

The Male Gaze Like in Chinese and Western Movies

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Abstract. In the history of the development of the film industry, different cultures and countries have had classic films. But in a patriarchal society, many classic movies are filled with the male gaze. Even though the status of women has undergone significant changes in the evolving society, implicit discourses and concepts of sexism still exist. This article chooses the Chinese movie "In the Mood for Love" and the Hollywood movie "The Tourist" to analyze the male gaze in Chinese and Western films. The research significance of this article is to explore the different manifestations of the male gaze and the symbolization of female characters through the analysis of the male gaze in films from different cultures. This article uses the method of comparative analysis to study the female role under the male gaze. The expressions of the male gaze are different in different cultures, but the gaze under the patriarchal system is essentially the same.

Keywords: Male gaze, Movie, Patriarchal society.

1. Introduction

With the changes in social structure and the advancement of equality between men and women, women's social status has been dramatically improved. However, due to the inertia of social concepts, the state of a patriarchal society persists. Women still receive stares from many aspects of culture, especially the male gaze. While women are fighting for equal rights, anti-gaze has become a new direction of social progress. However, modern society has not been able to break away from the influence of patriarchy altogether, and implicit discourse and concepts of sexism still exist. As Kate Millett states, men dominate women through gender politics, which is the basis of patriarchy [1]. The male gaze treats women as the second gender to be looked at, while men enjoy the pleasure of voyeurism through various media and channels, becoming the first gender to watch and gaze [2]. The male gaze, this viewing method that carries the operation of power and the entanglement of desire, provides a theoretical perspective for this article to observe cultural products and cultural phenomena. In today's new media era, although the term female gaze has also appeared, there is still much room for expansion in the study of the systematic construction and strengthening of the female gender from the gaze perspective to the dissolution of resistance to the male gaze. Through comparative analysis, this article chooses Chinese and American films to analyze the male gaze manifestations in different cultures.

2. Comparative Analysis Using Two (Chinese and American) Movies as Examples

2.1. Character Creation in Movies

The movie "In the Mood for Love" is a literary romance film directed by Wang Jiawei and released in 2000. The film tells a fruitless love story that took place in the 1960s [3]. Su Lizhen, who has a husband, and Zhou Muyun, who has a wife, both discovered their partners were cheating. In pain, they reviewed the process of their partner's cheating together, rented a house, wrote novels, and gradually fell in love with each other through their interactions. However, the two are worried about the rumours around them, especially the female's dependence on her husband, who has never been able to break through her adherence to morality. Ultimately, the two separated, the female returned to her family, and the male left for Singapore. The heroine's unique Shanghai temperament and the ever-changing mood of the cheongsam demonstrate the aesthetic consciousness of Chinese classical

art and bring the audience back to the atmosphere of Hong Kong in the 1960s. The high-collared and slim-fitting cheongsam wraps the body like an image, perfectly combining traditional Chinese aesthetic concepts with Su Lizhen's classic character and moral restraint and implicitly narrating that beautiful time that makes people reluctant to move.

"The Tourist" is a love suspense film directed by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck and released in 2010 [4]. Frank travels alone from the United States to Europe as a tourist to relieve his emotional trauma. He met a sexy beauty named Elise on the train. Elise has a mysterious identity and background. Frank is addicted to the romantic affair, but in fact, he has entered a dangerous incident. Men were being spied on from Paris to Venice, and their lives were in danger. As the woman's identity is revealed, Frank realizes he is already in trouble. The male protagonist has a dual identity in the film. On the one hand, he is Alexander Pierce, Elise's boyfriend, who has been missing for almost two years. He was initially the financial investment consultant of Russian gang leader Shaw, so he was hunted by the gang and Interpol. On the other hand, after undergoing multiple plastic surgeries, changing his voice, and changing his identity, he became Frank, a university teacher, and met Elise during his trip to Venice. The so-called encounter was Elise's intention. Elise followed Pierce's instructions in the letter and found a passenger on the train who was the same size as Pierce to escape Interpol's tracking. Frank was chosen solely because of his physical appearance. This was a deliberate foreshadowing by the screenwriter. The two of them are the same person. So, the male protagonist naturally uses Frank's senses to realize his voyeuristic pleasure step by step.

2.2. The Way to Express Shooting Female Characters

In the "In the Mood for Love", Su Lizhen changed into 26 cheongsams in total. The changing cheongsams show the protagonist's complex and confused psychology. Wearing a brightly colored cheongsam will better cover Su Lizhen's inner helplessness and confusion. She uses exaggerated colors to block the inexpressible inner emotions. Hegel put forward the theory that if you want to create a portrait of a contemporary figure in modern times, it is necessary to determine his clothing and external environment based on the real life of the constitution. Because he provides the subject matter of the work of art as a natural person, his appearance, mainly clothing, must be shaped according to his actual appearance in real life [5]. Su Lizhen wears different styles of cheongsam throughout the film. The cheongsam is a metaphor for the female body and secretly expresses her inner desires and upholds moral sense. Su Lizhen's charming expression when reviewing Zhou Muyun's wife's seduction of her husband echoed the cheongsam she wore. The emotional transitions in the film and the changes in the inner emotions of the male and female protagonists are displayed through different colors of cheongsam and scenes.

At the beginning of the "The Tourist", a surveillance car is parked outside the heroine's apartment. Three Interpol police officers in the vehicle closely watch the surveillance footage. At this time, Elise left the apartment and walked gracefully down the street. At this time, the film photographer sequentially presents close-ups of the heroine's upper body and legs to the audience. A policeman in the surveillance car then praised, "Her ass is perky." His partner then pointed the surveillance camera at her buttocks, and then the photographer showed the audience a close-up of her buttocks. In this way, the heroine's performance in the narrative subtly combines the audience's gaze with that of the male characters in the film. On the other hand, this series of close-ups incorporates another erotic mode into the narrative. Regarding this point, several plots unfolding in an outdoor restaurant in the film can also be used as examples. When shooting heroines, flat shots with soft lighting are often used to reduce facial wrinkles and highlight youthfulness and beauty. Stereoscopic lighting is commonly used when photographing men to simulate the real world. Shadows on the face help to show the mature charm of men.

2.3. Director's Perspective

John O'Neill quotes Merleau-Ponty in *Five Bodies - Re-figuring Relationships* and proposes. The concept of the "communicative body" believes that in addition to its physiological functions, the body

can have cultural significance because "the human body is communicative. The combination of its upright posture and audio-visual ability expands a world of symbols. It greatly enriches our experience and makes it beyond the scope of any other life form" [6]. The symbolized body is used as a metaphor for certain abstract expressions in literary and artistic works and has symbolic meaning. As a male narrator, director Wang Jiawei's overall portrayal of Su Lizhen is from a male perspective. The director observed the changes in the heroine's cheongsam from the male protagonist's perspective, which is a metaphor for the female body and emotions. Through the selection and processing of space, narrow corridors, dim streets, changing stairs, walls, swaying curtains, etc., the cheongsam is more restrained, and the vitality and eroticism of the cheongsam cannot bloom freely. The director provides us with a space to feel from a male perspective. Su Lizhen, as a woman, has lost her subjectivity and has become the "other" being "seen" in the eyes of the director and Zhou Muyun. Women represented by Su Lizhen seem to be shackled and can only be used as shadows or accessories of men. Once a woman gets married, she no longer has herself. All her emotional sustenance comes from her husband's feedback. Even if her husband does not respond, a woman has no right to pursue freedom. In the movie, Su Lizhen always introduces herself as Mrs. Chen. She is just an accessory to her husband and has lost her subjective status as a woman. Her experience reflects the dilemma of women in married life, and various details reveal the status of male discourse. Wang Jiawei's movies are a kind of male gaze movie mixed with female gaze [7]. The changes in Su Lizhen's cheongsam are the main thread throughout the film. The director uses her constantly changing cheongsam to metaphorize the mood and physical desires of the man and woman during the affair. At this time, the woman's body is no longer controlled by herself but becomes a symbol of expression. So after Zhou Muyun got over his wife's betrayal, as a man, he naturally fell in love with and pursued women. But Su Lizhen was always struggling between emotions and morality, unable to decide. She still retreated into her husband's around to keep the integrity of the husband who no longer loved her. As far as Su Lizhen is concerned, the husband, who barely appears and has no positive image, is the subject. She only serves as a symbol to carry her husband's thoughts and requirements. In the movie, both Zhou Muyun and Su Lizhen's husband, Mr. Chen, are self-reliant and independent, but Su Lizhen, as a woman, is not. She remains vulnerable throughout the film, dependent on two men and without a true sense of herself. This is also the gaze of director Wang Jiawei, which can also be said to be the gaze of patriarchy.

There are three ways of viewing related movies, considering the camera recording the film's events, considering the audience watching the finished film, and considering the characters on the screen [8]. It is particularly evident in the film "The Tourist", not to mention the Interpol police officers watching in the surveillance car. If we carefully review the film's plot, the male protagonist is the voyeur. Movie lenses often divide the female body into different parts for shooting, such as close-ups of breasts and buttocks. Through conscious lens design, the audience is created to watch from the subject's perspective, awakening the audience's hormones and feelings. Most movies in film history have featured close-ups of actresses' buttocks. This kind of shot, which is not necessary in the story but has enormous market demand, is called a predatory shot. Commonly used methods of photographing the female body include slowly moving the camera from bottom to top to photograph a standing woman or slowly panning the camera to snap a lying body. For another example, in slow motion, men are usually fighting, while women have more sexy shots.

3. Discussion

The comparative analysis of these two movies shows that even under the same male gaze perspective, Chinese film tend to be more implicit in expression techniques. The audio-visual effect of the story is presented in the film through many metaphors and symbolic representations. But Hollywood movies are more straightforward, integrating the audience's perspective into that of the male protagonist and directly gazing at the heroine. But regardless of cultural differences or differences in representation, the essence of the male gaze in movies remains the same. In the film,

women are shown as "beautiful". However, the important thing is that this "beauty" is shown for men to "see". Mulvey believes audiences are obsessed with male figures of their kind in the illusion of natural space, and through this, male control, and possession of women in the story world. It is the central theme of erotic perception [8]. If the central image of the heroine in "In the Mood for Love" also used cheongsam and some symbolic metaphors to reflect the female body, then in "The Tourist", the female body is directly expressed, and many scenes are shot in many shots to tell the female body deliberately. The female body is turned into an objectified gaze through the lens of the male gaze, be it the buttocks, breasts or overall body curves.

'Gaze' – a method of viewing that carries the operation of power or the entanglement of desire. It is usually a product of visual centrism, where the viewer is privileged to 'see'. By 'see' to establish one's subject position, the person being watched becomes the object of 'see' and at the same time feels the power pressure brought by the viewer's eyes and self-materializes by internalizing the viewer's value judgment [9]. Based on men as viewers and saviors, female images become the objects of male desire after being erotically encoded. At the same time, Mulvey said that the gender power behind the gaze is divided into three aspects: During the shooting process, the male photographer stared at the actress. In movies, at the plot level, women are always waiting to be rescued, while at the image level, women are the objects of the male gaze and viewing. During the movie viewing process, the audience identifies with the actions and gaze of the male character. It uses their sense of identification with the male character to gaze at the female character. Since the audience has a gaze and possessive desire for women both in the film and while watching, Mulvey pointed out that the female image is crucial to resolving this contradiction [8]. In the film's characterization, eroticism displays sex on the screen in an overt way, and in this process, women are the primary vehicles. It can be said that this is a description of these bodies from a male perspective, using a male gaze to gaze at the female characters. The pleasure of watching a movie situation mainly comes from two aspects. On the one hand, it is the pleasure brought by the satisfaction of scopophilia, and on the other hand, the pleasure brought by identifying with the images being watched.

The male gaze in movies is more a product of social structure and patriarchal society. The male gaze is an ideology that operates through the power control of vision based on desire centred on patriarchal ideas. From birth, everyone will accept the gaze of this society from many aspects. In addition to being subject to the male gaze, women seem also to be subject to the gaze of other women. Therefore, it is concluded that women are gazing at are subject to more constraints [10]. In a social gaze centred on patriarchal concepts, gaze has become a ubiquitous taming rule. Women will continue to cater to the market of the male gaze, thus becoming accessories in a male-righted society. Restrictions and discrimination against women will continue to deepen, leading to the regression of a gender-equal society.

4. Conclusion

In these two films, the male gaze is a window of expression for men, through which they express their aesthetic requirements to others. Some people who accept the face become accomplices of the male gaze, maintaining, and passing on this oppressive aesthetic. These defenders of the male gaze are committed to objectifying women, turning women into props, and making women more attractive to the male gaze under the camera. Thanks to the efforts of defenders and the absolute power of men, women have been trapped in the cage of male aesthetics. Under long-term spiritual indoctrination, they unconsciously lose their autonomy, obey the male gaze, and work hard to change themselves to gain male approval. The gazer, the gazed, and the defenders of rights become a stable structure that consolidates the value system of the male gaze. The analysis of this article is limited. Only two movies were selected for comparative analysis of the manifestations of the male gaze in different cultures. In future research, more examples will be chosen for in-depth analysis, and the impact of the male gaze in movies on society will be explored.

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