like to introduce the historical background of China's modernization. Modernization is not only a phenomenon of the world, but also a progress of civilization and a goal of development. Many scholars believe that modernization can be traced back to the British industrial Revolution and the French Revolution in the 18th century. By the middle of the 18th century^[1], Europe had undergone tremendous changes, such as rapid economic growth, which led people to believe that "being modern and meeting the needs of the modern" represented the trend of The Times. A new word, modernization, was coined to describe this new phenomenon. Subsequently, the phenomenon of modernization became a fashion, and the word "modernization" was talked about with relish. The Chinese word for "modernization" appeared in the early 20th century^[2], but after a series of upheavals such as: the fall of the feudal dynasty and the War of Resistance Against Japan. It was not until 1949 that the Communist Party of China established its leading position, and then began to carry out China's national construction and economic reform. From 1949 to 1977, China implemented the planned economy policy, and it was not until 1978 when the reform and opening up was carried out that economic construction was established as the center. In 1994, the 14th CPC National Congress has been clear about the goal of the country's economic system reform is to establish a socialist market economy, which made the Chinese economy really took to the track of the socialist market economy, China's economy has begun to release the unprecedented vitality. Since entering the 21st century, China has constantly promote the

economic globalization and modernization. The 18th CPC National Congress proposed to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the centenary of the Communist Party of China (2022), and to turn China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by the centenary of the People's Republic of China (2050)^[3]. Therefore, this film is set at a time when China is on the verge of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects. At this time of China is facing the market economic system and political reform period. And it is worth noting that the market economy modernization first introduced to China from the western capitalist society. Facing the market of foreign capital, the Chinese inherent parochialism, namely small peasant society, agriculture and nomadic for a living, is in a state of shock^[4]. With it comes unemployment, a shift in traditional modes of living and increased mobility as people search for ways to live.

Dwelling In The Fuchun Mountains shows the social landscape of Fuyang ahead of the 2022 Asian Games. In order to meet the Asian Games, Fuyang city speed up the modernization reform, demolition, moving, subway have changed the life order of people who once lived there. However, under the rapid construction of foreign new order, people in cities are facing great challenges, which makes more and more contemporary people fall into spiritual dilemma. As Jameson analyzes "As the industrial cities expanded, there was no talk of 'urban freedom', but a new sense of loneliness and anxiety^[5]." In the era of capital and money, the collectivism consciousness and traditional agricultural production mode of the Chinese people are impacted by individualism and new technology and industrial culture. At the beginning of the film, the picture presented to us Chinese traditional collective birthday scene, aged mother birthday gathered a large family is a traditional Chinese birthday customs. However after that when the aged mother fell ill, the family system was in a state of collapse and the four sons form a small family separately. There is no longer the scene of the big family eating together as in the beginning. Chinese Confucian culture stresses the concept of filial piety and clan, the so-called filial piety is to obey parents, filial piety and parents first. The concept of family is the collective consciousness of "ancestor worship and respecting ancestors"^[6], striving to realize the prosperity of the family. After the aged mother fell ill, four sons faced the dilemma of "who will take care of the aged mother". But when they faced the traditional Confucian filial piety culture, the first thing they thought about was whether they could bear the responsibility of taking care of the aged mother in their own living situation, which was also the beginning of the collapse of Confucian filial piety culture in the development of capital modernization. Similarly, four sons have their own family, they are not family conception of respecting the collectivism but hard for their family, Laoer elaborates for his restaurant, Laoer for fishing effort, Laosan in casino, Lao xiao working in construction site. Everyone in the field of personal survival, also for their own interests. Hence, the Chinese family structure based on collective interests is transformed into atomic nuclear family structure in the wave of modernization.

Hannah Arendt, a German philosopher, in her book called the Origins of Totalitarianism, describes people in modern societies as "atomization". The atomized individual is solitary, absorbed in material comforts, and completely "personal". "Such individuals are ubiquitous and there is no strong connection between these individuals. Every individual is serving his own personal interests^[7]". Just as Gu Xi said in the film, "The elders in the family are selfish ghosts who always think of their own interests." The cross-flow of capital is full of everyone's life. In the dialogue between old four and the second brothers, there was almost no greeting to each other, but most of the exchange was "money". Laoxiao borrowed money from Laoer, and Laoer asked Laoxiao about his financial situation. Also, it is the conversation between daughter-in-law and aged mother asking about the ownership of house and deposit in the future or the communication of people buying vegetables in the market, it is full of modernization problems brought by money economy.

As Jerry Z. Muller notes in his study of Simer's philosophy of money "Georg Simmel set in which more and more areas of life could be measured in money^[8]." Capitalization is increasingly prevalent in Chinese society. Buying a house, marriage, pension issues are full of the interests of the first principle of modern society. The four sons consider whether they can take care of their aged mother out of their own interests, and daughter-in-law also take equal interests when facing Gu Xi's marriage. In addition, Perry Anderson In his lecture note "as Marx emphasized, the very same onrush of capitalist economic development also generates a brutally alienated and atomized society, riven by callous economic exploitation and cold social indifference, destructive of every cultural or political value whose potential it has itself brought into being.

Likewise, on the psychological plane, self-development in these conditions could only mean a profound disorientation and insecurity, frustration and despair." And then his also point that Berman writes, 'of agitation and turbulence, psychic dizziness and drunkenness, expansion of experiential possibilities and destruction of moral boundaries and personal bonds, self-enlargement and self-derangement, phantoms in the street and in the soul-is the atmosphere in which modern sensibility is born.' Laosan in the movie is a typical example. In the era of market economy development and social, Laosan, as an agricultural migrant worker, feels confused and idle, which even leads to spiritual emptiness. Gambling can not only kill time and away from the pressure of the outside world, but also satisfy people's money worship and hedonism psychology, and even present the "rich overnight" desire. Thus, Laosan willingly lost in the casino. He hid himself in the casino, trying to escape reality, trying to find direction and hope in life.

2 Traditional Chinese painting and modern narration

Chinese scholar Feng Yi says "in his literature that different from the scientific focus perspective in western painting, Chinese traditional painting has always used the scatterpoint perspective. How to apply the scatterpoint perspective in Chinese landscape painting to film creation, and then provide a reference for the creation of Oriental aesthetics for domestic films^[9]." Fan Yu also points out "the director tries to present the narrative in a Chinese painting style^[10]." A large number of scholars have analyzed how to integrate landscape painting into narration from the aesthetic innovation and form characteristics of films. However, I would like to try to explain from another Angle that in fact, the realism film of *Dwelling in Fuchun Mountain*, which focuses too much on form and neglects content as king, does not integrate traditional Chinese painting into the narration of the film ingeniously and truthfully.

Gu Xiaogang's original intention as a realistic film is just as he said "in an interview with the media: making this film is to strike a balance between narrative and lyric, between the public and art, and in the specific film, between civic and elegant^[11]." However, in the film, when Teacher Jiang taught the traditional Chinese painting *Fuchun Mountain* in class, the director abruptly added the image of *Dwelling in Fuchun Mountain* in class, which made the film lose its sense of cinema and tended to be pictorial. The film is usually the art of movement. The activities of people in the film constitute the whole feature film. If a picture is suddenly inserted into the picture, the realism of the original feature film will be weakened. So this jarring illustration spoils the cinematography of the whole movie. In addition, when Gu Xi and Teacher Jiang were walking by the river, Gu Xi recited the lines she had learned in the acting class. Originally, the director tried to show the panorama of the local conditions and customs of the river, but it was obviously awkward for Gu Xi to recite the lines all the way. Additionally, except for these lines, the director attempted to present a scroll painting panorama, but in fact, the director spent nearly 5 minutes following Gu Xi and Teacher Jiang in the single scene and characters, which would make the audience feel bored and thus fail to achieve the director's goal.

3 The plight of the modern female

Gu Xi is the representative of the female image in this film. However, director only tells the story of Gu Xi's struggle against marriage in the face of family, but does not establish the characteristics of the female image itself. In the *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Beauvoir pointed out that "the other" is a relative concept. One party establishes itself as the subject, and the other will naturally become the other. In real life, under the influence of the thought of "others", women regard men as the main body and deny themselves, which makes women unable to obtain freedom^[12]. Under the background of patriarchal men, men created various mythological systems to confine women to the shackles of the family. Gu Xi lives in the modern society. In the film, Gu Xi confronts the "femininity" that her parents pay attention to and refuses to adhere to the traditional view of marriage and obey their parents' orders, and her parents arrange everything in her life, so that Gu Xi has the obedient and cunning femininity that women should have. However, Gu Xi still lacks the attitude towards the "other" position given to her by the current society. At the end of the film, we only see Gu Xi talking about having children after she gets married with Teacher Jiang, but we don't learn Gu Xi's personal attitude towards marriage and family. Although Gu Xi is fighting against the traditional family (the symbolic order of patriarchy), will she face the oppression of the new order when she wins the battle against the traditional patriarchy? Gu Xi once said in the film: "two-child policy". China's two-child policy may also cause new troubles for women, as scholar Wei Yuan pointed out "having a second child will make women's family burden heavier and face great challenges in balancing family life and work^[13]." From some aspects, the comprehensive opening-up of the two-child policy is indeed a move that benefits the country and the people. However, the implementation of this policy brings more social, economic and political benefits. Women, as the direct bearers of the two-child policy and the subject of childbirth, cannot grasp the initiative status of the right to choose childbirth in reality, but also suffer from gender discrimination. Labor rights and interests are damaged due to the birth of a second child, or there is almost no internal conflict between Gu Xi and Teacher Jiang. Will Gu Xi be affected by family bondage and physiological characteristics as De Beauvoir said: Because of the innate disadvantage of women's physiology, women's participation in social production is restricted and family is a big obstacle under any system^[14]. All these problems are not explained to us by the director, so the characters tend to be flat. We also don't get any more answers from this film about female own attitudes and actions.

4 Conclusion

Nowadays, in this modern society, how people find their own spiritual home, in the traditional and modern transformation to find their own habitat is worth our thinking. The film tries to lead us to find the answer by showing us the plight of people living in modern society through the living conditions of a family, pension, marriage, work or other aspects. They are generally faced with the problem of aphasia, they wander in the traditional and modern living space,

they have never found the final spiritual home. However, what can we see in *Dwelling In The Fuchun Mountains* are just some landscapes like China paintings. The director does not discuss the lives of the four brothers in such a modern society in detail, and their story clues and characters are still unclear. In addition, there are also female characters in the film, such as Gu Xi and the elderly mother. These characters tend to be flat, and the director does not show us the life of individuals in various aspects in such a modern society. Therefore, what we learn in this film is only a landscape picture full of modern transformation and the confusion or dilemma of people in the current city, but the characters in the film are still lack of detailed depiction and in-depth exploration.

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