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Mother’s Influence on Daughters’ Thoughts

In the movie *Eat Drink Man Woman* directed by Ang Lee, the three daughters, although having many differences from each other, all have one thing in common: each of them has an unusual love relationship with another person. Jia-Jen’s flash marriage, Jia-Chien’s putting foot in other’s marriage and Jia-Ning’s early marriage with pregnancy. All of the events happen in a short time in the movie and shocks the audience again and again. Why does Ang Lee set these complicated relationships in the movie? The reasons of all the incidents are related to the mother. As against Leonard Klady’s claim in his review that “with so many characters to identify, an anxiety builds that the plot strands have no core,” the core of the movie indeed exists, and it is the mother’s influence to the family. Although dies very early, the mother still affects her three daughters’ view of love and destinies.

Since mother died, the eldest daughter, Jia-Jen has gradually played the role of “mother” in the family and has been very responsible to her father. In the movie, after Jia-Chien said she would move out, Jia-Jen says that she feels not balanced in her heart because she will afford more responsibility to the father if Jia-Chien moves out. In another scene, Jia-Jen and Jia-Chien has a quarrel with each other. Jia-Jen says she knows nothing about Jia-Chien’s heart because she thinks Jia-Chien does not like her and does not regard her as a good sister to share inner thoughts. Jia-Chien then says Jia-Jen is wrong and is always acting like her “mother” and never willing to know her. Through these two scenes, we see how mother’s death affects Jia-Jen to be a very responsible and depressed person. She pushes herself to be the “mother” of two little sisters, takes care of the old father, never looks for a new boyfriend since a sad break-up, and feels unhappy and tortured to afford such a big obligation in the family. Because Jia-Jen has restrained herself for so long, when she gets hurt by her naughty students, she feels so disappointed and cannot restrain herself anymore. Finally, she kisses the coach and gets married to him.

Jia-Chien is also affected by her mother. In the beginning of the movie, Jia-Chien has sex with a man who used to be her boyfriend and gets married now. From the conversation after their sex, we know that they fight with each other when they dated, and they enjoy their current relationship because it is more relaxed for them. In another scene, when the three daughters wash the dishes and clean up table for the very first dinner shown in the movie, Jia-Chien wrangles with Jia-Jen because she insists on her disagreement of her parents’ marriage. She says the parents often disputed with each other and the early death of the mother is an early end of the war. Through Jia-Chien’s words, we could conclude that she does not believe marriage means happiness and prefers more relaxed relationships with others. This could explain why Jia-Chien appears to be an amorous woman who has love affairs with two men in the movie.

Jia-Ning’s life is, without exception, related to her mother as well. In the movie, Jia-Ning is portrayed as a relatively innocent person comparing to her two sisters. She misunderstands her friend’s thought about the boy and falls in love with the boy. Finally, she gets pregnant and has to get married and move out at a very young age. During the last dinner which Mr.Chu wants to announce his intention of getting married to Jin-Rong, when everyone starts eating, Shan-Shan criticizes the fish is too big and then Mrs. Liang censures Shan-Shan would not be able to get married if her demand is too high. Although Mrs. Liang is Shan-Shan’s grandmother but not mother and it is a little advice from her, she still affects Shan-Shan’s view of marriage in some degree. If Jia-Ning’s mother does not die so early, she would probably teach Jia-Ning how to deal with the sexual relations with others and let Jia-Ning avoids getting married because of an accidental pregnancy. Anyway, if Jia-Ning could have her mother being with her when she is growing up, she would be wiser in the field of love.

Though the character of mother never appears in the movie, her influence to the whole family is significant. The mother, like the father, represents responsibility and obligation of the family. Because the mother dies very early, she lost the chance of sharing responsibility and raising children. However, she still lives in her daughters’ lives because we see how she affects her daughters’ minds of love. Accordingly, the core which connects the three daughters to each other in the movie is the mother and her influence to them, and this proves Klady’s opinion that “the plot strands have no core” is in fact inaccurate.

Works Cited

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