

## THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE MOVIE AND THE NOVEL 'THE JOY LUCK CLUB'

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**Abstract:** The Joy Luck Club is a novel published in 1989, written in by Amy Tan, a Chinese American writer. In 1993, it was adapted into a movie directed by Wayne Wang and achieved a great success. The study aims at analyzing the differences between the novel and the movie in content and narrative strategy. Though the movie is basically faithful to the novel---the main characters and stories are the same and both in flashback narrative order, it made some changes in story endings, narrative order and other expressive techniques, some omissions and some supplements. Consequently, the themes expressed in the movie, in addition to the commonalities of love, communication, and cultural identity with those in the novel, showing less feminist spirit but more ethnic community culture, less conflicts but more reconciliation.

**Key words:** differences, movie, novel, narrative strategy, order, durance, frequency, theme, ethnic community culture, feminist spirit.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Joy Luck Club, the first novel of Amy Tan, was published in 1989 and made a hit at the debut. It focuses on four Chinese immigrant women in San Francisco , together with their families, who get together regularly playing Chinese game of mahjong while feasting on a variety of foods, and at the same time, they share stories among themselves, *dreaming of the good times in the past and good times yet to come.*(2019:p.36) They name themselves the Joy Luck Club.

In 1993, the novel was adapted into a feature film directed by Wayne Wang, a Hong Kong-born American director, producer, and screenwriter. The screenplay was written by the author Amy Tan along with Ronald Bass, an American screenwriter and film producer.

The movie also achieved a big success. Basically, The movie is faithful to the original work in terms of characters and main stories. However, it is no doubt that, as different forms of artistic expression, movies focus on strong auditory and visual effects, while novels rely on narrative art in written languages. Movies need to present the beginning, climax, development and ending of a story in a limited time, and with some clues and a core event that run through the entire movie. That is why some changes are undoubtedly necessary when a novel is adapted into a film. Consequently, due to such changes, the theme in the movie is also shifted from with more feminist features in the novel to only with the sense of Chinese community.

### II. DISCUSSION

The study will point out such differences by comparative study on the movie and the novel, to show the changes in the content, the omissions and the supplements, and then to draw a conclusion on the differences in the themes.

#### 1. The Differences in Content

##### The beginning

The movie begins with a party held in the Woos' house for celebrating Jing-mei Woo going to China and looking for her sisters. At the party, all the characters of four families are at present, and the stories of the four sets of mother and daughter are staged one after another by each

character thinking about something related with the old time and recalling her memory(except for Suyuan Woo, who died several months ago).

The novel begins with Woo Jing-mei recalling her mother's story in Kweilin, and then coming to the party held at the Hsus' house and playing mahjong in the place of her mother who died roughly about three months ago. The daughters of the other three families are not mentioned at the party as that in the movie. At the party, Jing-mei is told by the members of Joy Luck Club about the news of her lost sisters in China and she finally agreed to visit them on behalf of her mother.

### **The ending**

In the book, Jing-Mei travels to China in a plane with her father. Her twin sisters had already known the death of their mother, because aunt Lindo had written another letter about it at her request. However, in the movie, aunt Lindo refused the request of Jing-mei to reveal her mother's death to her sisters so that the twins believe that their mother is still alive. Jing-Mei travels to China alone on a boat without her fathers' company.

The ending of the novel is open-ended, that is, most of the questions raised during the storytelling process are not answered. Nearly all the stories were not completely closed, except for the story of Kweilin. The Kweilin story, being on the outer layer, is completed at the end in the way that Woo Jing-mei learned from her father that her mother did not abandon her two sisters, but left them in the hope of being saved by someone else because there was no choice for her in the despairing situation. Knowing the whole story of her mother, Jing-mei began to understand and appreciate her mother. On the contrary, other stories leave the readers great room for imagination. To begin with, in the scene that Lindo Jong and Waverly Jong, the pair of mother and daughter with more difficult communication problem than others, in a hair salon, when the barber Mr. Rory inadvertently pointed out that *"It's uncanny how much you two look alike!"*(Tan 310), they began to look at each other carefully and discuss their faces. Linda Jong couldn't help but think about *"What did I lost? What did I get back in return? I will ask my daughter what she think."* (2019:p.310) The novel does not continue with their discussion about these questions, leaving them for the readers to imagine. Besides, neither the marriage dilemma facing with Lena Saint Claire nor with Ruth Hsu is solved or revealed the final outcome in the novel.

However, the open-ended endings are changed to closed ones in the movie, where almost the questions raised in the story have been basically answered, and almost the emotions aroused have been basically satisfied, although there are a couple of unanswered questions that will extend beyond the film. The open endings in the novel show a kind of continuity of female narrative. Here, in the movie, the continuity is cut off with an endpoint of happiness. Waverly and her mother Lindo express themselves openly and directly while looking into the mirror in a hair salon. They laugh with tears and forgive each other for mutual misunderstanding over many years. Correspondingly, at a gathering scene, Lena and her new boyfriend sit together and chat with others, indicating that she has left her selfish husband and starts a new life. Similarly, in a party scene, after Ruth recalling the divorce incident with Ted, her husband, Ted walks out from her side and looks at her affectionately, which means that the couple has overcome difficulties and reunited. So all the stories came to a happy ending, leaving no suspense or imaginative space for the audience.

### **The way Ying Ying St. Clair killed her baby son**

There are obvious changes in the way Ying Ying St. Clair' killed her baby and the way she treated with the little dead body.

In the book, she killed her unborn son out of hatred for her husband. *I took this baby from my womb before it could be born. This was not a bad thing in China back then, to kill a baby before it is born. But even then, I thought it was bad, because my body flowed with terrible revenge as the juices of this man's firstborn son poured out of me. When the nurses asked what they should do with the lifeless baby, I hurled a newspaper at them and said to wrap it like a fish and throw it in the lake. (2019:p.301)*

In the movie she kills her own son by drowning him in the bath tub. *My mind kept busy with one single thought: He has taken from me my innocent, my youth, my heart and every thing, so I took from him the only thing I could. After that, she held the died baby in her arms with strong and complex feelings, The baby was so light in my arms, because his little spirit has flown away.and with his, my spirit has also gone. (Wang, 1993)*

## **2. The Differences in Narrative strategy**

This part is based on the concepts "order, duration and frequency proposed by Genette Gerard in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Order refers to that story can be narrated and described chronologically or not chronologically, such as flashback or flash-forward. Durance is the relationship between story time and narrative time. In this sense, there are four basic forms of narrative movement: ellipsis, scenes, descriptive pause and summery. Frequency is about something similar to repetition. Since the separation between an event and its narration allows several possibilities, the times of an event occurs and be narrated can be equal or unequal, from once to many times. (Gerard,1972)

### **The story order**

Though both in the novel and the movie, flashback is used, there is still a considerable differences in story order arrangement.

In the novel, the main sixteen stories are arranged in four parts and narrated by three mothers and four daughters disorderly. The first and the last part are basically narrated by mothers while the middle two parts by daughters.

In the movie, the order of stories is changed and the stories of each set of mother and daughter are put together mainly recalled by the mother. Therefore, it is easier to remember the characters and associate mothers with daughters in such a more natural way of telling the story. Initially, during the party, Jing-mei touched the piano and recalled her experience of practicing piano. She was interrupted by auntie Lindo.

Then Auntie Lindo recalled how she got rid of her first marriage, and how she kept her promise to her mother to make a contrast with Waverly, the daughter, didn't keep her words of taking her mother to have haircut. Irritated by her mother's word, Waverly had to drive to the barber salon. Naturally, Waverly began to recall the episodes between she and her mother about her playing chess at the her young ages and her dating with her boyfriend. Then the film comes back again to the scene, Lindo and Waverly are looking into the mirror at the two faces in the salon. This reminds Lindo think of the moment when her mother combing her hair before a mirror. Lindo said how she admired her mum and tried to practice what her mother told her to do. At last, before the mirror, Waverly and Lindo have a good communication and they laugh loudly with tears because they know they love and care each other deeply. As explained above, Lindo's story, The daughter Waverly's story and the story of Lindo's mother are embedded

together one by one.

The film comes back to Lindo again to show the end of her recalling. Next, Ying Ying recalled her terrible marriage ending up with she sitting before a window in deep depression without hearing or seeing her daughter, Lena, so the point of view shift to her daughter Lena. She began to recall how her mother helped her to get out of her marriage. After that, the scene comes to the party again, where Lena is sitting with a new boyfriend or new husband, with a background of a crying baby, maybe it being their daughter.

Third, the scene moves to An-mei, who is talking with her daughter. She gently touches her scar on her neck and begins to recall her story of the scar and her mum's story. At the end of her story, she gave advice to her daughter Rose on how to deal with her divorce problem. Rose recalled how she got known with her husband Ted and how they got along with in their marriage and at last the marriage anchored with some problems. Rose said that *I like to be tragic, mum. I learned it from you.*(1993) Upon to this, An-mei told Rose how her own mother, Rose's grandmother, rebelled with her life by committing suicide. An-mei said that her mother had never known what her worth until it was too late, but it was not late for herself and Rose. It proved that mum's advice worked because Rose and her husband restored good relation again. The scene moves back to Rose in the party and her husband is enjoying another kind of cake. That means he can make some changes instead of being self-centered only in favor of chocolate pie.

Then Rose comes over to Jing-mei and tells that she misses the crab that Jing-mei's mother cooked. Thus, June begins to recall another party held by her mother last lunar year and how she and her mother got mutual understanding by communication.

Up to now, all the stories have come to a happy ending. The scene comes back to the party again. Every one cheers for June's trip the next day and asks her to say something. After all the guests leave, dad hands her some photos and the swan feather and tells her the whole story about twins.

### **Duration**

Movies are with more advantages in processing temporal duration than novels, and the speed and rhythm of narration are more distinct correspondingly. Ellipsis and scenes are the two main methods employed in movies.

In order to highlight the conflict and reconciliation between the four sets of mother and daughter, some stories are omitted in the film because of not in line with or closely related to the theme, making the film's theme more prominent and streamlined. The stories include The Moon Lady in the first part, The voice from the Wall in the second part, Without Wood in the third part, Lindo's story about how she came to America and got married, and all the details about how the mothers get to know their husbands and began their new life in America.

In the novel, there are many monologues of narrators, while in the movie, monologues are changed into dialogue scenes between mother and daughter. On one hand, scenes are suitable for movies to express; on the other hand, in this way, the movie emphasizes the communication between mother and daughter rather than isolation and confrontation from each other.

### **Frequency: The Repetition of Swan Feather**

In the novel, the swan feather only appears once in the parable story "Feathers from a thousand Li away" and the writer doesn't explicitly point out that the story is about Woo Suyuan and her daughter. On the contrary, in the movie, the swan feature and the story of "Feathers from a

thousand Li away” appear several times. At the very beginning, The story is read by Jing-mei outside of the screen, *She will know my meaning, because I will give her this swan---a creature that became more than what was hoped for. But when she arrived in the new country, the immigration officials pulled her swan away from her, leaving the woman fluttering her arms and with only one swan feather for a memory.....For a long time now the woman had wanted to give her daughter the single swan feather and tell her, ‘this feather may look worthless, but it comes from afar and carries with it all my good intentions.’ (Wang, 1993)* At the same time, an image of white feather appears in the screen.

At the middle, Woo Jing-mei tells the story to Rose’s daughter. She supplements some details to the story: *Now the woman was old. And she had a daughter who grew up speaking only English and swallowing more Coca-cola than sorrow. For a long time now the woman had wanted to give her daughter the single swan feather and tell her, ‘this feather may look worthless, but it comes from afar and carries with it all my good intentions.....; (Wang, 1993)*

At the end, when the father finally found the swan feather and gave it to Woo Jing-mei, Jing-mei was so touched and held it like a treasure. At that moment, she appreciated her mother’s love and good intention. Finally, she took the swan with her to see her sisters. At the boat arriving in Shanghai, holding the feather in her hand, she had an inner monologue: *that I will tell them that this feather may look worthless, but it comes from afar and carries with it all my good intentions.(Wang, 1993)*

We can see that the swan feather functions as an important clue, highlighting the theme and connecting the entire movie.

### **III.CONCLUSION**

In the novel, there is no single protagonist that is far more important than other characters, so it is not possible that the important plot derived from this protagonist far exceeds the other plots. The stories of the four mother-daughter pairs are all narrated in the parallel level though they are interlocked and embedded artistically as a whole. The perspective and credibility of all their storytelling are also equal. The open ending implies the continuity of female stories.

In the movie, it is not difficult to find that there are still a large number of scenes depicting reconciliation, which does not match the proportion in the novel. It is obvious that the director deliberately omitted some conflicts and added some communication and happy endings in order to highlight the theme of understanding and love.

In the movie, thanks to the mothers' wisdom shared in their stories, the three daughters' marriages all come to a happy ending. The good traditions of ethnic community culture have been passed down from generation to generation. In this way, the movie emphasizes on the ethnic community culture while the novel stresses the feminist spirit and tradition.

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