



# All About My Mother: a Plausible Dissection of Women's Positioning and Prospects in Feminist Film

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**Abstract.** Women in women's cinema, as an important figure in the heavily coloured media landscape, has been gaining prominence in the film market in recent years. This further reflects the balance of gender relations in the new era and women's active struggle for their rights under the popularisation of education. Against this background, All About My Mum focusing on gender relations under the realistic premise of affirming women's status, and providing a more unique and comprehensive rational reflection on women's way out from a male perspective.

**Keywords:** feminism; female awakening; female way out dilemma analysis; male perspective

## 1 Introduction

Feminism is one of the major trends of our time, and women's cinema is an effective means of communicating the awakening of ideas to break down gender oppression. Although feminism was originally created to promote equality among the sexual classes, today's extreme feminism has taken advantage of it.

The art of film and television has always been closely related to literature and social thinking.<sup>[1]</sup> On the premise of giving feminism a proper name and returning to the truth, the realistic women's film directed by Zhao Tianyu - "All About My Mother" was born.

Through the realistic filming techniques and objective and realistic lens vocabulary and simultaneous sound into the audio-visual and the main line of the downward spiral intertwined with the presentation of the soul of the character Ji Peizhen's disease under the trivial life as the main line, a more complete display of the fate of the main characters in the drama intertwined with the transformation of the temperament, and to "end happily" as the end of the story, the full story The narrative provides us with a complete picture of the real situation of women in today's society. As a hot work that responds to the social reality and guides women's way out, the producer and creator have made great efforts, not only in the expression of women's subjective consciousness and the detailed list of reflections and ways out of the feminist craze, but also in the objective recording of life, the combination of audio-visual language and the design of the tear-

jerking point, which is a unique combination. What is even more rare is that, compared with similar subjects in the past, there is a great improvement in the combination of plain life and dramatic events, as well as in the broadening and deepening of women's way out from the perspective of both genders. To put it plainly, this is a feminist film guided by rational thinking in recent years, and it is also a more objective and truthful film reflecting the reality of women's status in China, spreading gender equality, and reflecting on the male-dominated society under the gaze of men.

## **2 Far-Reaching Intentions and the Principle of Realism in the Creation of Films on Feminist Themes**

### **2.1 The Confucian Ideology of Femininity that Permeates the Blood of the Film**

Confucianism, as a representative thought that has been passed down in China for thousands of years, has had a profound influence on the construction and development of traditional Chinese thought, and Confucian women's thought has been present throughout. According to Liu Qianru (2021), Confucianism completes the metaphysical argument for women's inferiority through the interpretation of the meanings of the two hexagrams "Qian" and "Kun" in the I Ching. <sup>[2]</sup>The film's scenes are cleverly dispatched and set in Qingdao, Shandong Province, which is the birthplace of Confucianism and has been deeply influenced by it. At the same time, Qingdao, as the "leading city" of Shandong Province, is very representative.

In the 21st century feminist film, *All About My Mother*, the subtle influence of this traditional thinking is unapologetically demonstrated. The most striking manifestation of female inferiority is the distribution of power in the film, which is usually held by men. In stark contrast, women are often the ones who do the basic jobs in society, such as assistants and service workers. This more "harmonious" situation is the best reflection of Confucianism. Due to its far-reaching and deep-rooted influence, this situation will persist and the concept will continue in today's society. Therefore, facing up to the reality of the situation is the first step in addressing feminism in a way that is both clear and true.

### **2.2 Lamp-Lighting and Lamp-Destruction Patterns Across Ancient and Modern Societies**

As Virginia Woolf, a pioneer of modernism and feminism in the twentieth century, said, a human being is not a still life in a vase to be admired, but a melody that spreads across the grassland and dances with the wind. <sup>[3]</sup> However, the requirements of the Three Obediences and Four Virtues and the superiority of men over women have long constrained and confined women's freedom of speech and person. In Zhang Yimou's *Big Red Lanterns Hanging Tall*, the status of women can be seen between the lighting of the lanterns and the extinguishing of the lanterns - lighting the lanterns and being favoured, extinguishing the lanterns and being left in silence. This single criterion for judging women

is also more or less applicable after the founding of the PRC. The "lights on, lights off" model reflects the fact that traditional women's self-worth has been left to men's discretion, and that gender oppression is a constraint on women's spirit. Therefore, it can be briefly summarised as follows: in order to solve the problem of gender deviation, the second step is to remove women's limitations on their own spirituality, and this self-limiting thinking can be called "foot-binding thinking".

In today's society, the modernisation of the "lights out" paradigm has also progressed. In the film, the daughter Xiao Mei enters the workplace, where her work environment is dominated by men and the power of women is banished. She falls in love with her married boss, and she is able to tolerate being called the "third party" because, in addition to the so-called love, she is also able to enjoy the admiration and status that her boss brings with his "downward spiral". She was "sheltered" by her supervisor, and now she has become a "post-00s-dominated workplace" where she can act according to her own temperament, regardless of her leader's demands. The power of male supervisors in the social work mechanism has brought Xiao Mei a smoother workplace experience and enhanced her sense of achievement and satisfaction. However, it cannot be ignored that when she has the help of her male supervisor, Xiao Mei's work is smooth and satisfactory, while once she loses the blessing of her supervisor, Xiao Mei is at the mercy of others in the workplace. The invisible foot-binding cloth is still a fundamental problem that restricts the advancement of women's status, and if the mechanism of social work and the determinism of power remain unchanged, the lamp-lighting model will not be eliminated, and the flame of women's inferior social status will not be extinguished.

### 2.3 Women's Independence under Marxist Concepts

Feminist film as a famous IP under the image creation fever, the female figure as the protagonist has become a deservedly strong media landscape. Feminist propaganda is one of the most important forms of enhancing women's status under the modern patriarchal society, providing a boost for women's affirmative action. In his view of women, Marx said, "The oppression of women is a social phenomenon at a certain stage in the historical development of mankind. Therefore it will certainly be replaced by equality between men and women under new historical conditions." [4] This not only illustrates the significance of propagating the idea of affirmative action for the advancement of women's status, but also provides an important ideological guide and behavioural path for women's independence and equality of status. Moreover, countless facts have proved that Marxist feminism has provided extremely important experience and reference for the improvement of women's status in the world, and has provided extremely profound experience and reference for the development of women of different classes in different countries all over the world. Nowadays, we still take the Marxist theoretical system as the guiding ideology, and we are making new thinking and understanding to realise the balance between the two sexes in the true sense of the word, and we are trying to put ourselves in the shoes of the opposite sexes to understand the situation in a reverse way. Therefore, it is the duty of media workers to learn from today's feminist films. At the same time, women's cinema, as one of the most important products of

commercialisation, has injected vitality into the contemporary society, especially the film market under the impact of the epidemic. Under the development prospect of today's society, the progress of modern media has made feminism not only a commercial consumption mode, but also a mode of positively criticising the reality of life, which provides a thought leadership and a model for contemporary women. It is the effort in creative consciousness and value pursuit that notices that ordinary women are still the main body of women's groups, and focuses the main character on Ji Peizhen, a housewife, whose world is "a home of more than a hundred square metres" in *All About My Mother*, and whose life loses the pursuit of personal value, and whose personal value is structured in the realisation of group value. Her life loses the pursuit of personal value, and the realisation of personal value is structured within the realisation of group value, i.e. the realisation of the value of an ordinary female group is still based on the realisation of the value of all family members. Based on the analysis of the current situation, and in order to better think about the status of both genders, the director has gone beyond the gender confrontation and put himself in the shoes of the family members to understand the situation in a reverse way. Based on the real life in the form of storytelling to develop the attack on extreme ideas, with a higher focus and based on the return of rationality, and focus on the image of the housewife, for the high development of feminism boom injected into a more rational and realistic image of thinking.

### **3 Focusing on Gender Groups and the Expression of the Main Theme of Feminist Films in the Modern Context**

The film "*All About My Mother*" achieves the main expression of feminist narratology by choosing small cuts that reflect the scenarios of traditional women's lives in a male society.

The concept of family as a cultural symbol is rooted in the Chinese bloodline, and the default division of labour in the family not only binds women, but also provides the ground for gender confrontation in modern society, and even more so, under the umbrella of the concept of family, women are objectified and treated as valuable commodities to be circulated in the market. *All About My Mum* is a replica of traditional women's portraits in the modern context, and adopts the form of a heart-warming family drama, bringing the audience inner insights through tears and touching emotions.

At the same time, the film "*All About My Mother*" uses video narrative as a means of unfolding, reproducing various types of family symbols, especially the important branch of the division of labour in the family. With the image of the mother as the core of the film, the film focuses on the gender relations in the family on the division of labour in the family. At the same time, the traditional thinking of the female protagonist represents a symbol of thinking, in which the intense conflict focuses on a single object symbol - the kitchen. At the beginning of the film, the kitchen in the early morning, the busy mother, Ji Peizhen, and the father, who sits at the dining table and reads the newspaper, seem to have formed a kind of default division of labour. At the same time, the symbolism of the kitchen gradually develops into a synonym for women's constraints,

and the traditional idea of the kitchen as a "shelter" in a patriarchal society is also extended in the film, in which the kitchen is long, square and narrow. The kitchen is rectangular and narrow, and the only glass door is full of angles like bars and frames, highlighting the sense of bondage. Combined with the sense of weightlessness brought about by the tilted frames, this "shelter" is in fact a "ghost gate".

Looking at reality can enhance the film's sense of gravity, while the de-dramatic artistic expression and more rational narrative perspective can better break the barrier between the audience and the film. The film "All About My Mother" takes the image of housewives in the real world as its starting point, and takes "the cooling down of modern feminist thought and the summary and reflection of the way out of feminism" as its main line, breaks through the class restriction, breaks free from the ideological manipulation of the patriarchal society, and inspects the minutiae of all kinds of women's lives, which provides women with a more complete and universal way out. It provides a more complete and universal way out for women. The characters are full-bodied and full of documentary colours. The film portrays such women as Ji Peizhen, a hard-working mother, Li Xiaomei, a newcomer to the workplace who is full of rebellious thinking, and Liu Mei, a sickly but optimistic hot pot restaurant owner, presenting a diverse range of female images. While consuming warmth as a selling point, the director does not forget to think about the status of women in the general public and to truly "rescue" them. In the plot, the most extreme realistic scenes are used to make the audience contemplate and gain a sense of emotional urgency at the same time. The film's narrative breaks through the time and space limitations, which enhances the film's heaviness and has a deep meaning of redemption, and is a true interpretation of the status of women at this stage.

#### **4 Old Things are New, in Pursuit of Freshness under the Creative Fervour of Feminist Themes**

Unlike Western women's liberation narratives, which are centred on the critique of patriarchy, capitalism and the construction of women's subjectivity, Chinese women's liberation is underpinned by the discourse of national liberation, national construction and prosperity. [5] However, women's cinema has traditionally been characterised by the portrayal of legendary figures and the promotion of high morale, encouraging women to fight against injustice, but it has not provided a set of methodological approaches that are relevant to the general public. The value of women's cinema will be magnified if it tells a storyline that is relevant to society, and in order to turn a boring and commonplace life into a work of art that is both socially relevant and engaging, it must work hard on the plot.

According to Chung Wei-Wen, a Taiwanese communication scholar, people live in a realistic scenario interwoven by social reality, media reality, and objective reality.<sup>[6]</sup> The difference between social reality and media reality stems from the bias of media communication and reporting. As a media communication channel, traditional women's films have processed from art factories a batch of characters with distinctive leadership colours, high fighting spirit and some extremist tendencies, which not only

deviate from the life situation of women's groups but also provide the ground for the development of extreme feminism.

It is based on the above communication differences and the status quo of the industry, "All About My Mum" has made bold breakthroughs and innovations in the selection of perspectives and plot settings. Not only does it change the design of the leader's image of women, through the way of influence narrative, it quickly portrays the image of a traditional housewife protagonist who is a man outside the house and a woman inside the house, but it also provides a set of preliminary methodology for millions of women, although it has its own limitations.

On the one hand, this is achieved through the construction of women's alliances. According to Le Sueur, women's collective consciousness is an important weapon to resist oppression in a patriarchal society. In a patriarchal society where women's value is determined by men, the formation of women's alliances not only facilitates women's pursuit of self-worth and identity, but also allows individuals to obtain more adequate help in the group due to the mutual support within a homogeneous group. The film shows the two sides of the constructed or not, as Mei's star assistant, who is also a woman, looks on coldly when she is reprimanded by her boss, and attempts to gain her own value by lowering the status of others, which leads to the two of them always being on the opposite side of the male society. On the other hand, the female alliance in the film, the alliance constructed by the mother and Xiaomei, countered the oppression brought by the male director and gained the applause of the actors and actresses; the alliance constructed by the mother and her siblings, made the younger brother to pull back from the precipice and give hope to the days; the mother and Liu Mei were each other's friends to fight against the torment of the disease and harvested the precious memories in the last days. It is precisely this kind of sympathy that transcends identity and class status that makes the general environment of a masculinist society not seem harsh and tragic, a scenario that is highly compatible in the real world.

It is true that mutual support among women can help them solve certain problems. However, the disadvantages of building a women's alliance are also worth pondering.

Firstly, when the number of women in the alliance is so small that they can only form a small group, the women's alliance cannot get rid of the essence of control by the patriarchal society. As shown in the film, although the mother and her siblings support each other in the hard life, when the younger brother comes to compete for the money, both of them can do nothing to help the younger brother's behaviour; although the mother helps the daughter to win the dignity of the workplace, the daughter loses her job, the director's role of power is still a woman, but the essence of the male-dominated society has not been changed. In addition, when the female alliance is large enough, the disadvantages of the group come to the fore. Le Bon, a group psychologist, once pointed out that the rational ability of a group is always much lower than that of an individual. Liu Jinlu (2009) summarised Freud's view that group communication is controlled by unconscious influence.<sup>[7]</sup> Sunstein proposed the echo chamber effect, which argues that when people are in a homogeneous group, their thoughts will gradually go to extremes. Therefore, when the women's coalition is large enough, due to the echo chamber effect, the coalition's thoughts are gradually polarised and prone to extreme feminism. At the

same time, according to the above research on group psychology, individuals may become less rational in a group and make unconscious communication<sup>[8]</sup>, which will easily lead to the spread of extreme feminism and create social antagonism between men and women.

So building women's alliances is not a panacea, we should also think about the second aspect - engaging men's alliances.

In the reality of patriarchal society, men are naturally more powerful than women, and under the operation of the social power mechanism, men have more resources and power than women. In order to achieve equality and respect, women need the help of male alliance. Therefore, the construction of male alliance can provide more help to women on the other hand. The help shown in *All About My Mother* is mainly divided into two aspects: on the one hand, it is the help of father and Uncle Ren to mother, and on the other hand, it is the support of Xiaomei's boss to Xiaomei. First of all, in the film, when the mother feels unwell, she first endures the pain and then goes to the hospital for a medical check-up, but the lack of resources makes her illness drag on until the cancer spreads. When the husband learns that his wife is seriously ill, he uses his resources and power to seek the help of Ren Tong, who is hundreds of dollars away in Beijing, in order to make his mother's surgery foolproof. In the second aspect, although Xiaomei's relationship with her boss is against morality, her boss's connections, status and financial strength can provide great help to Xiaomei, who is new to the workplace, and enable her to complete the initial step towards the workplace. The director has thought about the issue of women's way out from the perspective of both genders, but men and women are not opposites; only by seeking help from each other and becoming self-reliant can we break the shackles of gender and find an equal and free way out.

Participation in men's alliances is not a panacea, and the continued subjection to the male mindset in today's society is a persistent and important point of disconnect for gender equality. As in the film, the power and resources of society are still vested in the hands of men, while women lack power and resources in comparison. In order for women to fight for equality and freedom, they need to participate in men's alliances to get their help. In the final analysis, although joining the male alliance is a way out for women, this way out is mostly achieved under certain abnormal conditions.

First and foremost, the extreme nature of the film's plot and characters lacks some practical reference value. The director uses a more extreme way of dealing with illness and death as the turning point of the film, which can highlight the rhythm of the film, but at the same time does not notice that the characters portrayed are too thin and two-faced, and that the male alliance in the film is a class of its own, which is the display of a group of people with psychological or physiological disabilities, which does not refer to incompetence, but rather to "delusion". This disability is not an impotence, but a "delusion". This is not a healthy way of dealing with the fact that all the male characters are paper-thin, designed to emphasise women's abilities; the father goes from being inconsiderate to delicate, Paige goes from hateful to remorseful, and the boss goes from apathetic to rational. Furthermore, the ways in which women participate in the male alliance all fall into the category of negative material. Taking the role of mother as an example, the director designed the mother as a "spring silkworm" who fully understands that in a patriarchal society, men are under great pressure and have a heavy task to do,

and she is used to self "PUA". The mother fully accepts the image of "male dominates the outside, female dominates the inside" circulating in the society, and uses "family division of labour" as the reason for self-explanation to her husband, who "pays no attention to family affairs, and is all about career"; and in the case of Peiqi's weirdness, she is a "spring silkworm" who fully understands the heavy pressure on men in a patriarchal society. Exclusion; and in Peiqi blame when followed the "Kong Rong let the pear" principle, she to "eldest daughter as mother" label to bind themselves, many times the "offence" is not blood dissolved in water love.

To sum up, the director has made a more comprehensive and objective analysis of the two ways out, so All About My Mother is not only a film for entertainment and amusement, but also serves as a part of ideological edification. The film does not further expand and think about women's way out, but conducts a more comprehensive and profound analysis of the two ways based on the real situation, and the idea that the choice of the two ways is the key factor in solving women's dilemmas runs through the whole film.

## 5 Conclusions

Literature and art are the trumpets of the times, and as the old saying goes, "Literature is a tool for the passage of the Way."<sup>[9]</sup>In the past ten years, women's films have shown a strong sense of femininity, but at the same time, they have embodied a certain colour of "appeasement".<sup>[10]</sup>With the development of social progress and ideology, feminist films have become more and more popular among filmmakers. It is noteworthy that there is a tendency of homogenisation in the creation of women's films. All About My Mother, as a representative film of both familyism and feminism in recent years, also shows homogenised expressions of women's plight in line with the trend of the times, as if the artistic value of feminist films produced by the assembly line has been greatly reduced.

Compared to other feminist films, "All About My Mother" has added a reflection on the way out for women while conforming to the trend of the times and a thousand other people. Through interpreting the creators' thoughts on the way out for women today and reflecting on its advantages, disadvantages and feasibility, it is easy to find that there are dilemmas in the creators' thoughts on the way out for women. It is not difficult to find that the creators' thoughts on the way out for women have the disadvantages of dilemma and idealisation. At the same time, the film does not give any rationalised suggestions on how to participate in the way out, and even if they are successfully participated in and implemented, they do not change the nature of the patriarchal society. Although the film's suggestion of a way out still has drawbacks, it still reflects the creators' thinking to a certain extent, which is a good start. Just as it is better to teach a man to fish than to give him a fish, it is more worthwhile to advocate a film that can give women a way out than a traditional feminist film that simply reacts to the status quo, and although Everything About My Mother still has a lot of room for improvement in this regard, it is always a good start. In a patriarchal society, the awakening of women and the construction of their rights still need to be explored in the long run. Only



through in-depth study of women's way out and their cinematic treatment can we create excellent films that are compatible with society and reality.

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