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Food, Love and Sex

There’s an old Chinese saying: “Drink, eat, man, woman are the basic desires that a human being has.” Here “drink” and “eat” represent the desire for food while “man” and “woman” stand for the desire for sex (or we can interpret it as the love between man and woman). In Ang Lee’s film *Eat Drink Man Woman*, scenes of food preparation, family meals and anecdotes happened on main characters Mr.Chu as well as his daughters Jiajen, Jiakien and Jianing keep switching and show the extremely close and strong connection between food, love and sex. According to Leonard Klady’s, the author of *Review: Eat Drink Man Woman*, “ With so many characters to identify, an anxiety builds that the plot strands have no core” (Klady). Although there are so many characters needed to be identified in the film and shots move from one character to another quickly, a hidden clue does run through the whole film-----food, which can help us understand the film. The shots of “Mr.Chu prepares food” are shown most frequently on the screen. Contrary to Leonard Klady’s view of “ the ritual of preparing food is a means to avoid interaction”, I think the real purpose of preparing food elaborately for Mr.Chu is to let everyone gather together and provide opportunities to communicate with each other instead of maintaining isolation (Klady).

There are series of plots about “preparing food” in the movie that can reflect the interaction between characters. The first one is at the very beginning of the film. While Mr.Chu is preparing the food in the kitchen, the phone rings. It’s from a woman (Her name hasn’t been mentioned here in the film) and she tells Mr.Chu that she has fried the fish. Then, Mr.Chu replies that it’s much better to steam the fish so that the original taste of the fish will be kept there, and do not smear any salt on the fish. Although the phone call in that scene is all about how to prepare and cook the fish, it shows the communication between Mr.Chu and a mysterious lady. From this call, we can know that the relationship between them is close (At least they are friends.) so that they can talk about how to cook the fish. In addition, this scene also gives us implications about the latter part of the film as the story moves on to another scene when Shanshan, the little girl, runs into Mr.Chu’s house and says: “Mom overcooked the fish.” Then, we could know that who is the woman that gave the call, and the astonishing ending is that the woman becomes Mr.Chu’s wife. Therefore, preparing food is not only a kind of knowledge but also a method to increase the affection between lovers.

Preparing food also helps developing the friendship between Mr.Chu and his friend Chef Wen. People communicate more through cooking by talking and exchanging tips and novel cooking ideas. This increased communication eventually results in the love between friends. We could see from the film that Mr.Chu trusts Chef Wen very much: since Mr. Chu has lost his taste, after he completes cooking a dish in the big restaurant, he asks Chef Wen to taste the dish for him before serving to customers. (Actually, this is the metaphor that Director Lee used in the film, the lost of taste represents the lost of happiness of life.) Also, because of the longstanding friendship, Chef Wen might be the only person, who understands Mr.Chu as well as his second daughter Jiakien or even better than she does. This is analyzed by the chat when Mr. Chu visits Chef Wen in hospital. Mr. Chu talks about his recent life. He considers it as boring, and Chef Wen replies a word “Bie” in Chinese, which is a kind of animal, but always used to describe a person who wants to do something but because of some kind of situations that he cannot do what he really wants. This scene implies that Chef Wen is the first one that knows the relationship between Mr.Chu and his future wife Jinrong. No one else can play such an important role in Mr.Chu’s life so that’s why Mr.Chu is so distressed when Chef Wen passed away. Thus, preparing food together leads to the development of this unforgettable friendship between Mr.Chu and Chef Wen.

During the two-hour movie, besides cooking in the restaurants, the most time we see is Mr.Chu preparing meals for his family on Sunday nights. There are only four members in this family (initially), but Mr.Chu always cook a large meal (maybe no less than ten dishes) for each dinner. The purpose of doing that is his wish of sitting down and chatting with his daughters at the table. Considering Jiakien as an example, as Leonard Klady mentions in his review, there’s a conflict between Mr.Chu and his second daughter Jiakien. However, this confrontation actually shows his deep love towards Jiakien. Mr.Chu loves his daughter so much that he doesn’t want his daughter to choose the same career as he does (Maybe he thinks this job is tiring.) and push her into executive business area instead, even though cooking is what Jiakien actually prefers. Furthermore, there are some other short scenes that may easy to be ignored could show the father’s great love. The first one is two daughters are exchanging their underwear. This reflects Mr.Chu has already been in old age, but he still takes care of every daily trivial matter of his daughters, such as folding the clothes and putting them into the closet. Next scene is Mr.Chu wakes her daughter up after preparing the breakfast for them in the morning. The third one is Mr.Chu helps Jianing pick up a meatball from the soup and puts it into her bowl. All these scenes could prove that how important the girls are in Mr.Chu’s heart. Since Mr.Chu loves his daughter so much, preparing food aboratively for hours is for his daughters enjoying the meal and having better communication with each family member. Hence, “the father’s modus operandi for years” is providing more chances to interacting with his family rather than trying to be isolated (Klady).

We could find that there are some other scenes showing the interactions of two characters while they are consuming food, such as the scene when Jianing is eating tofu with her boyfriend and the scene when Jiakien cooks many delicious dishes in Raymond’s home. These shots all foreshadow the development and the outcomes of the relationships between those characters. In addition, Ang Lee shoots a lot of close shots about the process of cooking food, which makes us exclamatory and mouthwatering. Opposite to Klady’s view “neither food nor love is finally enough”, I find that food is enough and so is the love (Klady). Love is not only between lovers, but also between friends and family as well. Because food is fully involved and love is completely expressed throughout this film, *Eat Drink Man Woman* is ranked the first of Ang Lee’s family series films.

Work Cited

Klady, Leonard."Reivew:'Eat Drink Man Woman.’"Review. 1994. *Variety Media*.Variety Media, LLC, a subsidiary of Penske Business Media, LLC. Variety and the Flying V logos are trademarks of Variety Media,LLC,16 May 1994. Web. 2 Oct. 2014. <http://variety.com/1994/film/reviews/eat-drink-man-woman-2-1200437180/>.