

## Article

### On the Female Images in Bai Xianyong's "Love's Lone Flower" and Its Film and Television Adaptations

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**Abstract:** "Love's Lone Flower" is a unique article included in the short stories of Bai Xianyong's "Taipei People", which combines the two most important themes in Bai Xianyong's novels — gay themes and female themes. In the process of literature review, it was found that previous studies on "Love's Lone Flower" mostly analyzed gender issues and tragic fate. This paper will start with the three female characters A-Liu, Wubao and Juanjuan in the novel "Love's Lone Flower", analyze their characters and the sense of struggle consciousness, and then explore the significance of the film through the adaptation of two versions of film and TV series.

**Keywords:** Bai Xianyong; Love's Lone Flower; female image; film and television adaptation

## 1. The appearance of the female consciousness

The novel's first-person narrator, A-Liu, is a woman, acting both as the narrator and a participant in the story. Through A-Liu's perspective, the story's key character,



Juanjuan, appears, while through A-Liu's memories, another crucial character, Wubao, emerges. By placing a woman as the storyteller and simultaneously allowing her to participate in the narrative, the tragic stories of the other two women are recounted with equal eyes, ultimately forming a text that tells the tragic fate of women from the lower classes. From this perspective, "Love's Lone Flower" possesses a prominent female consciousness.

In the narrative of the novel, it also reveals the writer Bai Xianyong's expression of female subjectivity. Bai Xianyong is standing on the standpoint of women writing, the novel denounces scoundrels like Hua San and Ke Laoxiong who treat women as playthings. In the text, the author uses the voice of the narrator "I" to express his dissatisfaction with men using dirty words such as "bitch" to insult women, and reveals her sympathy and pity for the unfair fate of women at the bottom, as well as his empathy for the poor people. These are all manifestations of the consciousness of female subjectivity.

In the emotional orientation of the novel, the author also shows the warmth and beauty of the same-sex between women. The narrator, A-Liu, develops same-sex relationships with two women working in a restaurant. In Shanghai, she and Wubao make a wish: "When we have enough money, we will buy a house and live together, starting a family. We also plan to buy a prostitute and raise her." (Bai, 2010). After Wubao's death, A-Liu came to Taiwan and met Juanjuan. As they got along, he started thinking about starting a family again. He used up all his savings to buy a small apartment to live with Juanjuan. "Juanjuan, this is our home." (Bai, 2010). The words "having a family" are used many times to imply the delicate feelings between A-Liu and them, so that readers can distinguish the same-sex love in the story from the friendship between ordinary women supporting each other. About the love of A-Liu and Wubao and Juanjuan, the author uses the kind and brilliant language to describe the beauty of female love. In A-Liu's eyes, Wubao, a new arrival at Wanchunlou, is so innocent and lively. "She tossed her short hair, grinning widely. I took her in my arms, grasped her cheek, and kissed her twice" (Bai, 2010). After arriving in Taiwan, A-Liu encountered Juanjuan, who had passed out drunk in the restroom of The Mayflower Restaurant, and took her home, providing her with attentive care. These delicate descriptions depict a heartwarming scene of mutual love between women.

The display of the female consciousness in the novel is also reflected in the contrast with the male image. Although the fate of women in the novel is mostly sad,



it is full of the author's appreciation for women, such as the description of Juanjuan appearance, "she wears a black satin cheongsam, wearing a small white gown, long hair, and a waist" (Bai, 2010), elegant and beautiful appearance appeared on the paper. For the brutal and fierce Ke Laoxiong description is "two red black thick arms", "a handful of hard hair like a pig's temples", "two teeth like carp gills", "a pair of pig eyes", "not near a smell of body odor" (Bai, 2010) and so on. Such words, without the need to read carefully can feel Ke Laoxiong this person how dirty stench. There is also an easily overlooked male character, "Lin Sanlang", who describes him "blinking rotten eyes and playing a broken accordion" (Bai, 2010), which feels poor and sloppy. The sharp contrast between the elegant and quiet Juanjuan and the brutal and vicious Ke Laoxiong, and the poor Lin Sanlang, highlights the author's appreciation of women.

Through the above analysis of the novel's narrative perspective, emotional orientation and image comparison, we can see that female consciousness is fully displayed in the author Bai Xianyong's book. (Shi, 2024). As a male writer, Bai Xianyong can abandon the so-called prejudice of mainstream discourse in his writing to speak for women's love, and put aside his moral criticism to show the living conditions and emotional needs of the women in the lower-class bar. (Pu, 2005). This is undoubtedly a great respect for women.

## **2. Analysis of the female image**

"Love's Lone Flower" primarily portrays three women: A-Liu, Wubao, and Juanjuan. In the male-dominated old society, these women are unwilling to simply serve as tools for men to vent their desires. When these livelihoods became obstacles to their pursuit of their dreams, they resolutely chose to fight back. (Wang, 2011).

Relying on A-Liu's own talents and strategies, she worked hard with her boss for many years and finally became the manager of Mayflower. She no longer had to sell her body to make a living. But A-Liu, having witnessed so much misfortune and evil over the years, remains unbearable. Her heart remains kind and full of love. A-Liu and Juanjuan have only met a few times in the restaurant, but when she sees Juanjuan passed out in the restroom, A-Liu takes her home without hesitation and carefully cares for her. Even as a manager, A-Liu doesn't use her power to exploit the other women working in the restaurant. Instead, she prefers to live a frugal life herself



rather than deduct their wages. In the society described by “Love’s Lone Flower”, male is dominant, and women at the bottom have little choice but to make a living. But A-Liu did not want to accept the fate, she chose to join the “running single help” such a male-led way to make a living, but she fought to life or failed, so she issued “that is everyone’s life” (Bai, 2010) sigh. Although A-Liu’s struggle failed, but she dared to fight, do not take the initiative to sink the behavior cannot be ignored. In A-Liu, we see that the female images in the novel are not all passively accept the space reserved for the bottom women to make a living, but actively find the possibility of a new life.

The story of the Wubao is mainly told through the memories of A-Liu. In the Wubao, what we see is the “physical escape” struggle. Wubao came from the countryside of Yangzhou. She had no mother since childhood and was abducted and sold to Wanchunlou by human traffickers at the age of 14. Below the care of A-Liu and accompany, Wubao gradually had more yearning and beautiful expectation to the life, she hopes to save enough money to buy a house together with A-Liu, live together, become a home, raise a clear herd person. However, what Wubao got in return for her beautiful expectations of life was an encounter with a beast like Hua San, who subjected Wubao to insane and endless abuse and torture. The repeated injuries gradually eroded all of Wubao’s hopes for life. Enduring enough torture, Wubao ultimately chose to commit suicide by ingesting opium, ending her own tragic life. Looking back on her life, Wubao, despite claiming “this is fate,” refused to resign herself; though powerless to resist, she chose suicide to escape from the demon of Hua San, defying this unjust and unfortunate fate. The novel depicts Wubao’s gruesome death, eyes glaring, mouth stuffed with opium paste, as a silent curse on the inhuman beast that is Hua San. She achieved her own resistance to this unfortunate fate by escaping physically.

Juanjuan’s fate is even more tragic. She has never felt the warmth of a family since she was a child. Her mother is a lunatic, locked up in the family pigsty by her father, who keeps her from knowing her identity. Her father treated Juanjuan even more hatefully, raping her when she was fifteen. When he discovered she was pregnant, he dragged her out into the street, humiliating and cursing her, accusing her of adultery, and driving her out of the house (Bai, 2010). After arriving at The Mayflower, Juanjuan remained silent and unresisting in the face of the guests’ teasing, as if she had discarded her very being, with only a wistful smile at the corner of her



mouth. After meeting A-Liu, Juanjuan enjoys a period of comfort. A-Liu spends her life savings and sells off Wubao's belongings to finally buy an apartment for her and Juanjuan. However, the good times don't last long. The appearance of Ke Laoxiong forces Juanjuan into a morphine addiction. Unable to break away from Ke Laoxiong, Juanjuan can only sigh helplessly to A-Liu, "There's nothing I can do" (Bai, 2010). In *Mayflower*, Ke Laoxiong once seduced a barmaid named Fengjuan and tormented her to death. Unfortunately, Juanjuan fell prey to the perverted Ke Laoxiong and suffered repeated violent abuse. However, she did not compromise like Fengjuan, nor did she commit suicide like Wubao. Instead, she killed Ke Laoxiong, a ruthless beast in human form, and went completely insane, ending up incarcerated in a mental institution. Although Juanjuan's body was confined to the asylum, her spirit had already escaped this filthy place. Of the three women in the novel, Juanjuan suffered the worst misfortune, her suffering more profound, and her struggle more fiercely.

The novel repeatedly hints to the reader that Juanjuan is Wubao. Firstly, their facial features are strikingly similar. Secondly, numerous details in the text complement each other, employing the "parallel technique" to simultaneously unfold the lives of two girls separated by time and space, as if they were living parallel lives. This also suggests that Juanjuan's previous life may have been Wubao. Furthermore, Juanjuan's eventual killing of Ke Laoxiong can be interpreted as avenging Wubao, who was persecuted to death by the equally demonic Hua San. Furthermore, the presence of the lesbian character "I," A-Liu, provides a bridge between Wubao and Juanjuan. Through my feelings for the two women, I connect these two individuals, who were previously unrelated and even lived in different time and space. (Guo, 2019). This allows the tragic fate of Wubao and Juanjuan to transcend the boundaries of individual lives and extend to the lives of women as a whole. (Zhang, 2022).

### **3. The reconstruction of film and television adaptation**

Bai Xianyong's novel "Love's Lone Flower" was written in 1970. In the 1980s, a large number of literary film adaptations appeared in Taiwan, including director Lin Qingjie's "Love's Lone Flower" in 1985. (Lin Qingjie, 1985). In the 21st century, with the awakening of Taiwan women's consciousness, the improvement of social acceptance of gay issues, and the rising popularity of gay film and television, Director Cao Ruiyuan, based on the successful adaptation of Bai Xianyong's "Crystal Boys" in



2003, remade “Love’s Lone Flower” again in 2005 (Cao, 2005). The two versions of “Love’s Lone Flower” spanned a period of 20 years, and the different historical contexts influenced the film adaptations in various ways, allowing us to see the evolution of the female image in both films over time.

In the 1980s, Taiwan entered a consumer society. Although the quality of material life gradually improved, social chaos persisted. This chaos extended to the film industry, sparking a wave of films featuring crime, violence, and sex. “Love’s Lone Flower” was adapted into a film precisely because the original novel featured trendy elements such as gangsters, prostitutes, and rape and abuse (Huang, 2009). However, in the context of the time, homosexuality was still a taboo and a sensitive topic, so the film completely rewrote the original novel’s female love stories. A-Liu is portrayed as a completely heterosexual person in the film, and even Wubao is rewritten and merged into the new character “Bai Yu”. A-Liu is a sister to Bai Yu (Wubao) and more like a mother to Juanjuan. Her concern and care for both of them stems from her inexperience and pity for them, fearing they would be harmed or deceived. The original novel’s most ambiguous emotional connection between the two, “starting a family,” was replaced by “opening a restaurant together. The film also depicts Juanjuan being raped multiple times. Not only are the costumes revealing, but the camera deliberately emphasizes the curves of the female body, turning her into an object of male desire. The setting was also altered to save costs, losing the core spirit of the original novel. This adaptation of “Love’s Lone Flower” reveals the limitations of contemporary literary adaptations and the ways in which the image of women has become a commodity.

Entering the 21st century, after the women’s and LGBTQ+ movements of the 1990s, Taiwan’s society has maintained a relatively open attitude towards women’s status and LGBTQ+ issues. The 2005 film “Love’s Lone Flower” directed by Cao Ruiyuan, adheres more closely to the original novel and, through expanded writing, offers a more nuanced portrayal of the characters’ backgrounds, personalities, and emotional developments. Cao’s version of “Love’s Lone Flower” adds a richer emotional connection between Wubao and Lin Sanlang, allowing Wubao to navigate the emotional turmoil between A-Liu and Sanlang, and between same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Whether it’s her same-sex love with A-Liu or her romantic relationship with Sanlang, the expanded portrayal of Wubao reveals the fluidity of an ordinary person’s desires, allowing emotions to return to their own emotions,



unconstrained by sexual orientation and gender. Juanjuan's pain in the film isn't limited to Ke Laoxiong's sexual abuse; her greatest pain stems from a sense of self-doubt. To her father, she's a daughter, yet he's used as an object of his desire by his closest friend; to Ke Laoxiong, she's a barmaid, a new plaything for men after Fengjuan's death; to A-Liu, she's merely a replacement for Wubao. As the protagonist, A-Liu journeys from Shanghai to Taiwan. Her experiences in both places allow her to gain a deeper understanding of her own changing state of mind. This migration between two cities depicts the transformation of a woman's strength and tenderness amidst the profound changes of the times. Throughout the film, whether A-Liu is a lesbian is less important than the true story of how a woman survives and faces herself in the changing times. Cao's critical acclaim for "Love's Lone Flower" stems from both its faithful adaptation and the way it uses the female story of "Love's Lone Flower" to express the director's concern for humanity: through A-Liu, we see the transformation of the times; through Wubao, we express the possibilities of emotional mobility; and through Juanjuan, we capture the lives and tragic fates of the humblest people in this era.

From 1985 to 2005, from Lin Qingjie to Cao Ruiyuan, it crossed the changes of the century. The two films, although adapted from the same work Bai Xianrong short story "Love's Lone Flower", conveyed different views. Twenty years ago, women could not escape the fate of oppression, and were regarded as the box office attraction; twenty years later, with the awakening of female consciousness, women were no longer the object of gaze by others; twenty years ago, the gay issue was taboo not to be talked about and was deleted without trace; twenty years later, with the spread of the gay movement, the social acceptance gradually increased, and more common (Wu, 2015). The changes of social development are closely related to film production. As a film adapted from literary works, the two editions not only let us see the dilemma that the adaptation is limited by The Times, but also let us see the changes and progress of society through the deepening of the female image in the film.

## **4. Conclusion**

"Love's Lone Flower" allows us to see the strong female consciousness in the work through the portrayal of different female images. This highly topical literary work has been adapted by different directors in different eras. The different ways in



which different film and television versions of “Love’s Lone Flower” portray female characters allow us to observe the inheritance and development of literature over time.

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