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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 that happened on main characters keep switching and show the close and strong connection between food, love and sex to audience. Although Leonard Klady’s, the author of *Review: Eat Drink Man Woman*, writes: “With so many characters to identify, an anxiety builds that the plot strands have no core” (Klady), in my point of view, “food” works as a hidden clue runs through the whole film and helps us have better understanding of the film. The shots of Mr.Chu preparing food are frequently shown 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 plot points about food preparation 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. The call is 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 to steam the fish is much better because 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 know that Shanshan’s mom is the woman who 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 way to increase the affection between lovers.

Preparing food also helps develop the friendship between Mr.Chu and his friend Chef Wen. People communicate more through cooking by talking and exchanging tips or 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 it to customers. (Actually, this is the metaphor that Director Lee used in the film, the loss 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 deeply as his second daughter Jiakien or even better than she does. This is analyzed by the chat when Mr. Chu visits Chef Wen in the hospital. Mr. Chu talks about his recent life. He considers it as boring, and Chef Wen replies with a word “Bie” in Chinese, which is a kind of animal, but usually 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 who 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 cooks a large meal (maybe no less than ten dishes) for each dinner. This action is mainly due to the love to his children as a single parent. 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 (Because 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 easily to be ignored, which could show the father’s great love. The first one is when two daughters are exchanging their underwear. This reflects that Mr.Chu even in his old age, he still takes care of every daily trivial matter of his daughters, such as folding the clothes and putting them into the closet. Mr.Chu also wakes his daughters 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 show how important the girls are in Mr.Chu’s heart. Since Mr.Chu loves his daughter so much, preparing delicious dinner to Mr.Chu is not merely a responsibility but also a strong wish of letting his daughters enjoy the food and having better communication with them during the meals. Hence, “the father’s modus operandi for years” is providing more chances to interact with his family rather than trying to be isolated (Klady).

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. The actors’ lines in these shots foreshadow the development and the outcomes of the relationships between them. (We could find if we explore deeply since Ang Lee used some metaphors. Furthermore, what the actor says could reflect what kind of person he or she is.) In addition, Ang Lee shoots a lot of close shots about the process of cooking food, which makes us exclamatory and mouthwatering. The reasons why Ang Lee distributed a large amount of time on food are for keeping the story developing and grabbing audience’s attention. 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/>.