

"Entering the Place without Light"—Cao Qiqiao's Other Survival Tragedy from the Perspective of Feminism

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Abstract: There is an inherent connection between Eileen Chang's creative ideas and Western feminist theory. She speaks from the perspective of women and recounts the bloody and tearful history of women silently seeking survival under the oppression of patriarchy for thousands of years. Her representative work *The Golden Cangue* has rich interpretive value and historical connotations related to gender. The protagonist, Cao Qiqiao, is a female figure with a strong sense of survival who struggles against man. However, under the ravages of patriarchal cultural discourse, she leads her descendants into a place without light. Therefore, based on the perspective of the other in feminist theory, this article points out the image of the other and its lineage evolution in the patriarchal context of *The Golden Cangue*. Starting from the survival dilemma faced by Cao Qiqiao under the patriarchal system and the resulting self-alienation, this study explores the tragedy of the other survival, showcases the contradiction between Cao Qiqiao's survival consciousness and reality's resistance factors, providing inspiration for the awakening of female consciousness at present.

1. Introduction

Eileen Chang's works are rich in profound feminist thoughts. In her works, women are placed on the opposite side of men under the patriarchal system to reveal the tragic fate of women being forced to become the Other in a repressed environment, among which *The Golden Cangue* is a typical work. In this work, the protagonist Cao Qiqiao, as a typical image of the Other under the patriarchal system, suffered from the heavy pressure of patriarchy, husband power and clan power, lost her right to self-determination in marriage and identity subjectivity, and her living space was gradually squeezed out, eventually alienated into a unfaithful wife in marriage, an evil mother in the eyes of children and a fierce ghost wandering in the world. Eileen Chang used "step by step into the place where there is no light"[1] to metaphor Cao Qiqiao's alienation process under the patriarchal system, and vividly described the life track of women from bathing in the light to falling into the place where there is no light, that is, from being in a blessed place with love to falling into a miserable situation without love. Therefore, in an era when the male-dominated discourse has not been completely dissolved, it is instructive to analyze Cao Qiqiao's Other survival tragedy from the feminist theory for the deeper awakening of women's consciousness in China.

2. The Image of the Other in *the Golden Cangue* and its Pedigree Evolution

As the most representative work of Eileen Chang, *The Golden Cangue* embodies her distinct and strong female consciousness. In this work, Eileen Chang truly depicts the group images of women, such as Cao Qiqiao, Changan, Zhishou and so on, who were destroyed and harmed by the patriarchal system and feudal traditional cultural customs. These series of female images lack the spirit of autonomy and economic independence, lose the personality and dignity that women should have, and struggle constantly in the pool of life under the patriarchal discourse, so they can exist as typical graphic examples of western feminism the Other. It is worth noting that there is a distinct inheritance relationship in the Other pedigree of *The Golden Cangue*. In this work, all the evils began when Cao Qiqiao entered the decadent feudal family of Jiang family. The tragedies of Cao Qiqiao, Changan and Zhishou have a chronological order, as well as a causal relationship. The oppression she suffered in the old family played a decisive role in the later experiences of her daughter and daughter-in-law. Therefore, Cao Qiqiao is the direct victim of the patriarchal society, exists as the primary Other image. Changan and Zhishou were directly forced by Cao Qiqiao, and they were indirect victims of the patriarchal society, and they existed as secondary Other images.

3. The Survival Dilemma and Alienation of the Other under the Patriarchal System

Based on Cao Qiqiao's life track, it is not difficult to see that abnormal and twisted lust and staggering material desires have greatly promoted the tragedy of her life. However, the strong desire is not the root cause of the tragedy of Qiqiao's life. Qiqiao was originally just an ordinary woman engaged in ordinary work. She only had some fantasies about people around her emotionally, and at most she was a snobbish person who was careful in business, and there was no out-of-line desire pursuit. Until she was sold into the Jiang family by her own brother, Qiqiao deep in the embarrassed reality of being restrained by male power, in the plight of rights, identity and space burst out a strong desire for survival, the pursuit of emotion and material tend to be out of line or even extreme. Therefore, the root cause of Cao Qiqiao's Other life tragedy is the irreconcilable conflict between her strong female survival consciousness and the obstacles existing in the realistic patriarchal society. In the past, researchers focused on money or lust unilaterally because lust and material desire were too prominent and strong in the text, which concealed women's pursuit of survival in the original sense. Material is the guarantee and cornerstone of women's survival, and emotion is the living water that irrigates and nourishes women's survival. Both material desire and lust are the external manifestations of survival anxiety, which are essentially the extension of survival consciousness and the desire for survival resources. Therefore, from a deeper perspective, *The Golden Cangue* tells the story of a woman with heavy shackles who is trying to fight for her rights and establish her own subject in the narrow living space left by the patriarchal society, but she is gradually alienated under the influence of heterogeneous forces.

3.1 The Dilemma of Rights, Identity and Space

3.1.1 Loss of Marriage Self-determination

In China's traditional patriarchal society, women are excluded from the construction of marriage relations. For the marriage combination scheme of boys and girls, the feudal parents represented by men are the chief designers of marriage. Moreover, in the traditional patriarchal society, this marriage relationship cannot be easily disintegrated. Even if it is disintegrated, it is the right of men to use divorce to complete it, while women can only be forced to accept. From this point of view, in the whole process of marriage formation and dissolution, women do not have any right to self-

determination. Women have neither the right to choose their own marriage partners nor the right to break off their marriage relationship freely. As for the nature of marriage under the patriarchal system, Beauvoir pointed out with great insight: "A woman is brought into a family group dominated by her father and brother as a slave or servant, and usually some men marry her to other men. In primitive society, tribes and patriarchal clans owned her, almost treating her as a thing, and she belonged to the physical object that the two groups agreed to exchange with each other; When marriage took the form of contract in the process of evolution, her situation did not change profoundly." [2] Cao Qiqiao's situation in her marriage as a commodity in the sales between the Cao family and the Jiang family can well confirm this.

The young Qiqiao has a youthful fantasy about her marriage partner. However, her right to choose a marriage partner is in the hands of her brother, Cao Danian, who is the feudal parent of the Cao family. In the traditional patriarchal society, "marriage is a scam, which is equivalent to being used as a medium for buying and selling by fathers and brothers" [3], and an equivalent exchange sale with Qiqiao as a commodity was packaged as a face of marriage and staged in the text: Jiang family got a healthy Qiqiao through this marriage, and Cao family got rich material benefits through this marriage. Obviously, this marriage sale with matching supply and demand is based on the respective interests of both families. The interests of the parties, Qiqiao, are excluded and have no right to ask and stop this sale, and become the victims of the interests of Cao family and Jiang family. After marriage, Qiqiao shared a bed with her lifeless living dead husband, served day and night, and was forced to undertake the reproductive task of reproduction, with dissatisfaction and suffering. However, the cultural context centered on patriarchy determines that she cannot dissolve the marriage relationship, and is always in a passive position.

3.1.2 Loss of Identity Subjectivity

"Since China entered the patriarchal society, the patriarchal culture has always wanted to dig out people's memory of 'worshipping mother' in primitive times and establish itself as the creator." [4] Under the patriarchal system, based on the male subjective consciousness, women are defined as an absence and an incomplete body. This patriarchal discourse regards women's non-subjective identity as a reasonable phenomenon from the ethical point of view through the traditional Confucian moral weapon, which urges the design of social system to be completely based on women's subordinate and non-subjective identity. This makes it difficult for women to establish their own identity subjectivity under the operation of the patriarchal social mechanism. Women's existence has to be based on men's existence, and they can't define themselves, but are defined in the definition of men's subjectivity and become subservient to men. This is just as Beauvoir said: "Women are not born, but are formed the day after tomorrow. No physical, psychological or economic fate can define the image that women have in society. It is the intermediary product that the whole civilization has designed between men and castrated people and is called women." [2] The loss of female identity subjectivity means that male subjects occupy a dominant position in the distribution of survival resources in the whole society, control and enjoy more survival resources, and can control, squander and chase survival resources at will, while women can't actively obtain survival resources to meet their own needs, so they can only wait for men's "pity". In the text, Qiqiao is in a passive position in the pursuit of lust and material desire, which can well reflect the survival dilemma caused by the loss of identity subjectivity.

After losing the right of marriage self-determination, in order to reverse the unfavorable situation caused by marriage, Qiqiao launched a survival war characterized by lust and material desire in Jiang family. In terms of lust, Qiqiao can't get emotional irrigation from the abnormal relationship between husband and wife, and even in order to complete the fertility task arranged by Jiang family, she is forced to activate the reproductive ability of her husband in bed to combine with him to give birth to a child, which obviously can't satisfy her normal physiological desires, but is only mechanically

achieving the set goals. It can be seen from her smoking opium to paralyze herself and complaining about her husband's behavior to her brothers and sisters-in-law, that in a loveless and a sexual marriage, Qiqiao's physical desires and mental anguish are intertwined and need to seek nourishment from outside the marriage. Qiqiao threw her hot emotions into her own brother-in-law Jize, and Jize rejected Qiqiao with the so-called prevention between brother-in-law and sister-in-law, after some interest considerations, dispelling Qiqiao's fantasy of seeking sexual satisfaction in the Jiang family. In terms of material desires, after entering Jiang family, "over the years, she has been wearing the shackles of gold, but she can't even chew the edge of gold." [1] The dialogue between the two maids at the beginning of the work shows why. In the Jiang family, men are the natural inheritors and owners of property and can spend freely, while Qiqiao, as a wife, cannot touch the power of money, and can only get the property of her own small family when her husband dies. However, because of the lack of male support in the separation of the family, even if she complains about the difficulties of life over the years, "widow and her fatherless son are still bullied." [1] In the aspect of the interweaving of lust and material desire, after the separation, Jize's visit to show his love made Qiqiao have to consider an extremely realistic question, whether to choose the love nourishment that she has dreamed of for many years or to choose the material foundation of survival that she had spent half her life to obtain. Qiqiao knew in her heart that Jize coveted her money, and after some probing, she was convinced that his move was to defraud her of the property with false love. Therefore, Qiqiao did not obey his wishes and drove him away, but this choice of refusing false love completely defeated her psychological defense. After rejecting Jize, Qiqiao fell into deep remorse and contradiction. Over the years, Jize has become the only object linked to love in Qiqiao's heart. His purpose of coming for money has further provoked her nervous tension and aggravated her anxiety for survival. The disillusionment of the object of love made her concentrate her life on material things, and gradually moved towards the path of a crazy woman full of greed. This war of survival ended with the exhaustion of lust and the expansion of material desire.

3.1.3 Loss of Living Space

Woolf, the founder of western feminist theory, used "a room of her own" as a metaphor for the prerequisite for women's writing rights and writing authenticity. In the literal sense, "own room" can be understood as a material condition for women's survival, and can also be extended to a space and environment where women can survive in a free and independent natural state. However, "in the power cycle of father and son for two thousand years, women have life but no history." [5] Under the control of the patriarchal feudal family hierarchy, women could not have their own rooms. In feudal families, paternal consanguinity is the physiological link between its members and the main basis for the formation of patriarchal system. The stability of family structure is maintained by biological metabolism. Men can easily grasp the lifeline of family power, while women can only gather in the marginal areas outside the power center. In order to ensure the so-called pure and excellent bloodline of feudal families, the feudal hierarchy is playing a role: "superior" and "inferior" are used to refer to men and women respectively in gender, and the family of princes and ordinary people respectively in social field. In the text, Qiqiao's living space in the Jiang family is squeezed out because of her "secondary" identity and lower-class background.

The loss of living space of Qiqiao is reflected in the harsh environment within the family and the conflict between interpersonal relationships. Eileen Chang once said: "People just feel that everything is a little bit wrong on a daily basis, to the point of being horribly wrong." [6] The Jiang family is a place with "horrible daily life". On the surface, it looks magnificent, but in fact it is full of thorns. Cao Danian said, "The Jiang family is a big family. The elders always intimidate people by pinning labels on them, and the younger generations are like wolves. Which one is easy to provoke?" [1] shows that the Jiang family is terrible, nervous and full of intrigue. Under the cover of this atmosphere,

Qiqiao has been pushed out and bullied from top to bottom because of her humble status. The old lady in Jiang family just regarded her as a senior servant girl. She disgusted Qiqiao and Cao family and gave her some pains in bits and pieces. Daizhen, the sister-in-law from a noble family, naturally discriminated against Qiqiao's background from the bottom of her bones, often mocking Qiqiao's vulgar words and actions, and even intentionally or unintentionally exposing Qiqiao's scars to Lanxian, who had just married into the Jiang family. This quickly made Lanxian "see through Qiqiao's character and her status in the Jiang family"[1], disdaining to be with her and standing on the same side as Daizhen to isolate Qiqiao. Sister-in-law Yunze accused her face to face that she was "annoying on weekdays"[1], and her brother-in-law Jize also saw that Qiqiao "has such a bad popularity, who will forgive her?" [1] The servants of the Jiang family are also snobbish individuals who are deeply influenced by deep-rooted hierarchical thinking. Xiaoshuang's disdain for her and Fengxiao's description of "inferior people"[1] reflect Qiqiao's embarrassing situation of being looked down upon by the lower-class girls in the Jiang Mansion. The existentialist Sartre put forward that "Others are hell" can profoundly reveal the cruel gap between Qiqiao and others. "In *The Golden Cangue*, others, as accomplices of society, brought death threats to Qiqiao, and the castration pain it specifically projected on Qiqiao aggravated the collapse of the interpersonal relationship system." [7]

3.2 The Alienation of Wife Nature, Motherhood and Human Nature

3.2.1 The Alienation of Self: The Dissolution of Wife Nature

The wife nature praised by patriarchal culture is a kind of quality that has no resentment and no desire, and is willing to accept it as a husband and slave. Women with such a wife nature have completely lost their vitality while gaining praise and recognition from men, which is tantamount to living in death, because their souls have been pulled away, leaving only a vacuum shell. However, Cao Qiqiao is far from the model woman who meets the cultural standards of patriarchy. She is a fiery and unchaste wife image with rebellious spirit. She is dissatisfied and unwilling with her marriage situation, has surging desires, and has a strong sense of survival and vitality. However, Cao Qiqiao, as a trading commodity, suffered from the pain and depression brought by marriage, which caused trauma and anxiety for survival, and finally made her rebellion break through the reasonable limit and move towards the alienation of wife nature.

Qiqiao subverts the traditional impression of a gentle and obedient wife written by men in the past. To her husband, she has no loyalty, and to her mother-in-law, she has no filial piety. In the relationship between husband and wife, she despises her incompetent husband who has suffered from cartilage disease since childhood. Whenever she meets someone, she will put the Jiang family's taboos on the table and dig deep into her husband's pain points. From the plot of her complaining to her sister-in-law, brother and brother-in-law, it can be seen that she does not regard her husband as a basic person in her heart. In addition, Cao Qiqiao also betrayed the traditional concept of wife's sexual chastity. Her husband's crippled body made Qiqiao's sexual desire impossible to release. After smoking heavily to numb herself to no avail, she became mentally rebellious and regarded her naturally promiscuous brother-in-law Jize as an emotional support. She even flirted with him in front of his wife Lanxian, as if she had abandoned her identity as someone else's wife. In the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, since she was hired as a senior servant girl, she has been disgruntled with her mother-in-law, which broke out in the plot that she angrily accused her mother-in-law of deliberately ignoring her family's arrival, showing the tension in the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

3.2.2 The Substitution of Patriarchy: The Destruction of Motherhood

In the history of patriarchal clan system for thousands of years, the traditional role of mother has been fixed in the cultural structure of filial piety and kindness, which was established through the patriarchy. In the maternal myth woven by men, the mother revered by men is only a gender imagination originated from the patriarchal culture, and the inner meaning of motherhood is formed in the patriarchal context, which is a static and eternal value paradigm, divorced from the reality of specific female motherhood. Beauvoir once said: "A mother's attitude is determined by her whole situation and the way she bears it." [2] This is vividly reflected in Cao Qiqiao. Because she had long been a tool for carrying on the family line without self-consciousness in the old family, she was brutally suppressed by her mother-in-law, who occupied the position of the male patriarch, with patriarchal means. Therefore, she did not gain spiritual independence when she got rid of the bondage of the feudal patriarch, paternal power and husband power. She unconsciously tacitly accepted the traditional thought of male superiority and fall into the contextual trap of only the masochistic and sadistic relationship between the upper and the lower. In addition, the difficult living past made her anxious about living resources in her new family continue, which led her to exercise her power wrongly after the new family came to power, embezzle other people's living space, apply the patriarchal order and the rules of power manipulation game learned from feudal clans to her children to make up for the past losses and satisfy herself, and vent and resolve the pent-up resentment at will. This means that the female Qiqiao is disciplined by the patriarchal system, alienated into the paternal Qiqiao as an oppressor, and becomes an accomplice of men, a defender and accomplice of a patriarchal society.

In her daughter Changan, she killed her daughter's happiness and made Changan a copy of herself. For her son Changbai, she possessed her son's emotion and made him her valentine. In the relationship between mother and daughter, she controls all aspects of Changan with the unquestionable face of family elders, and this control method is sometimes presented in the form of survival anxiety. For example, Qiqiao used the reason that others were greedy for family property to prevent Changan from interacting with Chunxi and her fiancé Tong Shifang, and she makes a fuss about sheets and tuition fees on the grounds of maintaining property. In addition, Qiqiao has a strong jealousy for Changan. The hardships of the old family destroyed her body and mind. In the new family, all she wants to do is to vent the pain that was suppressed in the past, instead of watching her children go to happiness. Therefore, she obstructed her daughter's marriage in every way possible. Because for her, her daughter's success means her failure, so she will not only reject Changan's emotional appeal, but also destroy Changan's future happiness. In the relationship between mother and son, Qiqiao has a serious Phaedra complex. "There is only one man in her life these years" [1], and Qiqiao's portrayal of Changbai is full of erotic fantasies between lovers. This is the possession behavior caused by Qiqiao's making up for the emotional emptiness after the old family lost love. From Qiqiao's unilateral ridicule and exclusion of her daughter-in-law, it can be seen that the conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law lies in the struggle between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law for the ownership of their son. In order to be able to completely possess her son, she forced two daughters-in-law to death one after another.

3.2.3 Cold Ghost: The Extinction of Human Nature

Qiqiao dissolved her wife nature in the old family and her motherhood in the new family, but what runs through the old and new families, that is, throughout Qiqiao's life, is the extinction of her humanity. Whether it is male or female, whether it is wife nature or motherhood, its basic starting point should be human nature. Qiqiao faced a crisis of survival under the patriarchal system, and felt threatened in the process of being a wife and a mother, but she could not solve this crisis on her own.

The oppression of the patriarchal system made her struggle to survive as a woman, and even made her unable to maintain normal human nature and be a basic person. "When a person's reason is constantly peeling off until it is completely destroyed, this person is no longer a person, but a madman, but she also has the prudence and wit of a madman, which is the devil in human nature." [8]

The author depicts for us a bleak ghost whose life has been destroyed by patriarchy and whose soul has been drawn out. The external image changes of Qiqiao can reflect her dehumanization process. Beauvoir once said, "Dressing up is not just grooming ... it reflects a woman's social situation." [1] When Qiqiao first appeared, the author portrayed her attire from the perspective of others. "She wore a pale pink blouse and a pair of mauve trousers decorated with greenish-white lines. A lavender silk crepe handkerchief was half tucked around her wrist in one narrow blouse sleeve. On her thin face were a vermilion mouth, triangular eyes, and eyebrows curved like little hills." [2] Her bright attire exudes a vulgar and domineering aura. Despite being suppressed in wealthy households, she still possesses strong vitality and holds basic hope for her future destiny, hoping for the realization of some wishes that are in line with human nature. On Qiqiao's last appearance, the author portrayed a living female ghost from the perspective of Tong Shifang: "Shifang turned around and saw a small old lady standing at the door with light on her back, her face could not be seen clearly, wearing a blue-gray dragon palace woven satin robe, holding a water bottle in her hands and two tall maids beside her. The sun outside the door is dim, and the stairs are covered with lake green plaid lacquer cloth lichen, which goes up step by step and leads to the place where there is no light." [1] At this time, in her twilight years, she has experienced a series of blows from patriarchy, and her hope has been shattered, and the original vigorous fire of life has been extinguished. Her own family was destroyed by the sword handed to her by male power, and her humanity was also annihilated. She is not so much a person as a ghost wandering in the world, ready to take away her daughter's last piece of life territory with "the prudence and wit of a madman." [1]

4. Conclusion

The story of *The Golden Cangue* not only reveals the fate that women are bound to face the survival dilemma under the patriarchal system, but also reveals that women are wandering towards alienation after facing the survival dilemma, which constitutes the tragedy of women's Other survival. Obviously, in order to truly solve the irreconcilable contradiction between Cao Qiqiao's strong sense of existence and the reality of patriarchal society, we can only start with the latter, instead of taking out the feudal means that have been dead to stifle the former's sense of life. However, Cao Qiqiao's tragedy was deeply rooted in the ills of the overall social order and structure at that time. The dilemma of rights, identity and space, the alienation of wife nature, motherhood and human nature are all inevitable results under the patriarchal system, and they are also fundamental problems that cannot be solved by her own efforts. Even if she obtains economic control freedom in a small scale, the shadow of survival anxiety and mental trauma hangs over her. Her resistance failed after all, but it can't be said that her resistance is meaningless. She proved that women are never resigned and willing to be slaughtered, never willing to fall into the history of the Other forever, and never willing to walk into the place where there is no light. In this sense, Eileen Chang really stood in the position of women, and by portraying an insane image that is incompatible with male discourse, she deeply explored a female real world that is difficult to get rid of the oppress of male discourse hegemony, aroused readers' concern about women's living conditions, and criticized the patriarchal system that "continues the cannibalistic feast" [9], which showed the bumpy road to women's liberation.

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