

# *The Voiceless Rural Women in Films from the Perspective of Female Discourse——A Case Study of Mountain Cry*

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**Abstract:** Women living in village lacked their discourse rights owing to the restrictions in terms of both gender and geography. In China, rural-themed films focused on depicting the fate of those who live in obscurity, in order to present the real rural society. In this paper, the case would be the movie *Mountain Cry*. To further study the core of feminism while giving an insight into how women's right has been achieved in rural areas, the research need to find the "unheard one", which is considered as the portrayal of village women in this movie and analyze the metaphors and plot device in *Mountain cry*. Although the protagonist was speaking out with such courage and strength, trying her utmost to get rid of the chains from patriarchy, throughout this process of self-redemption, she paid a heavy price. Unfortunately, it's not just happened in the last century, even today, women's rights needed be achieved with different sacrifice to make.

**Keywords:** the other, feminism, rural-themed films, discourse right

## 1. Introduction

In China, rural side is lacks from the city in information, culture, life, and so on. People who live in rural society are limited by their vision, and still continue the inherent value judgment and value choice of traditional society, it makes rural women become the edge. This year, feminism turned to be a popular topic, however, vicious social events such as trafficking in women and domestic violence are still happening, and the "voiceless" rural women who are free from power need to be taken serious immediately. At present studies, there has a slight amount of paper that has been studied in domestic crime films with "voiceless" characters, but the field about the voiceless rural women in movies need to be supplemented. The paper is focused on the fate of rural women through the "discourse" theory of Michel Foucault, "the other" theory of Simone de Beauvoir, and the "subalterns" theory of Gayatri C. Spivak. Combined with social reality and other film works, this paper explores the self-liberation and self-sacrifice of Chinese rural women as a social voiceless group.

## 2. Film Analysis

### 2.1. Literature Review

There have many scholars had researched the voiceless characters in criminal films, such as *From Moral Anxiety to identity transformation: beyond the binary opposition of the voiceless image in criminal films*(Pang Rui, Sun Xuehu)[1], *Analysis of Identity Dilemma in The Coffin in the Mountain*(Hou Dongxiao)[2], *Research on Voiceless Image in Domestic Crime Films recent years*(Ma Enfeiye)[3], etc. The field of voiceless and identity research was completely where the scholars used different theories to make in-depth studies. But about the content, these studies are limited in the gender perspective.

Besides, there have many scholars are focused on the female image in rural literature and films, such as *Women's Fate in Rural Dilemma Literary Reflection on Jia Pingwa's Local Novel in the New Century*(Wu Jingming, Cai Yixuan)[4], *The Change of rural women image in Rural-themed films*(Zhang Lihua, Liao Bingling)[5], *Female Implication and Local Complex in Chinese and Western Films*(Li Yimei)[6], *Locality as Natural Village-On a spatial Construction of Chinese Contemporary Rural Films*(Meng Jun)[7], etc. In the field of rural female image in literary and artistic works, the scholar's researches are related in female and local, female fate, female image; it's multiple and extensive.

At present, the research gathered the voiceless images and feminism is less; this paper is combined the two aspects to fill the research gap.

### 2.2. Female Dilemma in *Mountain Cry*

In this film, Hong Xia is the main character that has endured heavy pain caused by the oppression of the patriarchal society and the closed thoughts of the people. In addition to being treated as an "object", she also faces mass violence in many cases.

#### 2.2.1. Situation as "the Other"

The story of *Mountain Cry* took place in 1984, "Although China's achievement in changing customs is obvious, many old customs have been deeply rooted after thousands of years of inheritance, so cannot be completely eliminated in a short period of time [8]." In the rural society of 1980s, because people's information was more closed, traditional customs were more stubborn and still continued the parts of traditional cultural customs that needed to be discarded, it makes rural women's position of "the other" more pronounced.

In *The Second Sex*, one of the founders of the feminist movement Simone de Beauvoir thoughts that woman is "the other", the theory points out that male establishes themselves as the subject in society and leaving women in an object position. She also said that "women are not born, but made of in reality[9]." In *Mountain Cry*, La Hong gives a hardly domestic violence to his first wife, causing her to tragically die. After that, he bought Hong Xia as his child-bride, and makes Hong Xia experience the domestic violence as the first wife.

La Hong's life was very unsatisfactory. He came to the village where the story took place as a "beggar" and also occupied the donkey shed of Han Chong. As an "outsider", he came into "the other" in the village. So he chooses to abuse Hong Xia to establish his subject position. However, because Hong Xia has left the protection of her native family, her "privilege" as a member of a scholarly family has also disappeared, so she has to be arranged by La Hong as an "abducted child bride" and become a victim of patriarchy.

### 2.2.2. Group Suppression

European Christianity carried out a 3-century “Witch Exclusion Movement” in the Middle Ages of Europe. Once women are identified as witches, it is difficult to leave the fate of being tortured and killed, and the most widely spread method is burning. In *Mountain Cry*, Xia opened the door when La Hong is dying; in this shot, the villagers held torches and looked at Xia in unison. It’s reflected that all the villagers treat Hong Xia as a witch; she totally became a heresy after his “husband” died. Just like the attitude towards “witches” in the Middle Ages in Europe, Xia has become a symbol of “superfluous” and “evil”. In addition, La's narration of Hong Xia’s “epilepsy” makes the space of Xia’s discourse right was further compressed which aggravated her voiceless.

In the film, because the conditions of the countryside in the 1980s were not advanced enough, their thoughts were also on the edge of civilized society. What they practiced was not legal standards, but generally acknowledged morality. In this mountain village, Han didn’t be asked to take legal responsibility for La’s death. He only needed to pay 20,000 yuan to La’s family in order to “buy” La’s life. This so-called generally acknowledged morality also prompted the villager’s group suppression against Xia. Women as “the other” are regarded by the villagers as vassals of men; when they recognized that the police bureau was about to come to the village to investigate the case related to La. They tried to remove La-related “items” including Xia from the village to erase the traces of La, rather than consent Han to voluntarily surrender himself because he is the male, the subject, the workforce. The villagers surrounded Xia and asked her to leave the village. This scene also echoed the scene where everyone stood in front of Xia with torches when La was dying. It confirms the villagers’ materialization and alienation of Xia.

### 2.2.3. Character Analysis of Voiceless Rural Women

Gayatri C. Spivak thoughts that the Third World countries women is the “subalterns”, Under the dual suppression of colonialism and patriarchy, women became a mute group[10]. Xia’s specific voiceless multiple meanings are both about “psychological and physiological” and “geography and gender”. Xia’s fate is heading for the deeper suffering due to the superposition of the voiceless.

After the secret of La’s first wife has died because his domestic violence was known by Xia, La is afraid of things being revealed, so he cuts off Xia’s tongue leading to her physical aphasia. After they came into the village, Han gave a bowl of pancakes to them, Xia just made a “hmm” sound to show gratitude, but La was really angry at this behavior, so he beat while scolding to Xia and warned her that “You ever speak again, I’ll kill you”. In this situation, although Xia could make some sounds to express some basic information, it’s still held down by violence. If things continue this way, she couldn’t have a voice at all.

In terms of psychological voicelessness, Xia was born in a scholarly family; from a young age will recite a variety of ancient poetry, and had nice handwriting. But when she was kidnapped and sold to the “beggar” - La Hong, in addition to domestic violence, she had to be displaced with this man, her knowledge would not be taken seriously in such a living environment. She not only lost that luster of well-educated, but also lost the ability to express herself.

In Rural criminal film such as *Cock and Bull* (2016, Cao Baoping), *Wrath of Silence* (2017, Xin Yukun), *The Looming Storm* (2017, Dong Yue) etc., the directors give a personality about “voiceless” to the main character, even they are the male and the subject contrast to female, but they still have a long distance to power. Michel Foucault thought that once a discourse is produced, it will be screened, controlled, and so on by the program, and the program divided into two parts, that is internal program and external program. According to Foucault, once discourse produced, it’ll be selected and controlled by the procedure which can be divided into internal one and external one.

The latter decides the “exclusion procedure” towards the discourse through prohibition, division, rejection and the identification between true and false [11].

In this film, Xia’s discourse right primarily controlled by external program. Her discourse right is first restricted by the psychological and physiological prohibition, she was losing the ability to discourse after cutting off the tongue. Her identity is divided into outsiders in the village and the “other” in society, so her words were also rejected. The villagers were making decisions for her in everything without considering her attitude, for an example, she expresses that she doesn’t ask for money twice, but the villagers still asked Han to compensate money, her life had just improved a little bit, but the villagers had tried to get her out of the village.

As a woman in the countryside, Xia is still in the position of “the others” while lacking in power, and her voice is even weaker. After Xia was cut off her tongue, La became the “spokesman” of Xia. When La Hong came to the mountain village where the story happened, he used “Epileptic, Bites when she’s crazed” to describe Xia. When Xia is alienated into a “madman”, her words begin to become unreliable in the villager’s heart. When establishing true and false, people are also more inclined to think that Hong Xia does not have the ability and right to decide their own affairs.

Gayatri C. Spivak has a discussion about “subalterns”, she thought that the subalterns have no discourse right, and the voice of the subalterns has to be transmitted through people who is not subalterns to be heard [10]. For an example, Xia’s resistance is powerless when the villagers tried to get her out. Han is a representative of a non-subalterns image in the film, who is important in the heart of the villagers and meets the expectations of the rural society for a strong, young, and healthy male workforce. Han turned to be a “spokesman” instead of La after they fall in love. He asked everyone about it: “But who here’s willing to listen to Hong Xia? Does she have a say in anything? Or are you all just gonna keep pushing her around?” it makes the villagers to stop the noise. And every expression that Xia had done before could only be ignored.

#### 2.2.4. Feminism Consciousness in *Mountain Cry*

“Whether it is the part to strive for, or the part to obtain, whether it is the satisfaction of self-body, or the contusion of self-need, women are struggling with self-liberation in the incomplete self-consciousness [12].” In this era, women’s thoughts became more open and pluralistic, the feminism achieved new development.

Based on the analysis, even that Xia’s life and discourse environment was bad, she never gave up pursuing for freedom. *Mountain Cry*’s Chinese name means to climb the mountain and yell, it’s shown that Xia’s firm and tenacious. In this film, Xia climbs the mountain and made a voice with iron pots and bars instead of using the vocal cords. Silent yell is the only right of the voiceless women in the expression, and Xia realizes the self-expression in the communication with the mountain.

Even though Xia just ended her fate of being domesticated, she still has hope for love, the relationship between Han and her that full of warmth and sincerity. Hong Xia was attacked twice by all villagers, but she still sticks to their love. She never minds that secularization about whom she loved is the “killer” of her “husband”. When Han’s father introduced him to someone else to marriage, she rushed to Han’s home to take out the agreement that Han had signed to take care of her after La died to show her position. This behaviour is the resistance to the inherent social concept of the countryside.

In the film, although Hong Xia has been in a state of voiceless, but she is not without trying to have discourse. She born in a scholarly family, the environment made she learned the handwriting, knowledge, new thought and so on. After La’s death, she was able to express her attitude by writing; when Han was about to be arrested, she made a confession to claim the course of the incident.

“Subalternity implies the condition of unspeakability; but it is underscored not by complete absence

of speech, rather the failure of speech [13].” Even her discourse is not heard due to the multiple restriction, but she shows the master of her own destiny at two important time frames by writing.

### 2.2.5. Female Discourse Right and Self-sacrifice

In film works and the reality, some female characters have no discourse right, when they want to fight for their own rights or to reconstruct their own voice, they have to face the self-sacrifice to proving their pain or innocence. Most of this situation is to establish by society rather than creative by women will. Either the film works and reality, the way of women protects the right for self is long and hard to walk.

In *The Looming Storm*(2017, Dong Yue), Yan Zi can’t bear her lover to use her as bait to find the murderer and put her in danger, so she jumped from the bridge and killed herself. In *Bus 44*(2001, Wu Shixian), the female bus driver was raped, and she chooses to take all the passenger to die. In *Blind Mountain* (2007, Li Yang), in order to escape the buyer, Bai Xuemei selling her body to the commissary owner just for get 40 yuan to leave the village. When rural women in film work face to unfair treatment and structural oppression, they have no way to express or liberate themselves, so the only way they can choose is to go the extremes of life or sacrifice their dignity to achieve self-salvation and self-expression.

At the end of *Mountain Cry*, Xia confesses his plan and method of killing La with a confession. She claimed that she suffocates La with her hands after villagers leave to make him die. But in the pilot before that, La was already dead when the villagers were present. Therefore, there is no only definitive answer to whether the content of the confession she wrote is true. In order to protect her love and break free from the bullying of the patriarchal society, she had to seek relief in another sense by confessing her guilt in this way.

In the case of Shiori Ito in Japan, she charged that she was sexually assaulted by her superior to the police bureau. She was repeatedly asked to retell her experience of being sexually assaulted, and even to conduct a case simulation [14]; “A woman is damned if she does and damned is she doesn’t..... whichever course the woman takes- to speak women’s language or not to- she will not be a respected [15].” When a woman has to prove that they were family abused by their husbands on the internet to ask for justice, the netizens ask them to tell the story in detail, take out photos and inspection reports to prove themselves. When a female talks once again about their pain, they will be hurt once more. But they must hurt themselves in this way to get the right to charge.

## 3. Conclusions

Through the research, the rural women in 1980s were not entirely subjected by patriarchal oppression, although their voices were very low, they still keep the germ of feminism in their hearts. The 1980s rural women in the village was lacking in knowledge and power, even in this year’s it’s still a really matter. The rural women showed the attitude and courage to make their voices, their efforts to promote the realization of self-expression. In the development of the generation, the status of women has been improved and not entirely in a state of voiceless. However, every step forward in women’s rights needs to be carried out under the spotlight of public opinion, which often requires women to make self-sacrifice.

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