

國立交通大學

外國語文學系外國文學與語言學碩士班

碩士論文

愛上,悲劇:

論李安電影《臥虎藏龍》,《色戒》以及《斷背山》中的倫理抉擇

In Love, with Tragedy:

On the Ethical Choice in Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*,
Lust, Caution, and *Brokeback Mountain*

研究生: 陳慧文

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摘要

本文主要探討在李安的三部電影《臥虎藏龍》,《色戒》以及《斷背山》中關於希臘悲劇,倫理抉擇和愛情的觀點。從《推手》開始,李安在商業和藝術當中取得巧妙的平衡。所謂的商業就是通俗電影類型中的「衝突」元素。從《推手》到《斷背山》,李安沒有一部作品不是恪遵「衝突→解決→」的公式。不僅如此,李安在好萊塢的成功更證明了李安擅長的通俗劇衝突元素不限於古今中外,而是人性必然要面對的重要課題。李安一次又一次地闡釋:每個人的一生中面對最慘烈的鬥爭,不在於外在世界的刀光劍影,而是當個體的慾望受到社群價值的壓抑時,內心的掙扎難捨以及慾望的移轉流動。經由衝突產生的掙扎,緊繃,和倫理抉擇強迫人們重新思考人類最基本的需求。就這個觀點而言,也只有悲劇才能完整呈現這樣的人生自我衝突和抵觸。

本文一開始會分析現代觀點對於希臘悲劇中的悲劇精神統一的看法。根據悲劇精神的本質,李安細膩描述了悲劇人物如何在傳統封閉的環境下掙扎求生。透過巴斯特勒對於命運的觀點,尼采在《悲劇的誕生》中提到的太陽神和酒神的精神,以及亞里斯多德"行動"的論點,李安這三部電影中的人物在面對大環境的群體意識壓迫時,是毫無生存的空間。李慕白游盪在江湖道義和自我欲望間;王佳芝不斷拉扯在國家賦予的重任和一個不該愛上的漢奸之間;恩尼斯和傑克這兩個同性戀者一生遭受異性戀主導社會的壓迫。每一個人物角色都在這痛苦的過程做出痛苦的決定,但這決定最終都一一帶領他們走向死亡的懷抱。最後,我們才默然發現原來驅使他們做這項決定和行動的力量,是愛情。

關鍵字: 李安, 悲劇, 倫理抉擇, 命運, 必然性, 愛情

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ABSTRACT

My thesis attempts to study the issue encompassing Greek tragedy, ethical choice, and love in Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Lust, Caution* and *Brokeback Mountain*. Beginning with *Pushing Hands*, Ang Lee's films ingeniously reach a balance between mainstream cinema and art house cinema. His mainstream strain deals with the element of "conflicts." From *Pushing Hands* to *Brokeback Mountain*, every of these films abide by the formula of conflicts and solutions. More than that, Ang Lee's success in Hollywood even proves that the conflicting issue he demonstrates is not confined to time and space. He deals with fundamental issue that humankind will confront in life. The struggle, tension, and ethical choice brought about by conflicts compel people to rethink the most basic need of humankind. In light of this, such a tension can only be revealed in its extreme form as tragedy.

My thesis begins with the analysis of tragicalness in Greek tragedy, and looks for the common ground between the concept of tragedy and modernity. Applying the essential traits of tragedy to these three films, Ang Lee portrays tragic characters striving under the controversial and fixed environment. Using Gabriela Basterra's perspective of fate, Apollonian and Dionysiac forces in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, and Aristotle's concept of actions, Ang Lee's characters in these three films have no place to survive while individual desire must confront collectivity. Li Mu Bai vacillates between the code in *jianghu* and his personal anxiety; Wang Chia Chih is torn between her duty and a collaborator with whom she cannot but fall in love; Ennis Del Mar and Jack Twist, who are gay lovers, are repressed by their heterosexual society. All of them make a choice which only leads them to death while being involved in a dilemma. In the end, it is clear that the motivation behind their behaviors is love.

Keywords: Ang Lee, Tragedy, Ethical Choice, Fate, Necessity, Love

Acknowledgment

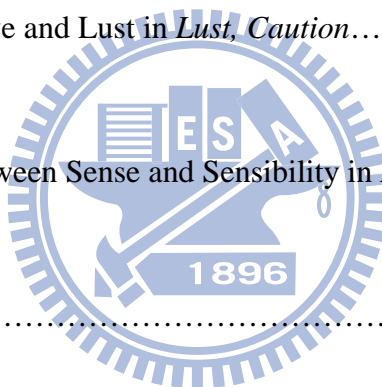
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Contents

Chinese Abstract	i
English Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgment.....	iii
Contents.....	iv
Chapter 1	
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2	
Love, Destiny and Ethical Choice in <i>Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon</i>	15
Chapter 3	
The Repression of Love and Lust in <i>Lust, Caution</i>	30
Chapter 4	
The Entanglement between Sense and Sensibility in <i>Brokeback Mountain</i>	47
Chapter 5	
Conclusion.....	64
Work Cited.....	71



Chapter 1

Introduction

Ang Lee's latest film *Taking Woodstock*, which illustrates a music festival held by a young man, Elliot was released in 2009. According to Ang Lee's typical tone color, it is not hard to explicate the obscure, delicate and innermost message beneath its appearance as a comedy. Like in the case of *Hulk*, Ang Lee, being himself within an American hero movie, depicts the actor's internal conflicts with his father and the whole society, carrying the elements of exquisite emotions in fighting scenes. In *Taking Woodstock*, the hippie music festival only serves the background; instead, Elliot's undergoing and inner change is the heart of this film. As an obedient son, Elliot, out of his parents' expectations, is demanded to quit his job, and comes home to run their dilapidated Catskills motel, The El Monaco. The original intention of holding the music festival, for Elliot, is merely for the sake of re-flourishing the business of the hotel; however, to everyone's surprise, it also attracts novelty on all sides. Such an impact not only strikes Elliot's family but also enriches vitality of the small town. Agitated by freedom, peace and love, a force named change sweeps Elliot up and put his family into a revolution. Sometimes, taking familial responsibility could deprive one's longing for taking off. Thus, it takes courage to leave the fixed frame set up for one's life. In the end, Elliot's cutting off his parents' expectations doesn't symbolize he is going to leave all behind, but rather to make his life roll forward to a better future.

Once again, Ang Lee portrays the issue of the conflict between a rigid dogma and an individual yearning. As a matter of fact, such a pattern has been prevailed in

Ang Lee's early works.¹ Ang Lee's earliest movies as known as the Father Trilogy surround the main figure, a father, who "represents the Chinese patriarchy, the social and psychological structure of society" (Berry 329). However, a configuration of a traditional father keeps being challenged within these films. In *Pushing Hands*, a Mainland Chinese father has to compromise with his American daughter-in-law and a culture he is not familiar with. By the end of the movie, Mr. Chu and Mrs. Chang seem to have found a way to live in America without forsaking their Chinese traditions, but at the same time they are also forced to abandon some insistence on traditions. *The Wedding Banquet* brings forth the critical issue of homosexual threat against national identity.² General Gao knows about his son's homosexual orientation, and fake marriage, but he remains silent for the sake of having a grandchild. As one representative of both family and society, a father yields to the reality and his yearnings again. *Eat Drink Man Woman*, the last episode of the Father Trilogy, overthrows not only the traditional ritual of the feast but also suggests "a complete dissolution of the family in favor of personal contentment" (Yeh and Davis 204). In the first two films we only witness a separation between father and son, parent and child. But in the end of *EDMW*, it is the father who is "regenerated" and "resexualized," leaving home and remarrying a young woman.

In Ang Lee's following movies, the father image remains and is expanded to a concept. *Sense and Sensibility* describes "a world of mothers and sisters, a world

¹ Wei Ming Dariotis and Eileen Fung hold the similar aspect by saying that "Lee's work illustrates the inevitable conflicts and negotiations between individuals bound by familial and societal obligations" (187).

² In Wei Ming Dariotis and Eileen Fung's "Breaking the Soy Sauce Jar: Diaspora and Displacement in the Films of Ang Lee," they propose not only the issue of homosexual threat but also cross-cultural gender ideology and an immigrant woman caught between transgenerational and transsexual identity.

virtually without fathers...yet a world where all important decisions emanate from invisible men” (Lyons 36). Elinor as a rational realist loves a man already engaged and must suppress her emotions in the tight little social world where women are deprived of voices. Marianne, on the contrary, seeks love regardless of consequences. In the end, she is injured badly, and eventually learns to abide by social codes and accepts Brandon. *The Hulk* and *Ride with the Devil* also examine the relationship between father and son, and the struggle between collectivity and individual. *The Ice Storm*, however, witnesses complete the malfunctions of the social system and father figure. There are considerable uses of glass and mirrors to reflect the other side of each character, and also the indifference and illusion of the family.

The next three movies of Ang Lee, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and *Lust, Caution*, compared with other earlier works, share one common ground: they all happen to be tragedies. The reason why I choose them instead of others is because they hold more elements of a tragedy for me and can better elaborate the tragicalness in these three films. Therefore the first question to ask is how tragedy occurs, and what kind of tragic elements exist in Ang Lee’s movies. When it comes to tragedy, it is unavoidable to mention Greek tragedy,³ which always deals with conflicts, crises, struggles, resolutions and changes of fortune. “Tragedy is the conflict between the typical and the individual, the former being good, the latter evil. Tragedy consists, according to Hebbel, of the representation of this conflict” (Kallen 183). Therefore, the tragicalness⁴ in Greek tragedy mainly illustrates characters who fight

³ There are diverse and various paths to discuss Greek tragedy, such as traditional classics and modern classics. However, this paper will only focus on the common grounds which most scholars agree upon. Please see Simon Goldhill, “Modern critical approaches to Greek tragedy” (324).

⁴ Tragicalness refers to the spirit, the essence of Greek tragedy where customs, ethical

against established values or their inevitable fate.⁵ For instance, *Oedipus*, by some scholars, is regarded as a tragedy of destiny, who struggles against his doomed fate on the path of seeking the truth. “What the play proves is that man has no free will but is a puppet in the hands of the gods who pull the strings that make him dance” (Dodds 177). No matter how hard he tries to avoid Apollo’s prophecy, it turns out that what he has chosen to do means to fulfill it. Jean-Pierre Vernant proposes that Greek tragedy, instead of establishing communication and agreement between the characters, sets the barriers which separate the protagonists who trace the lines of conflicts. “Tragic irony may consist in showing how, in the course of action, the hero finds himself literally taken at his word, a word which turns itself against him in bringing him the bitter experience of the meaning which he insisted on not recognizing” (Vernant 190).

While Oedipus suffers from the conflict between unavoidable fate and individual free will, the conflict in *Antigone* takes place between Creon and Antigone.⁶ The death of Antigone is led by her devotion to her loved ones and her challenge to Creon, representing of supreme authority. Creon, who appears as a strict legal ruler and is loyal to his city, decrees a law which oppresses Antigone’s will, that is, her love for

actions, conflicts, collectivity and individuality are all interwoven together.

⁵ The great philosopher Aristotle makes the distinction between comedy and tragedy. Aristotle defines tragedy as a tragic character falling from a high place in society due to a flaw they possess and provides an insight into human existence. In these three movies, all tragic figures happen to be the “falling characters” and to fall in love. Therefore this distinguishing feature in tragedy in this paper is limited to discussing how these tragic figures are seduced by the taboo to love.

⁶ When reading both *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone* by Sophocles, it is impossible not to compare and contrast the leading characters, Oedipus and Antigone. However, I will only address their similarities to elaborate the characteristics of tragic subjects in these three movies, such as insistence, individuality against collectivity, and the loss of loved ones.

her family. Both of them choose different actions that create the conflict, and there is no reconciliation between them. In other words, Antigone puts the values that she espouses absolutely and is unwilling to compromise while Creon turns down every suggestion and listens to no one. Conflicts exist not only between Antigone and Creon but also between Haemon's love for his father and his love for Antigone. Only when he realizes that Creon will not listen to reason does he choose to be with Antigone. Here the tragicness emerges not from characters themselves but from their actions. "Consequently, tragic subjects commit themselves to a conflict whose resolution always escapes them, since at a particular moment of each drama the weight of necessity disrupts the previous state of equilibrium, foreclosing any possibility of responsible initiative, or what is called human freedom" (Basterra 19).

Both *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone* demonstrate that fate and free will manipulate the tension in tragedies. The union of these two elements is well displayed in *Hippolytus*. The beginning of *Hippolytus* presents a powerful external force which not only predicts but also determines the tragic plot. Aphrodite announces what will happen and explains her motives. Like *Oedipus the King*, audiences may perceive that the characters' behavior, such as their actions and choices, only serve to fulfill Aphrodite's purpose. However, unavoidable fate is not the sole element which constructs the core of tragedies. Generally speaking, fragility of human beings, responsibilities, freedom, conflicts, physical or mental miseries, arrogance, and pride are the necessary objects which tragedies deal with. Thus, the way how tragic figures confront predicaments is also worth noticing. Hippolytus himself is not the only tragic figure in the whole play. Bernard Knox advocates that Hippolytus, Theseus, Phaedra, and the nurse embody four different views of life, purposes, actions, and suffering. None of these characters, however, is capable of resisting the unpredictable power of sexual love. Each of them oscillates between different alternatives, but at the same

time they are affected by people around them, especially Phaedra. “Human action appears radically ambivalent. On the one hand, action entails reflecting on motivations and aims; on the other, it involves precipitating oneself into inscrutable territory at the risk of one’s life...The tragic action is one that recoils against the agent, with results contrary to those intended” (Basterra 24-25). In terms of characters in *Hippolytus*, their actions, instead of fulfilling conscious purpose, brings about the opposite of that purpose, and reveals the futility of human choices which are doomed to be fatal.

The concept of necessity or fate which occupies a vital role in Greek tragedy has changed slightly in modern tragedy. Gabriela Basterra suggests the term of “tragic modern subjectivity” to replace “tragic figures” in modern tragedy. Basterra elaborates that the self is alienated by a mystifying “other,” which is perceived as a powerful, constraining force that deprives the self of its autonomy. The other represents the power of the father, the law, the state, the social value, all of which radically bind the individual identity of the modern subject. “Very importantly, the modern subject is as divided as the tragic self, since it internalizes external coercion as a critical agency that returns against the material and sensitive part of the self...the subject suffers from the ambivalence of being simultaneously subordinated to social power and constituted by it as an agent” (Basterra 68-69). Therefore the modern tragic subject still follows a tragic pattern inherited from Greek tragedy and it is no less constrained than tragic figures in Greek tragedy. Ang Lee’s three movies, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and *Lust, Caution*, are conducted into the orbit around this tragic pattern in which tragic subjects suffer from the other.

In characters’ actions and sufferings, it always involves ethical choices, such as *Oedipus the King*, *Medea* and *Hippolytus*. Oscillating between alternatives is such a commonplace in Greek tragedies that it enacts as a causal connection with tragic

figures' suffering and seriousness in drama. "Seriousness in drama depends upon an insight into the relationship between individual human powers and responsibilities, on the one hand, and impersonal powers, in the other" (Philipson 199). Tragedy essentially deals with the crisis occurring in life, therefore the choices the tragic subjects make and the attitude they hold become significant. In these three plays, each character confronts with different ethical choices.⁷ In *Oedipus the King*, Bernard Knox illustrates Oedipus' choice based on the notion of individual free will. "Oedipus did have one freedom: he was free to find out or not to find out the truth...it is the key to the play's tragic theme and the protagonist's heroic stature. One freedom is allowed him: the freedom to search for the truth, the truth about the prophecies, about the gods, about himself" (Knox 159). Although it seems that Oedipus is only fulfilling the oracles of Apollo, it is Oedipus who determines and makes decisions. In spite of the importance of the prophecy, it is Oedipus who acts and makes the choice.

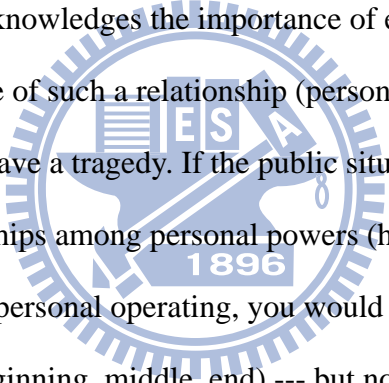
In *Medea*, Medea also encounters a dilemma and struggles whether to kill her children or not. She herself is the only one person who can interfere with her plan. In her monologue, Medea changes her mind again by temporarily renouncing her plan and then again to firmly execute her intention to kill the children. She is once torn between her maternal love and hatred before she eventually decides to complete her vengeance.

In *Hippolytus*, Phaedra's dilemma is discussed a lot among critics.⁸ In this

⁷ The ethical choice is a broad concept which can be discussed in many fields. In this paper the ethical choice is limited to and only considered as the one involved the tragedy. In other words, this paper will demonstrate how characters make ethical choices only in the setting of tragedy.

⁸ As we all know, there are three versions of Phaedra: Phaedra in Euripides's play, Senecan Phaedra, and Racinian Phaedra. Phaedra in Euripides's *Hippolytus* is torn between moral codes and sexual desire. Senecan Phaedra is completely manipulated

tragedy, Phaedra, wife of King Theseus and mother-in-law of Hippolytus, is excruciatingly divided between desire and honor, her illicit love for Hippolytus and her position as a queen. “Phaedra’s subjectivity is rent between desire and conscience... Phaedra is thus torn between two imperatives, the overwhelming desire she inherits from her mother and the restriction of conscience embodied by her grandfather. Hers is a dilemma between two impossible alternatives that characterize tragic choice” (Basterra 42). Phaedra once had a chance to remain silent about her love toward Hippolytus; however, she yields to her own free will and chooses the destruction which perishes Hippolytus, Theseus, and herself. Therefore it is obvious that ethical choices which lead characters to the tragic end have become a core in tragedies. Philipson also acknowledges the importance of ethical choices:


 Without a sense of such a relationship (personal-impersonal), it would be impossible to have a tragedy. If the public situation were constituted only of the relationships among personal powers (human beings), with no sense of the impersonal operating, you would have a story, you might have a plot (beginning, middle, end) --- but not a tragedy. (199)

This imperative conflict simultaneously corresponds to Myers’ concept of ethics in tragedies. Myers proposes that inevitability or orderliness of values which represents necessity has always been required in tragedies. Tragedy is a “constant” and “dramatic” conflict between the law of values and individual freedom (Myers 341). If it is possible for the man to take his own course without any restraint, values cannot be justified, and tragedies no longer exist. Consequently, human beings have to be responsible for choices they make. Most of the time, the path which tragic figures choose usually bring them sufferings and lead them to death.

by desire. Racinian Phaedra is buried into the abyss of self guilt and irresistible lust. Here I only focus on the common point among three different versions of Phaedra.

“A play is not the same as daily life. But as a representation, it is like life” (Philipson 200). Although we may confront ethical decisions from time to time, this ethical choice is different from that in our ordinary lives and only confined to Greek tragedy because ordinary people usually succumb to the reality when they encounter such a tragic situation full of moral conflicts. R.W. Corrigan believes that man demands freedom, but the will to submit. Only the tragic hero refuses to make such a compromise. Concession and endurance are ordinary choices for ordinary people. Nevertheless, in terms of tragic figures in Greek tragedy, assertive insistence usually leads them to fight against destiny, like Oedipus and Agamemnon, or against the external force, like Antigone and Medea. Peter Burian also indicates that “the first and most obvious quality of tragic conflict is its extremity: it does not ordinarily admit of compromise or mediation” (181). Therefore reconciliation does not occur in tragedy and this is how conflicts are generated.

Moreover, the most explicit characteristic in Greek tragedy is that there must be a series of incidents, which usually result in many sufferings, and that cause characters to struggle between two choices, but at the same time it leads them convincingly to the tragic decision. Philipson takes Oedipus as an example to demonstrate how a series of actions are unified to form a tragic plot:

What constitutes the ordering of actions into an activity? What makes the unity of a plot?...On the contrary, it is because its several incidents are so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole. It is not because of what is happening to the man Oedipus that Sophocles' great play is the re-presentation of an action; the unity of the drama consists in the connection of the several incidents. Well, what is it? They are connected by the *impersonal activity* of trying to lift the curse on Thebes. This requires discovering the

murderer of Laius, and punishing him. It is this *purpose* which brings together all of the discrete actions--probable or necessary, and results in both peripety and discovery. The plot is dominant and the characters participate in the activity insofar as they contribute to the working out of the purposive situation. In itself, this is an impersonal problem. It is a public situation brought to a public solution, having devastating consequences for the private lives of some who are involved. (198-199)

At the beginning of the film, the value of *jiang hu* is ostensibly rooted in Li Mu Bai's mind. For instance, he has not revenged himself on Jade Fox due to her murder of his master and feels his duty unfulfilled. Hence, his desire is torn between retiring from *jiang hu* and settling down with Yu Shui Lien, between performing his obligation and living his own life. To some extent, he is confused and lost. While the sequential incidents, such as the sword of Green Destiny being stolen, Jen showing up, fighting, teaching and pursuing Jen, occur, the process creates more and more chaos and then drags Li Mu Bai into the fallen abyss. In *Lust, Caution*, Wang Chia Chi falls head over heel in the capricious situation, and eventually falls in love with Mr. Yee from the patriotic stage play, performing in the role of Mrs. Mai, three sex scenes and to the scene in the bistro. At the beginning, none of them, including Wang Chia Chih, expected that she would fall in love with Mr. Yee. After all, it is not love at the first sight, and it is reverse to their plan. During the process of seduction, only Wang Chia Chih conceives her mental transformation along with subsequent incidents: She has become more and more indulgent to her performance, the character of Mrs. Mai, and Mr. Yee. The pattern of several closely connected incidents forming a unity to interpret the tragic conflict is also demonstrated in *Brokeback Mountain* although it is slightly different. The primal and determinant plot which is the scene Ennis and Jack spend time in the mountain takes place not long after the film starts. The subsequent

incidents merely intensify the importance of that critical scene and logicalize why Ennis and Jack cannot help it.

Ultimately we may discover that what causes all the sufferings: it takes place under only one situation in which this tragic decision is made—love. According to Evans, Lacan locates love as a purely imaginary phenomenon, and love implicates an imaginary reciprocity. “It is this reciprocity between loving and being loved that constitutes the illusion of love, and this is what distinguishes it from the order of the drives, in which there is no reciprocity, only pure activity” (Evans 103). Although love may not appear in the first place in Greek tragedy, it frequently becomes the motivation of tragic figures’ behavior. For example, Phaedra eventually yields to passion and chooses to confess her love to Hippolytus. Her purpose aims at alleviating agony caused by love, and perhaps receiving a positive response from Hippolytus. All in all, Phaedra’s act claims for herself that love has motivated her.

I believe that these characteristics construct not only Greek tragedy but also Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and *Lust, Caution*.⁹ Although they are three different movies whose stories occurring in different eras, locations, and backgrounds, what is mentioned above seems to be a pattern common to them. Thus, in the following chapters I will elaborate how fate, ethical choices and love intertwine with each other in the light of the concept of Greek tragedy. In chapter

⁹ Conflicts in Greek tragedy generates mainly from struggling against authority figures. Authority comes in many forms, and goes by many names. In every human society, authority is incarnated in structures of political, religious, familial, and moral authority to comprise a coherent system. Many of the causes of confrontation in Greek tragedy arise from violating these authority figures. Please refer to Mark Griffin’s essay “Authority Figures” in *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*. In this chapter, I will eliminate other issues of authority figures, and merely focus on the individual ethical choices made against the social expectation from collectivity.

two, I will firstly provide the definition of *jiang hu* which is the major and the invisible principle dominating people living in it. I will focus particularly on the main tragic character, Li Mu Bai, to illustrate the dilemma which he encounters. On the one hand, he cannot get rid of the responsibility assigned by *jiang hu* and it is his destiny to fulfill it. On the other hand, he cannot help but pursue the possibility of filling up his emotional emptiness. In other words, Li Mu Bai does not only fight against his fate but also against his personal desire. Nietzsche proposes in *The Birth of Tragedy* the idea of Apollo and Dionysus to explain a falling character's tragic flaw, which also appears in Li Mu Bai. To some extent, such a tragic feature can be responsible for his self-inflicted demise partly. Reviewing Li Mu Bai's process of "falling down," we may soon find out that the motivation behind his deeds comes from love, his desire of settling down with Yu Shu Lien. In the end, like all other tragic figures in Greek tragedy, Li Mu Bai's tragic flaw inevitably leads him to death.

In chapter three, I will move on to *Lust, Caution* and discuss how a woman in disguise accidentally falls in love with a cruel collaborator. Wang Chia Chi, situated in the era of political havoc, sacrifices her virginity, innocence, and identity for the patriotic cause. The movie is adapted from Eiling Chang's short story about a group of college students attempting to assassinate a collaborator; however it goes beyond a simple spy movie. This paper will examine how Wang Chia Chi, as a disguised actor, confronts one emotional strike after another, arouses her innermost desire, and even throws herself into the embrace of death. The tragicity of this film also lies in Wang Chia Chi's tragic flaw, her insistence and her choice out of tabooed love. Wang seems to be a naïve girl who only desires to be loved and cared for. This is the key to her personality which results in her infinite desire and infinite lack for love. Furthermore, insistence, or consistency noted by Aristotle, must be sustained throughout the whole play to construct a tragedy. As a female, her insistence has been

different from men's. Here I will address Copjec's point of view to illustrate why and how female insistence is distinguished from male. Next, it is important to explore the construction of Wang's insistence. Therefore the three sex scenes play a necessary role in serving as the accidental causality which not only alternates every character's fate but also explains Wang's choice.

In chapter four, two lonesome cowboys, Ennis Del Mar and Jack Twist, are bound by a strict and unchangeable obligations but still strive for a bittersweet love. Similar to other two films, necessity, or social obligation, brings about the tragic characters' suffering and even death. In this film, the homophobic society in Wyoming in 1960s is the unavoidable fate which constructs a fixed frame for people playing their proper roles. It seems natural to get married, raise children, work hard and take care of the family in a heterosexual society. Whoever violates the collective system must suffer the consequence. Nevertheless, all the routine obligations function as Ennis and Jack's only connection to the collectivity, but at the same time suffocate their own feelings. Due to the force rooted from Apollo and Dionysus, they cannot help but linger between maintaining their duties and personal craving for love. Within a limited situation, they only get two choices: to quit or not to quit. Like the role of accidental causality in the case of Wang Chia Chih, there is a powerful force which explains how characters remain in their insistence and make their choices. Ang Lee portrays such a power with his filmic language.¹⁰ With the help of visual effects, the subjects' struggles, grief, pain, terror, insistence, and tragic love are vividly presented.

In my conclusion, I will try to make a brief summary of these three films. First of all, I want to reinstate the tragicalness and its relation to the issue of ethical choices

¹⁰ Greek tragedy uses soliloquies and chorus to convey characters' inner suffering. In films, directors use different angle of shots, music and lighting to present or contrast tragic figures' state of mind.

and love. Drawing from the essence of Greek tragedy, Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Lust, Caution* and *Brokeback Mountain* ground the plot and characters on ordinary people, just like us, about the individual fragility while confronting collectivity.



Chapter 2

Love, Destiny and Ethical Choice in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

Although *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is labeled in the West as a “kung-fu knockout” and martial-art film, in Asia it turns out that audiences who expect an action movie actually get a drama (Elley 85). “For many Hong Kong viewers, *wu xia* films mean characters in period costumes, a huge amount of fast-paced action, vigorous fights and sensational plots” (Lee 285). Compared to typical martial-art films which are popular for the speedy rhythm and constant fighting scenes, Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, based on Wang Du-lu’s novel, appears in a slow pace profound in meaning. Moreover, it is unlike a typical martial-art film also because there is no absolute evil to be conquered. Ken-fang Lee further demonstrates that “Wang’s style is rather different from others’ exactly because he focuses more on the inner worlds of his characters and elaborates on the romantic plots in greater detail. He does not dwell so much on the fight scenes. Wang’s wife once said that he was very much influenced by Freud’s psychology and Greek tragedy. Individual conflicts, instead of the traditional concept of administering justice in *wuxia pian*, run through the film and constitute the main tragicness in the film. Unlike other *wuxia pian*, the main male character, Li Mu Bai, does not embody a defensive or strong-willed spirit as a hero. On the contrary, Li Mu Bai, like Oedipus, is a tragic figure whose intended ethical actions always hang in suspense and eventually do not achieve their ends.

The ethical problem in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is mainly to fight or not to fight, and Li Mu Bai is the most typical representation of struggling between these two choices. The plot of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is loosely focused on the “sublimated romance” between Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien (Eperjesi 31). Hence, at the beginning of the film, Li Mu Bai has revealed his intention to retire from *jiang hu*

since he vaguely exhibits his fatigue about it and his expectation of settling down with Yu Shu Lien. Therefore he gives away his sword, the Green Destiny, hoping to be distant from his unstable life in *jinag hu*; however, his retirement is pregnant with meaning. During someone's lifetime, he or she, at some particular moment, may begin to doubt on the meaning of living in this world, especially for those who try to survive in *jiang hu*. As a matter of fact, *jiang hu* serves as a pivotal counterpart so as to reflect Li Mu Bai's inner struggles. *Jiang hu* has been regarded as an indispensable element in *wu xia* films over the centuries. With no doubt, it excites the imagination of legends about the chivalric knight-errant. Therefore the characteristic of *jiang hu* is worth being noticed:

The chivalrous heroes travel in the world of *Jianghu* (literally, rivers and lakes), a fantasized space world with multiple layers and dimensions in *wuxia* territory with no physical, professional, or class boundaries, *Jianghu* is ruled and sustained by certain ethical principles and behavioral codes by which the knight-errant recognize and judge one another, making friends or foes. Personal obligations, such as loyalty to one's master and friends, lead to intertwined networks among the knights, who are bound by a code of honor to avenge their allies. (Cai 445)

Jiang hu is a place full of moral constraints and has its own rules which everyone living in it must abide. It is this intangible law that keeps them alive, even though sometimes to abide by this intangible law is to violate one's own will. For those who are outsiders, like Jen, tend to hold a certain fantasy about *jiang hu*:

Jen. It must be exciting to be a fighter, to be totally free.

Shu Lien. Fighters have rules too: friendship, trust, integrity... Without rules, we wouldn't survive for long.

Jen. I've read all about people like you. Roaming wild, beating up

anyone who gets in your way!

Shu Lien. Writers wouldn't sell many books if they told how it really is.

Jen. But you're just like the characters in the stories.

Shu Lien. Sure. No place to bathe for days, sleeping in the flea-infested beds...They tell you all about that in the books? (40-1)

This conversation points out the realistic *wu xia* lifestyle which is not as fascinating as it is interpreted in books, but which is infused with conservative and invisible chivalric codes. The intangible rules contain compulsive revenge, if your master is murdered, or the willing sacrifice to protect the reputation of cliques. The whole *jiang hu* is virtually the epitome of Chinese conventions of loyalty and chastity. "On the surface is daily life, the structured social codes and conventions that dictate people's behavior. Underneath the restrictive social mores are found the repressed desires--hidden dragon. The social restrictions common to Chinese culture are at times inverted in the film--loyalty is opposed by betrayal, and chastity is supplanted by sexual transgression" (Dilley 130). The one who dwells in *jiang hu* is called *xia*, which is seen as a heroic figure with martial arts skills to conduct his or her righteous and loyal acts. The spirit of *xia* demands for individual loyalty and faithfulness that corresponds to Confucianism, the dominant ideology in Chinese culture. The community and collectivity are usually granted more valuable than the individual. Every individual behavior has to conform to the social expectation in *jiang hu*. Due to carrying on the social responsibility and the principle of righteousness, collective reputation surpasses personal desire or emotions. This unsubstantial meaning of *jiang hu* has even been transformed into concrete objects, such as swords, arrows, axes, which from time to time remind the *xia* of its rules and principles. In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* *jiang hu* is converted into the Green Destiny, which possesses a cultural symbol with morality, ideology and aesthetic appeal. The importance of the

Green Destiny has been discussed in many researches and has been recognized as signifying the masculine power and authority, maintenance of law and order. Rong Cai gives a comprehensive illustration of the Green Destiny embodying the implication of *jiang hu*:

It is well-known association with knight-errantry allows the sword to stand for the underlying principles of chivalry---individuality, friendship, loyalty, honor, and justice---ascribing certain moral qualities to the individual aligned with the sword, who appreciates the value it signifies. Besides its ideological appeal, the sword suggests a sense of cultural sophistication and elegance, thus becoming a symbol of class; swordsmanship is often aestheticized and likened to the art of calligraphy, an important part of the cultural tradition of China's elite...Because it appears in close association with male figure---warriors, literati, statesmen, and knights-errant---the sword is a representative image of masculinity and male authority, a perfect motif in the martial arts tradition that centralizes and celebrates masculine vigor and potency.

(450)

Holding the Green Destiny represents Li Mu Bai's respectable status in *jiang hu* but also indicates the constrained social morality imposed on him. It is Li Mu Bai's fate as a warrior who cannot transgress the boundary established by morality. Both Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien are submitted to the warrior's code to suppress their attraction to each other. Thus his handing the Green Destiny to Sir Te implies his retire from *jiang hu* that has restricted him for ages. Underlying the fantasy and visual magic is the theme that Ang Lee acknowledges as social obligation versus personal freedom. Through Ang Lee's comprehension, a self-contradicted chivalrous man strives between two forces, two ethical choices, is completely demonstrated.

Most of the time the reason why people in *jiang hu* fight all year around is to protect this invisible system, which no one is allowed to break, not to mention is Li Mu Bai. Being weary of having fought for others for such a long time, Li Mu Bai's tiredness and emotional emptiness need to be satisfied, hoping a woman to understand this. The scene which Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien sit in a pavilion for the first time "displays boldness between the two duty-bound friends" (Dilley 139). The mise-en-scene is foggily shrouded, and white but dreamlike light presents everything illuminant but also vaguely, exactly like Li Mu Bai's sentiment at the moment. When Shu Lien asks Li Mu Bai whether he is enlightened, he replies, "No, I didn't feel the bliss of enlightenment. Instead, I was surrounded by an endless sorrow." The motivation that Li Mu Bai cannot be enlightened but tries in earnest to give up *jiang hu*, is actually very carnal and secular. The figure of Li Mu Bai in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* signifies a remarkable departure from the typical hero of wuxia. Except for reclaiming the Green Destiny, he "does not avenge his master, nor discipline the erratic eroticism of Jen--he doesn't really do much in the film besides flirt with Jen and Yu. If the primary function of the righteous warrior is to create order in a chaotic world, Li clearly fails" (Eperjesi 33). Li Mu Bai's desire to retreat into the comforts of private sphere is more like everyman than superman. As far as a middle-aged man is concerned, the only question he wants to ask is whether he could stop fighting, and do what he craves to do, even to love.

In contrast to Yu Shu Lien, Jen absolutely understands Li Mu Bai's emotional change than Shu Lien does since Ang Lee does a quite wonderful job to build up the characters of Jen and Li Mu Bai. The characters Li and Yu represent the old tradition and the spirit of righteousness. They are role models of the old standard and must repress their personal desires. Compared to them, Jen is more straightforward and passionate to express her feelings. In addition to Li Mu Bai, Jen also marks a

significant difference from typical female warriors in *wuxia* films. For example, the female warrior in King Hu's *A Touch of Zen* stands for a righteous woman who follows the Confucian disciplines for her father and family. Her duty is to take revenge on villains who murder her whole family. In other words, this typical female warrior, like the *xia*, normally has to defend collective values. However, the personality of Jen is thoroughly opposite to the traditional image of a female warrior. When Jen craves for something, she is determined to obtain it by any necessary means. Unlike Yu and Li, Jen seems unbound by the restriction given by her destiny but decides to transgress it. She thinks that Yu can go wherever she likes and love whoever she likes because *jiang hu* enables her to be free of family duty and female identity. Afterward, Jen begins to drift in *jiang hu* in a male disguise and with the stolen Green Destiny sword. Ang Lee presents a rebellious female figure who displays her desire and questions traditional family values. She discloses a distinctive counterpart with Li Mu Bai, who is torn apart between social responsibility and individual wishes, whereas she leaves all the moral values behind. In spite of being wild, Jen seems to recognize passion, desire, and even love. Jen's relationship with Lo creates a sharp contrast to the relationship between Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien, since it takes place in a red desert which Ang Lee particularly works on the desert scene in terms of colors: "We [Ang Lee and his crew] used a lot of red to symbolize the passion between our two characters. This was the one portion of the film where the tiger and dragon were not hidden, though we reintroduced red at the end of the film in the cave scene to suggest there as well" (Williams 74). In the red and magnificent desert, Jen's emotion and vigor are completely exposed to the audience: she fights for retrieving something that belongs to her; she dines without unpretentious manners; she is aware of eroticism between her and Lo, and does not struggle to conceal it.

To some extent, Jen is much more loyal to her feeling and herself than any other

character in the film. Hence she is probably the only one character who can penetrate Li's state of mind. She becomes the fantasy for Li Mu Bai. Paul Verhaeghe elaborates that the fantasy is one of the most fundamental elements of eroticism. It is the privilege of human beings which differentiates humankind and animals. With fantasies, the erotic element becomes human. Fantasies also turn into the motivation that urges Li Mu Bai to chase after the stolen Green Destiny, Jen, and a middle-aged man's demand for love. The more he gets closer to Jen, the more he feels eroticism inside his mind.

Ironically, Li Mu Bai tries to quit fighting and dropping from *jiang hu*, but it is only through fighting that he can get closer to Jen. "The fights express character's feeling and desires, externalize their inner lives, and give physical shape to their relationships" (Klein 34). Therefore fighting in this film does not only mean justice against evil deeds but also represents fighters' state of mind. Philip Kemp depicts fighting scenes as an aesthetic work filled with rhythm and grace. "In visual terms this lends the film's fight scenes a soaring, balletic grace," writes Philip Kemp, "the combatants pursue each other up walls and over roofs, skimming across the surface of lakes, dueling all the way. The climax comes with a breathtakingly elegant airborne duel fought out amid the green treetops of a bamboo forest" (13).

The three fighting scenes demonstrate Li Mu Bai's change of his state of mind toward Jen and his struggle of transgressing social code. The first fighting scene is purely two fighters gauging each other, and the second in the old temple is Li Mu Bai not killing Jen but trying to discipline her. Up to now, Li Mu Bai has in some degree been attracted by Jen and cannot help but pursue after Jen and fight with her. Therefore the third fighting scene in the bamboo woods occurs and significantly illustrates the erotic relationship between Li and Jen, and that simultaneously demonstrates Ang Lee's skillful film language of transforming the external, physical

combat into an internal, psychological battle. Ang Lee also admits of the function of fighting scenes in the interview: “The task of the fighting in this film is not just to provoke excitement, but emotions as well” (Williams 74). In bamboo woods where *mise-en-scène* is painted with greenish bamboo, flying leaves and a crystal-clear pool, both of them leap and fly up and in slow motion. While chasing and hopping on top of bamboo woods, the camera constantly accompanies wherever Li Mu Bai and Jen go, rendering their movements elegant and sensual, as if feeling and setting, feminine elegance and masculine resoluteness, are happily blended together. Among those flying leaves serving as a veil, it is only through hindrance does one reveal his authentic feeling. Moreover, close-up shots of their facial expressions show that there is some mutual understanding between them, especially when Jen falls down and Li Mu Bai grabs her up. Until now Jen seems to realize Li Mu Bai’s sincerity and unusual feeling toward her. After several fights, Jen becomes more and more skillful in martial arts, and the relationship between she and her and Mu Bai becomes more like that between lovers but not master and disciple. Christina Klein also senses such an erotic atmosphere in this significant bamboo fighting scenes: “[T]he dreamy encounter atop the bamboo trees, which the camera assumes Li Mu Bai’s point of view and gazes down at Jen’s languidly reclining body, suggests a troubling erotic dimension that extends beyond what a master should feel for a disciple”(34).

The last psychological fight between Li Mu Bai and Jen is when Jen, nearly half naked, walks toward Li Mu Bai, asking him whether is it the sword or herself he wants to claim. It is the most shocking but realistic moment for Li Mu Bai since she explicitly indicates his fantasy, making him defenseless. It is not just physical fight but a demand directed right to his inner mind. In the pursuit of rebellious Jen, Li Mu Bai’s “dragon” or hidden desire is awakened. In the pavilion, Li Mu Bai once told Shu Lien that he feels life is an illusion whereas Shu Lien for the first time is exposed to

her love toward him:

Li. Shu Lien...The things we touch have no permanence. My master would say...there is nothing we can hold on to in this world. Only by letting go can we truly possess what is real.

Shu Lien. Not everything is an illusion. My hand...wasn't that real?

Li. Your hand, rough and calloused from machete practice...All this time, I've never had the courage to touch it.

(Li takes Shu Lien's hand and presses it to his face.)

Li. [*Jiang hu*] is a world of tigers and dragons, full of corruption...I tried sincerely to give it up but I have brought us only trouble.

Shu Lien. To repress one's feelings only makes them stronger.

Li. You're right, but I don't know what to do. I want to be with you...just like this. It gives me a sense of peace. (82)

However, Li Mu Bai perceives that such a feeling is quite transient because they have remained very rational and rigid relationship which isn't as turbulent as his direct touch with Jen when he is healing Jen in the ruins. Unlike Yu Shu Lien, Jen unflinchingly breaks through layers of Li Mu Bai's mental defense, even directly into his mind and soul. What Li Mu Bai feels toward Jen is a penetrable driving force which comes too fast to resist at all. His state of mind toward Jen is best described by Humbert Humbert's monologue in *Lolita*, which reveals his indulgence toward his stepdaughter:

What drives me insane is the twofold nature of this nymphet [*Lolita*], of every nymphet perhaps, this mixture in my *Lolita* of tender, dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity, stemming from the snub-nosed cuteness of ads and magazines pictures, from the blurry pinkness of adolescent maidservants in the Old Country; and from very young harlots

disguised as children in provincial brothel. (45)

Through his feeling for Lolita as a nymphet which combines “childishness” and “vulgarity,” Lolita’s image of a nymphet is filled with vigor and that is what Humbert Humbert revels in. Humbert Humbert regards Lolita as his passion, his sole obsession which he is willing to do everything to obtain. As a middle-aged man, Li Mu Bai’s erotic ecstasy and obsession with Jen are able to be interpreted in terms of Humbert Humbert’s constant chasing after a young teenage girl. The term of “youth envy,” notified by Hsiao-hung Chang is hidden underneath a masculine phenomenon referred to *jiang hu* and performed by Li Mu Bai’s exhausted runner after a young female body. Chang proclaims that many people merely consider the sword of Green Destiny as the symbol of phallus and power in *jiang hu*, and that Jen steals it is granted as the result of “penis envy” (37). Nevertheless, what is veiled beneath the layer of penis envy turns out to be a middle-aged man’s desire for both the sword and the girl.

In the film, we witness not only his erotic fantasy for Jen which is demonstrated through the bamboo fighting scene but also his hesitation which is exactly his tragic flaw vacillating between being against *jiang hu* morality and against his true desire. Li Mu Bai’s fantasy for Jen drives him to chase Jen insistently but deep inside his mind he knows that he cannot have Jen because it is against the morality in *jiang hu*. But if he abides by social morality, it is still a betrayal against his heart. As he cannot determinedly make up his mind he lingers on the boundary between traditional obligation and personal emotion. Nevertheless, how does his irresolute personality, his tragic flaw, lead him to the tragic end? Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* may provide an interpretation to Li Mu Bai’s tragic flaw. Nietzsche’s argument is that inside everyone dwells two opposite forces, Apollo and Dionysus. The Apollonian force represents rationality: “Apollo embodies the drive towards distinction, discreteness and individuality, toward the drawing and respecting of boundaries and

limits; he teaches an ethic of moderation and self-control"(*The Birth of Tragedy*, Introduction xi). In opposition, the Dionysiac force represents ecstasy: "The Dionysiac is the drive towards the transgression of limits, the dissolution of boundaries, the destruction of individuality, and excess" (Introduction xi). As far as Nietzsche is concerned, Apollo is the god of the light and its brightness presents a beautiful appearance of all kinds: "This is the true artistic aim of Apollo, in whose name we gather together all those countless illusions of beautiful semblance which, at every moment, make existence at all worth living at every moment and thereby urge us on the experience the next" (Nietzsche 894). In other words, Nietzsche believes that the beautiful appearance is fundamentally an illusion for humankind. Dream is the transformation of Apollo in daily life. With regard to Dionysus, ecstasy signifies emotional intoxication and the primitively instinctual power of life.

However, Dionysiac emotions cannot be interpreted as ordinary emotions but as tragic ones. While breaking through rules, an individual seeks for an experience of disencumbering constraints and then achieves pleasure. Both of them dwell deeply in humankind and constitute important elements for life. Apollo and Dionysus, in light of their own impulses, struggle against each other but simultaneously coordinate with each other. Tragedy is the artistic manifestation resulting from endless conflicts between Apollo and Dionysus, which are inseparable, and that constructs the spirit of tragedy:

[T]he one, truly real Dionysos manifests himself in a multiplicity of figures, in the mask of a fighting hero and, as it were, entangled in the net of the individual will. In the way that he now speaks and acts, the god who appears resembles an erring, striving, suffering individual; and the fact that he appears at all with such epic definiteness and clarity, is the effect of Apollo, the interpreter of dreams, who interprets to the chorus its

Dionysiac conditions by means of this symbolic appearance. (Nietzsche 892)

Dennis Sweet also comments on Nietzsche's proposition of Apollo and Dionysus in the Greek tragedy:

Nietzsche now suggests that the essence of tragedy consists in the fusing together of both the Dionysian and the Apollinian impulses. Dionysos is the god of the wild, uncontrolled excesses of nature, who was dismembered by his enemies and later restored by his brother, Apollo. Similarly, the Dionysian impulse in art represents the primitive, unrestrained energies that must be brought together, sublimated, and harmonized through the constructive constraints of the Apollinian impulse. (357)

This conception even outlines that rationality and sensibility of human beings are always situate in conflict, and thus compose their destiny. Although human beings do not understand the myth of destiny, they take the challenge against destiny. Characters in Greek tragedy display exactly this trait in which humankind is willing to reveal the veil of destiny at the cost of their lives. *Oedipus the King* is the representative in demonstrating how a tragedy takes place between omnipotent destiny and individual freedom. Oedipus is destined to do horrific things to his biological parents without his own awareness. The play points out the theme of destiny in the form of an oracle: "An oracle came to Laius one fine day," says Jocasta, "and it said that doom would strike him down at the hands of a son, our son, to be born of our own flesh and blood" (784-88). This is a terrifying oracle which no one is able to escape and hence tragedy takes off from this point. Although Oedipus tries to be nice and not to be ensnared by his destiny, he ends up fulfilling it, suffering death. Since destiny is rooted deeply inside human kinds, defying it will become a challenge against Oedipus himself.

Whether being submitted to the fate or unveiling the mysterious mask of it, the consequence must be at the cost of Oedipus' life. The crucial element of destiny also dominates Li Mu Bai's tragic flaw.

In terms of reality, Apollo stands for a large community and Dionysus for the individuals. Therefore, when the insistence and extremity of the latter have conflicts against morality and ethics of the former, it is easy to result in tragedy. In the film, the inability of reconciling personal desire and social restraint leads unavoidably to the tragic ending, Li Mu Bai's death. There are two forces dwelling in Li Mu Bai, one constantly reminding him of his inevitable destiny which is to revenge his master the other reinforcing his repressed desire to love. Similar to Oedipus, Li Mu Bai has his own destiny, and therefore he cannot love the way he has wished to. His destiny is to take revenge, but now because of his love for Yu Shu Lien, he slows down. His destiny has urged him to go on fighting; his love for women, both involving Yu Shu Lien and Jen, slows him down. Li Mu Bai cannot get rid of his destined obligation whereas he has difficulties veiling his emotional undercurrent, passion and secret desires. The more he tries to be nice, the more he is involved in this accidental intruder Jen. His insistence on challenging destiny only results in fulfilling his fate at the cost of his life, and love is the primary motivation behind all this.

When it comes to love in Greek tragedy, *Antigone* offers a full demonstration on the concept of love and its relation with tragicity.¹¹ Love is a major issue in *Antigone* and it is what has caught Antigone in the problem of destiny. Antigone's

¹¹ In Butler's positioning of Antigone, Antigone is a woman, but a manly woman who is manly and pursues her own desire in a masculine way. In fact, Butler's unconditioned designation of Antigone as manly is problematic since she ignores the real of sexual difference and focuses only on Antigone's desire for recognition, not for love.

love for her deceased brother is so great that it leads her to death. Antigone's death goes to cause Haemon's death due to his love for her. Eurydice, Creon's wife, makes her kill herself out of her love for her son when she finds Haemon's dead body. It has been said that love conquers all. In *Antigone*, love indeed conquers all, so does the tragedy of death:

Chorus. Love, never conquered in battle

.....

Love!

you wrench the mind of the righteous into outrage,

swerve them to their ruin--you have ignited this,

this kindred strife, father and son at war

and love alone the victor--

warm glance of the bride triumphant, burning with desire!

Throned in power, side-by-side with the mighty laws!

Irresistible Aphrodite, never conquered. (879, 887-93)

In *Movie: A Ten Year Dream Comes True* Ang Lee believes that giving one's life wholeheartedly to someone he loves as the most romantic thing, and that is the essence of where love lies in. Before he breathes his last, Li Mu Bai eventually gives Yu Shu Lien a promise which he cannot achieve during his chivalric life: "I've already wasted my whole life. I want to tell you with my last breath... I have always loved you. I would rather be a ghost, drifting by your side... as a condemned soul... than enter heaven without you. Because of your love, I will never be a lonely spirit." Witnessing Li Mu Bai's confessions and death, Jen returns to Wu Dang Mountain where she is supposed to live happily ever after with Lo. However, in the end she jumps into the abyss. As a rebellious woman, she has dismantled the order and regulations thus she must be punished. Furthermore, what she has experienced

subverts her comprehension about *jiang hu*. *Jiang hu* is not a place where she can gain complete liberation but a lockup where not many alternatives are left to choose from. Carrying regrets and remorse, Jen jumps into the abyss because she has no choice and there is no shelter for her anymore. This ending, in fact, quite corresponds to the ending in a Greek tragedy. In despite of a lot of efforts to defy their fates, characters, like Oedipus and Li Mu Bai, still cannot escape the manipulation of their destinies that fulfill them, ending up with death. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, through the character of Li Mu Bai, seems to reveal the tragic frame as a whole, and such a tragic flaw creates a tragic situation in which no matter what decision one makes, he is doomed to be wrong.



Chapter 3

The Repression of Love and Lust in *Lust, Caution*

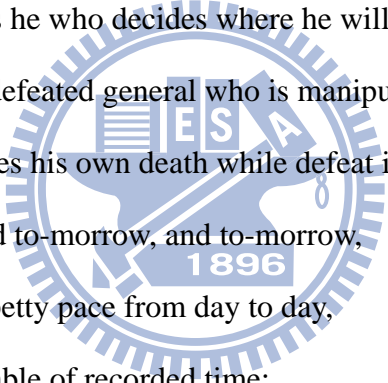
“And here, two words—*act* and *perform*—indicate the troubling question Zhang Ailing (Eiling Chang) asks us: for at the crucial moment when we *choose*, when we *decide*, when we *exercise our free will*, are we not also *performing*?” (Schamus, Introduction, xi)

The ethical choice in *Lust, Caution* is entangled with a woman’s insistence,¹² having to do with her choice to seduce or not to seduce. A woman’s insistence is much more complicated than that of a man, and usually has a great influence on her logic of behavior. When it comes to Antigone, it is recognized that there would be no Antigone without Oedipus. Oedipus serves as a significant role to interpret Antigone’s choice and act. Copjec designates in her essay “The Tomb of Perseverance: On Antigone” Oedipus’s tomb as a symbol where Antigone persists in her love as a sort of perseverance to her father. For Copjec, in other words, Oedipus’s choice and claim for love has weighed down upon Antigone and motivated her to realize it in her act: “The nature of the girl is savage, like her father’s, and she does not know how to bend before her troubles” (Copjec, 14-15). To follow her fathers’ death wish and inherit his

¹² The difference between female and male insistence originates from sexual difference. Take Antigone and Creon, for example. In psychological perspective, the effect of *jouissance* and castration threat in both of them is reached in different ways. However, Judith Butler’s elaboration of Antigone claims that she has repressed her demand and employed a masculine logic in her acts. But in fact, Antigone indeed persists in her demand for love rather than renounces it. For the difference between Antigone and Creon, please refer to Chi Yien Wu, “The ABC of the Feminine Superego: Antigone, Butler, Copjec.” MA thesis. Tsing Hua U, 2005.

desire, Antigone is therefore endowed with the courage to defend herself against Creon's command.

In the film *Downfall*, which depicts the last days of Adolf Hitler, he refuses to negotiate with the Allied Forces and to surrender, and his frantic insistence simply lies in his ideal dream--constructing the perfect Germany. He persists in his dream because everyone, he thinks, can create his own fate. However, when reality doesn't actually proceed on the arranged path, Hitler's pride cannot but ask how things could have turned out into a failure. While defeat comes near, Hitler, although never speaks it out, arranges his own death. "The war is lost... But if you think that I'll leave Berlin for that, you are sadly mistaken. I'd prefer to put a bullet in my head." What Hitler tries to punctuate is that it is he who decides where he will head for, when and how he will die. Macbeth, another defeated general who is manipulated by his personal desire and prophecy also determines his own death while defeat is about to fall on him:



To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing. (5.5.21-28)

Death of Macbeth, like that of Hitler, seems only the last act of a very bad play. In a word, choosing to insist on what they believe and encountering the doomed death are both driven by Macbeth and Hitler's tragic flaw, the pride.

In contrary to men's insistence, Wang Chia Chih's feminine insistence is more complicated. Ang Lee once states his proposition about this film directed in the light of a female's perspective:

The story is written by a woman from a woman's point of view, and Wang Chia Chi is a strong character. I think this provides a fresh angle on female sexuality, especially when contrasted with the political aspect, which is usually very patriarchal. The woman's perspective is like the dark side of the moon: it always exists, but it is never exposed, at least not in my culture. (Davies 34)

Lust, Caution is a story obviously told from a female's viewpoint. Therefore whatever the action Wang Chia Chih takes or whatever the decision she makes is the key point to how this "play" is going to end. As a result, Wang Chia Chih's logic of behavior becomes essentially important; in other words, audiences are able to witness the building of Wang Chia Chih's character on screen. The way Ang Lee molds the character of Mrs. Mai on screen is similar to how Pirandello creates the role of Henry IV, an artificial reality. The multiplicity of characters' identities is the major theme in Pirandello's play. The protagonist, Henry, whose real name is never revealed possess a triple role: himself before the accident, the madman, and the man who decides to act mad forever. Henry's delusion begins at the masquerade pageant twenty years ago, and one day he suddenly regains his sanity. Yet he realizes that life has moved forward, his youth has started to wither and he may not fit into the real world around him. "The reality of the outer world has a formal rigidity which does not yield readily to the wishes of the individual. In fantasy Henry IV [is] permitted to take interesting liberties with time" (Valency 225). He has been living in his own fantasy for past two decades, and there is no possible return for Henry. Thus he decides:

I preferred to remain mad—since I found everything ready at my disposal

for this new exquisite fantasy. I would live it—this madness of mine—with the most lucid consciousness; and this revenge myself on the brutality of a stone which had dented by head. (2.2.172)

Henry would continue to play his role and maintain his mask of madness. For the following eight years, this mad man becomes an actor who is frozen as a young emperor and can never suffer the horrors of age and reality. In *Lust, Caution*, to achieve perfection and accomplish the assassination, Wang Chia Chih “initiates a sadomasochistic game of cat and mouse in which the roles are constantly reversing and nothing, not even her own identity, is certain” (Davies 34).

To act a certain role flawlessly, there are several elements to fulfill for achieving it. First of all, costumes make characters identify with their roles. The costume is used in such a way as to suggest a disguise. In *Henry IV*, everyone needs to put on their own costumes to play their own part. It is just like when Wong Chia Chih plays the role of Mrs. Mak to seduce Mr. Yee, she always wears cheongsams which not only radiate with her enchantment but also identify her social status, to make the creation of her role more real. It can be discerned from the beginning of the novel where Wang Chia Chih deliberately dresses herself up:

Her makeup was understated, except for the glossily rouged arcs of her lips. Her hair she had pinned nonchalantly back from her face, then allowed to hang down to her shoulders. Her sleeveless cheongsam of electric blue moiré satin reached to the knees, its shallow, rounded collar standing only half an inch tall, in the Western style. A brooch fixed to the collar matched her diamond-studded sapphire button earrings. (Chang 3-4)

Proper and decent costume can indicate the image which a character tries to project to

himself and to others. “Once you put on the makeup, you are no longer yourself¹³” (Wang and Schamus 84). When Wang Chia Chih wears chipao¹⁴ and makeup, she is not that university student anymore. She has become Mai Tai Tai. Although she may preserve some disposition of Wang Chia Chih on her debut, her every movement and every action deviates more and more from her true self. There is one scene in which she returns to her room after her first meeting with Mrs. Yee. She closes the door, takes off her silky stockings and smokes. From then on, she has been absorbed into the role of Mai Tai Tai and has been distinguished from those university students outside. Those people still live in the real world whereas Wang Chia Chih has moved into an illusory world.

Scenery also provides the mask for performers’ to wear. After the accident, Henry’s wealthy sister “[contrives] to surround him with the trappings of his delusion—the ancient castle, which he takes to be Goslar, the costumes, and the imperial retinue” (Valency 225). The outset in *Lust, Caution*, both in the film and the short story, begins with the mahjong scene where women compete their jewelry and their husbands’ achievement with each other:

Though it was still daylight, the hot lamp was shining full-beam over the mahjong table. Diamond rings flashed under its glare as their wearers clacked and reshuffled their tiles. (Chang 3)

On the mahjong table, the ladies’ smooth white hands are busily shuffling and sorting the tiles, their diamond rings sparkling under the sharp light. (Wang and Schamus 52)

¹³ This line comes from the script, not from a criticism. Please refer to Wang, Hui Ling and James Schamus. “Lust, Caution: A Screenplay.” In *Lust, Caution: The Story, The Screenplay, and The Making of the Film*.

¹⁴ Chipao or Qipao translates “cheongsam.”

Ang Lee produces this scene based exactly on Chang's story by using many short takes to construct the aura of treacherousness. The world where those tai tais live is also a stage of performing. It is a politically sensitive era when everyone needs to be cautious in order to survive. Even though the mahjong seems merely a game, it is also a battle field where those tai tais show off and compete their social status and financial conditions with each other. They talk about someone's husband being promoted, the restaurant they should dine, and the carat of diamond rings with double talk or doubtfully sincere words. Whitney Crothers Dilley concludes that the scene originates from Chang's novel which "everyone has secrets; every participant has something in mind, and no one can trust anyone in the room" (Dilley 64). Wang Chia Chih is not the only one in disguise on this stage since every tai tai wears a mask as well. Compared with these wealthy ladies, the real Wang Chia Chih is only a university student whose gambling money on mahjong is not even her own. Except for her costume, Wang Chia Chi is somehow alienated from this high-class society until Old Wu offers her more substantial background of becoming Mai Tai Tai, such as her marriage license, her anniversary date, her bank account number, and the prices of every article Mai Tai Tai sells. The mask of Mai Tai Tai becomes more and more authentic due to the combination of costume and scenery created on Wang Chia Chih.

Last but not the least, in *Lust, Caution*, lighting even helps create the character of Mrs. Mai more real than actors because it essentially doesn't exist in reality. Since the whole film is expressed from a feminine angle, the mise-en-scene cannot be exception. Patricia Thomson in "Emotional Betrayal" writes,

These established the palette in Hong Kong, which Lee describes as "tropical, wet and colorful." By contrast, Shanghai features mixed, desaturated colors, conveying a sense of lost innocence and disillusionment. Prieto elaborates, "Hong Kong's color palette consisted

of blues, greens, cyan and a touch of red, mostly in the bougainvilleas.”
 Shanghai has two looks, beginning with a drab, monochromatic palette
 (achieved through costumes and production design), and progressing to a
 more colorful look as Chia Chih infiltrates the Yee’s privileged world.
 (51)

Lighting is deliberately designed, fraught with Wang Chia Chih’s change, and even underlines the relation between her and Mr. Yee. Basically, lighting and camera movements mold a transparent character of Mrs. Mak. Many close up and extreme close up shots are taken on Wang Chia Chih so as to reveal her ups and downs of every single emotion. The opening lines of Eiling Chang’s novel accentuate Wang Chia Chih’s beauty by a description of lighting: “The harsh artificial light silhouetted to full advantage the generous curve of Chia-chih’s bosom, and laid bare the elegant lines of her hexagonal face, its beauty somehow accentuated by the imperfectly narrow forehead, by the careless, framing wisps of hair” (Chang 3).

In the film, Ang Lee also punctuates Mai Tai Tai’s attractiveness compared with other ladies by close-ups and lighting to radiate her “bright shiny lipstick on her chiseled lips” (Wang and Schamus 54). The emphasis on her beauty tries to make Mr. Yee’s addiction to Mai Tai Tai plausible. Hence most of the time Wang Chia Chih, or Mai Tai Tai, is usually immersed in light which audiences can see the whole picture of her at any time. On the next day of the patriotic stage drama in the auditorium, Wang walks on the empty and dimly lit stage with the camera lingering on her, implying her sentimental attachment to the feeling of performance. In the tailor shop, Wang Chia Chih displays her new dress and “shows off her slender body sheathed in the snug chipao” in front of the camera and Mr. Yee (Wang and Schamus 127). When Mr. Yee orders her not to take off the new dress, the confusion but then the triumph both flicker on her face clearly. As a woman, Wang might be proud of her beauty and

performance which successfully arouse Mr. Yee's interest in her. Moreover, different angles of camera shots and lighting frequently trace Wang Chia Chih not only to capture her beauty but also to record her change through the whole play. The scene after Wang Chia Chi sacrifices her virginity to accomplish the whole assassination plan, or play, signifies her intrinsic transformation from Wang Chia Chih to Mai Tai Tai: "Wang lies alone, in the bed. She gets up and goes over to the window, pulling open the drapes. A sprig of bright green ivy pokes its head against the windowpane, translucent against the afternoon sun" (Wang and Schamus 141-42). The lighting is deliberately sheds over Wang Chia Chih's naked body with beautiful curves, suggesting that she has decided to completely embrace this new identity, Mrs. Mai.

Wang Chia Chih is not the only actor in this play, as there is another: Mr. Yee. He once mocks himself as playing the role of a whore: "It is I who was brought here...So you see, I know better than you know to be a whore" (Wang and Schamus 201). As far as a collaborator is concerned, although Mr. Yee seems to hold a considerable power, he is merely a puppet driven by the state of the affairs. He is not allowed to reveal his personal sentiment and not to trust anyone. Therefore he frequently stays in dim light, walks into darkness, or appears from nowhere. Sometimes it is difficult to clearly see Mr. Yee's facial expression which is mostly hidden in the dark. Even in the last scene when he sits on Wang Chia Chih's bed, we have a glimpse of his grief just for a moment, and then it is gone. Through the reflection of the hallway light, only his shadow appears in front of the camera. Mr. Yee's mysteriousness and sadistic personality are built up by Ang Lee's such craft.

However, a crude collaborator is never a convincing object to fall in love with. But if Wang Chia Chih doesn't love Mr. Yee, there would be no tragicalness at all. Is it because of those three sex scenes? If it is, the answer would simplify Ang Lee's dealing with a female's state of mind. Aristotle once raises a mode of causation, an

accidental causality in which things that take place not out of necessity. In other words, in the mode of accidental causality, things take place by chance or coincidence. This cause is indeterminable. This accidental causality doesn't show up in the first place, but has a great influence on the change of a character's behavior mode. Accidental causality is chiefly to illustrate an incidental occasion or chance which may bring about an unexpected result. According to Aristotle, *chance* lies in the realm of accidental causes. It originates from what is spontaneous. For a better understanding, it might be better to think of chance as coincidence: something takes place by chance if a person sets out with the intent of having one thing take place, but with the result of another thing (not intended) taking place. As far as Wang Chia Chih is concerned, this accidental causality, the three sex scenes and the diamond ring, evokes everything inside her heart that is beyond her expectation. In addition, chance must involve *choice* and thus deliberation, and only human beings are capable of choice and deliberation. In the end of *Lust, Caution*, Wang Chia Chih makes a choice and decides to let Mr. Yee go unhurt out of her own will. The causation which changes her mind is unexpected and the result is completely opposite to Old Wu's plan. Eiling Chang describes the accidental causality of Wang Chia Chih's state of mind by saying that "the way to a woman's heart is through her vagina" (Chang 36). However, Ang Lee designs three sex scenes to deliberately express how Wang Chia Chih is mentally induced by Aristotle's accidental causation and how her final decision is made.

The first sex scene is only a sexual intercourse which is composed of violence and male dominance. There Wang Chia Chih is the prey and Mr. Yee is the predator as it is described in the novel: "the last couple of times they'd met in apartments, different ones each time...how would she have known what time he was coming? He might have suddenly descended upon her at any moment. Or if they have fixed a time

in advance, urgent business might have forced him to cancel at the last minute” (Chang 13). It is always Mr. Yee who chooses the tryst whereas Wang Chia Chih is always waiting for him. In the first sex scene, Wang Chia Chih attempts to seduce Mr. Yee and declare her dominance in this play. Nevertheless, Mr. Yee recaptures his dominance over the whole situation in a sadomasochistic manner. An indifferent Japanese collaborator with a murky personality and a lack of trust exerts his feeling by way of conquering a young woman’s body. Literally Mr. Yee vanquishes in this battle; however, in fact it is Wang Chia Chih who gets to hook Mr. Yee.

The second sex scene is still Wong Chia Chih’s acting on her stage. Catching a glimpse at Mr. Yee’s arriving, she prepares herself and then threatens to leave. She murmurs at his leaving without any word for her with a plaintive look which successfully captures Mr. Yee’s attention. This time he responds to her emotion, or playacting, by submitting his trust: “I said I believed you. And you know, it would be the first time in a long time that I believed anyone, anyone at all. Let me hear it again, I want to believe...” (Wang and Schamus 180). His change of attitude is also manifested on sex. The second sex scene is more or less interwoven with Mr. Yee’s removing his mask away and Wang Chia Chih’s obtaining more power over him: she achieves what she is desired—an apartment. So far, their relationship is built upon physical intimacy as Eiling Chang characterizes it in her story: “As they sat next to each other in the back of the car, he folded his arms so that his elbow nudged against the fullest part of her breast. This was a familiar trick of his: to sit primly upright while covertly enjoying the pleasurable softness of her” (Chang 27). Outwardly Mr. Yee dominates the relationship inasmuch as Wang gives passive obedience to him. However, in each scene, the purely sexual intercourse gradually begins to transform into an intimate, even love, relationship between the two characters.

Finally, the third sex scene in which she bursts into tears indicates that she

eventually understands what sex is all about, with the realization of herself falling too deeply into this character, and in Mr. Yee. This is also Wang Chia Chih's first opportunity of shooting Mr. Yee, but she quits and continues her lovemaking. Apparently, this accidental causation begins to take effect on her and her choices. After all, neither Wang Chia Chih nor Mr. Yee would ever think of falling for each other. The third sex scene is crucial since it has caused a deviation completely unlike the original arrangement and redefined Mr. Yee and Wang Chia Chih's relationship. All in all, in spite of pretense and deceit suffusing the film, "the only place where all pretense is shed is in the bedroom, where three long, graphic and often violent sex scenes play out" (Davies 34).

Before the accidental causation emerges, Wang Chia Chih is supposed to play the role of Mrs. Mai and seduce this brutal collaborator for her comrades to slaughter him. His lust should lessen his caution. Yet "all the while, emotions are deranging tactics" (Alleva 20). "There are ripples of coercion and torment throughout their lovemaking—an ecstasy just this side of agony" (Gleiberman 54). If the three sex scenes are merely constituted by two actors, there will not be any emotion involved. On the contrary, we witness two desolated souls with undisguised reactions. By the same token, Mr. Yee is unlikely only to be attracted by Wang Chia Chih's beauty but also by her apparently emotional revelation and vice versa. Wang Chia Chih, like what Old Wu says, "carries herself every bit as Mai Tai-tai, and not an agent" (Wang and Schamus 193). When she hasn't heard from Mr. Yee for some time, she threatens to leave; when she penetrates Mr. Yee's state of mind, she sings a song to comfort him. In a word, Wang Chia Chih indeed impersonates a character of a woman in affair. For Mr. Yee's part, "he takes weird comfort in her loathing because, unlike the fawning hypocrisy of his underlings, it is a sincere emotion" (Alleva 21). Consequently the rendezvous scene in a Japanese restaurant appears after three sex

scenes, which distinctly reveal that both Wang Chia Chih and Mr. Yee, through accidental causality, have perceived something subtle and sweet like love.

Love can be accounted as the most accidental event in this film. Like in the case of Li Mu Bai, such an understanding comes too hastily to resist. Situated in such a condition, Wang cannot, and never will, escape from it, highlighting altogether a female's vulnerability while facing her tragicity. As a result, the relation of the hunter and the prey turns out to be Wang Chia Chih's realization that she can pretend no more. Everything is more real than reality. When she walks out of the jewelry shop, the camera movements to aimlessly gaze at the street present that Wang Chia Chih, like Henry IV, is obviously trapped in the character of her role, Mrs. Mai. This is a created role and she insists on remaining inside the role. Her insistence remains unchangeable: all she wants is love, but in such a tragic situation, her desire is unreachable and her insistence becomes tragic.

The tragic situation which causes Wang Chia Chih's death has something to do with her ethical choice is called fate. Walter Benjamin refers in *Fate and Character* the relation of fate and character to the concept of tragedy. By and large Walter Benjamin proposes that character determines fate, while character is shaped by its surroundings. In other words, when a person is situated in a particular circumstance, his or her fate will be determined according to it. Thus, it is fate that determines character and both of them cannot be distinctly differentiated: "Between the active man and the external world, all is interaction; their spheres of action interpenetrate. No matter how different their conceptions may be, their concepts are inseparable...character and fate...coincide" (Benjamin 202). Moreover, Benjamin also emphasizes on the trait of fate which "is the guilt context of the living" (Benjamin 204). There is an indisputable concept of guilt existing in that of fate, and tragic figures weigh on the moral burden or social responsibility imposed by fate.

Hence tragic figures are usually deprived of freedom and passively accept what fate has arranged for them. This concept of fate related to guilt corresponds to that of objective necessity proclaimed by Gabriela Basterra. In one early chapter of her book, objective necessity alludes to the social order or the law, and people “achieve a position in the social system of meaning by assuming guilt” (Basterra 40). Fate, or objective necessity, confines both Li Mu Bai and Wang Chia Chih to their social and moral responsibilities whether to revenge the murdered master or to assassinate the enemy of the government. Not that they choose to carry out this inalienable duty, but that it seems to be the only option left for people in *jiang hu* or in such an era of political havoc.

There is a normal pattern in Greek tragedy: tragic protagonists usually walk a tightrope “between the acknowledgment of social responsibility, on the one hand, and the desire to fulfill individual wishes, on the other” (Gajowski 15). While tragic protagonists pursue individual desire, they still cannot free themselves from the yokes of fate. Even though their deeds are considered injurious and wrongful, they do not intend to avoid the blame from there. To prove this point of view, Basterra takes Phaedra as an example. Apparently, Phaedra suffers from the dilemma torn between her desire and conscience that Phaedra cannot give way to. In Phaedra’s case, Basterra observes that desire and conscience constitute not only her desire for necessity but also her desire for guilt. “By assuming guilt, tragic subjects achieve identity and sense, which is why they do want to be guilty, why the idea of being innocent is intolerable, why they need to preserve their blame at any cost” (Basterra 41-42). Thus guilt is pivotal since it explains a tragic character’s state of mind both in terms of moral responsibility and personal desire. On the one hand, guilt reminds tragic characters of unavoidable social expectations; on the other hand, it provokes erotic ecstasy which tragic characters take ethical actions in conformity with their desire to the end.

Thereupon, it can be said that Wang Chia Chih conforms to this pattern. Situated in the turmoil of war, Wang Chia Chih seemed at first to believe Kuang Yu Min's speech about dedicating themselves to China for the sake of patriotism. Playing the role as a spy and living a double life are by no means effortless and easy to handle. It appears that it is everyone's responsibility to protect the country. So, assassinating a notorious traitor becomes a compulsory obligation which is imposed on Wang Chia Chih. In addition to the contemporary political background, Wang Chia Chih's fate has already been decided since she agrees to seduce Mr. Yee. Frankly speaking, this mission will only lead her to death when Old Wu mentions the two female spies indifferently: "The last two women I tried to snare him with were superbly trained, it's true, and they held his interest briefly, that's for sure. But he sniffed them out, and that was it for him. They even gave up the names of their entire cell" (Wang and Schamus 193). Furthermore, according to the concept of tragedy, tragic characters are placed in a silent position and will make a sacrifice for fulfilling the duty. Antigone is the classic example. In order to bury the corpse of her brother, Antigone excludes herself from social commands and therefore undoes herself as a member of society. Creon as the representative of authority refuses her request and isolates her from the community. Wang Chia Chih to some extent corresponds to Antigone's position in tragedy. Most of the time she obediently abides by Old Wu's instructions; however, when she exposes her sufferings to Old Wu and Kuang Yu Min, her confession seems to be intolerable for them. As far as Creon and Old Wu are concerned, protecting the law of the city or preserving the future of the community is of the most importance.

Except for fulfilling her responsibility, Wang Chia Chih also possesses her personal desire which has much to do with her search for love. Throughout the movie, Wang Chia Chih seems to be a disposable object in terms of the male-dominated society. First of all, her father takes her younger brother to Britain but leaves her alone

in Hong Kong. Second, her father informs her that he remarries and that literally excludes Wang Chia Chih from this new family. Third, in order to get Mr. Yee hooked, Wang Chia Chih must sacrifice her virginity to Liang Jun Sheng whereas Kuang Yu Min remains silent. Last, Old Wu not only burns her letter to her father but also disregards her safety since an agent should simply concentrate on loyalty to the party, to the leader and to the country. The assassinating mission drains of her innocence, her emotion and her identity until the three sex scenes which crucially resurrect her sexuality and desire for love: “In truth, every time she was with Yee she felt cleansed, as if by a scalding hot bath; for now everything she did was for the cause” (Chang 23).

After undergoing the baptism of sexuality, Wang Chia Chih as the only sensitive person in the play is the only major character to understand the meaning of love. Exactly due to the realization of love, Wang Chia Chih takes at the most critical moment the opposite decision on the path arranged by fate. In the light of Benjamin’s proposition in *Fate and Character*, this crucial moment is referred to as coincidence. He suggests that only under the concept of ethical action will there be the issue of timing. In order to influence a person’s ethical choice, coincidence must function and coordinate properly since it relates to a person’s immediate reaction at that moment. After all, an ethical action is not necessarily arranged, conscious, or related to thinking. It is a person’s presence of mind and needs to be decided at once to alter the current situation he or she is in. In *Lust, Caution*, this coincidence occurs in the jewelry shop where Wang Chia Chih receives the diamond ring. Like Wang Chia Chih’s double character, the role of the diamond ring does not remain consistent from start to finish. At the beginning, the diamond ring represents the performance of wealth and power:

The edges of the table glittered like a diamond exhibition, Chia-chih

thought, every pair of hands glinting ostentatiously—except for hers. She should have left her jadeite ring back in its box, she realized; to spare herself all those sneering glances. (Chang 8)

In addition to the topic of whose husband has been promoted, another conversation comes in about whom just bought a five-carat diamond ring and how rare the pink diamond ring is. Thereupon the original aspect of the diamond ring for Wang Chia Chih is the representative of a certain social identity which her character tries to fit in. However, the role of the diamond ring is given a completely different meaning at the crucial moment. What ultimately influences Wang Chia Chih's choice is a pink six-carat diamond ring which functions as the coincidence. Through the pink six-carat diamond ring, Wang Chia Chi actually catches sight of Mr. Yee's face. More accurately speaking, she sees love on Mr. Yee's face:

But there was, she noted again, no cynicism in his smile just then; only sadness. He sat in silhouette against the lamp, seemingly sunk into an attitude of tenderly affectionate contemplation, his downcast eyelashes tinged the dull cream of moths' wings as they rested on his gaunt cheeks. He really loves me, she thought. Inside, she felt a raw tremor of shock—then a vague sense of loss. (Chang 39)

In the movie, it is the second time, except for the first time in the Japanese restaurant, that Mr. Yee's facial expression is clearly lightened up in front of audiences. The camera also lucidly shows Wang Chia Chih's wince and struggle before she tells him to run. At this moment, there is no more disguise for Wang Chia Chih and Mr. Yee. Under the function of coincidence, Wang Chia Chih sees no more patriotism or performance but only a tender and vulnerable man in love.

Most of the time a tragic protagonist makes an ethical choice based on personal desire. Such personal desire alludes to escaping the net woven by fate and being

unwilling to accept destiny passively. In order to conquer destiny, it requires taking certain ethical actions to change the current situation which is unsatisfactory for the tragic figure. Even though fate is carefully woven, there are still some loopholes which can be taken advantage of. Therefore once the coincidence intervenes, it modifies the denouement. In Wang Chia Chih's case, she has found what is lacking in reality—love. The pink six-carat diamond ring becomes the decisive factor which shatters her final defense. Like Li Mu Bai, the tragic ending is unavoidable since she places herself to a tragic situation. She makes the final decision according to her own desire which “is not associated with life, but rather is bound to death” (Basterra 39).



Chapter 4

The Entanglement between Sense and Sensibility in *Brokeback Mountain*

Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain*, an adaption from Annie Proulx's short story, conjures up poignancy, social predicaments, struggles and love. Two lonely cowboys, Ennis Del Mar and Jack Twist, encounter each other by herding sheep one summer and continue their romance for the next twenty years. The whole story surrounds these two men yearning for a bittersweet and distorted love resulted from "a hypermasculine culture, their family upbringing, and their marital lives" (Urschel 247). Repressed by social expectation, Ennis and Jack are unable to fulfill their desire and therefore carry lifelong regrets and sufferings. All in all, *Brokeback Mountain* is a tragedy of doomed love. Two itinerant ranchmen, on the one hand, cannot choose but perform their social obligations; on the other hand, they are unable to give way to their craving for love, hence their returning to the wilderness for their trysts every now and then.

D.D. Raphael writes in *The Paradox of Tragedy*:

Tragedy always presents a conflict. It is familiar enough. But a conflict between what? I suggest that it is a conflict between inevitable power which we may call necessity of self conscious efforts. Tragic conflicts differ from the conflicts presented by other forms of drama in that in the victory always goes to necessity. The hero is crushed (25).

In ancient Greek, necessity usually refers to fate, and in *Oedipus the King* necessity displays the irresistibility of fate. But necessity can also be interpreted as nature, or an organized system which determines out ethics, civil obligations, religion and law.¹⁵ If

¹⁵ Here I limit the issue of necessity to the conflict between individual and family or social obligations, excluding other propositions related to Greek tragedy, such as

the character has a conflict with necessity, the irresistible power, he is not only uncompromisable but also persistent in his own will, and then the tragedy will occur. John Baxter also puts emphasis on the notion of fate which is the essential element in Greek tragedy in light of Aristotle's *Poetics*:

...pathos, an intensely painful act or suffering. This is, in Aristotle's view, the bedrock of tragedy. Tragedy, in a memorable phrase, has pain as its mother"...However much the pain and suffering is to be ascribed to the will of the gods, or fate, the central focus for Aristotle remains on what human beings do in the face of their circumstances. (Baxter 3)

Violation against fate results in characters' sufferings, even death. With these issues in mind, we will now take a look at the role of necessity in *Brokeback Mountain*. The unavoidable fate in *Brokeback Mountain* is related to its social background in its historical moment. The "homophobia of American society" in the sixties and seventies is dominated by heterosexual features and forces Ennis and Jack to keep their relationship in secret (Dilley 5). Like the code of jiang hu in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the conservative society in Wyoming also constructs a frame for people to abide by. Since the social background is established on heterosexuality, to a certain degree it holds the "social prejudice" against the homosexuality (Strommen 11). This fixed frame serves as the main cause of characters' suffering in the movie since they are unable to get away from it. Family is included in this frame. Strommen analyzes that social stereotypes already creates negative images about homosexuals; therefore family has the heterosexual feature and influences its family members. Simply speaking, homosexuality does not fit the modes of "heterosexual reproduction" (Strommen 11).

political or religious statements. Please see my first chapter, where I discuss figure of authority in Greek tragedy.

When it comes to family, heterosexuality is the common recognized quality. As family has a significant influence on constructing heterosexuality on people's minds, homosexuality is eliminated from the family setting. In other words, the society tends to treat homosexuals as "solitary, deviant individuals" and rejects the possibility of blending homosexuality and family together (Strommen 12). Moreover, family also limits people in their daily life. To put it more plainly, the idea of family makes people feel they are under an obligation to fulfill in a heterosexual life. Whether in family or in society, people already have expectations in their minds, such as being a responsible husband or a successful businessman. As a result, people try to follow the settled rule. What people do is to satisfy the social expectation because they cannot afford to be cast out from this fixed frame.¹⁶

In Greek tragedy, family usually serves as the locale where conflicts occur. "Tragedy is a world in which the tensions which ordinarily beset family life are unbearably intensified. In marriages, ancient and modern, husbands and wives quarrel and even fight" (Buxton 171). Medea kills her own two young sons and poisons the bride to take revenge on Jason's betrayal; Clytemnestra slaughters Agamemnon for his sacrifice of their daughter. Simon Goldhill's similar proposition of family as the particular locale for Greek tragedy also corresponds to Buxton: "The hierarchical order of family and state is depicted in tragedy as a locus of tensions and conflict—tension and conflict between members of the same family and between the duties of civic and familial role" (123). According to Simon Goldhill, tragedy again and again collapses the discourse of social order, such as justice, power and the right thinking because Greek tragedy itself is a Dionysiac event. Again and again, tragedy

¹⁶ The confrontation of homosexuality and heterosexuality, and the construction of paternal authority and masculine ideology within a family have already been unfolded in *Wedding Banquet*.

dramatizes “conflicting obligations of household and state,” such as in *Antigone* (Goldhill 123). It portrays a man who reaches beyond “the bonds and norms of social behavior, portrays a universe of conflict, aggression, impasse” (Goldhill 124).

In *Brokeback Mountain*, Ennis and Jack were supposed to raise their respective heterosexual families and have heterosexual marriages. It is the unwritten rule and phenomenon in Wyoming at that time, and no one deviates from the track. From beginning to end, Ennis cannot accept his homosexual orientation and regards his relationship with Jack abnormal. He doubts himself and even blames Jack, saying “Well, why don't you? Why don't you just let me be? It's because of you Jack, that I'm like this! I'm nothin'... I'm nowhere.” What he was taught and raised by his family excludes this situation. He used to be certain at everything. However, his relationship with Jack makes him unfamiliar and weak. In addition, Ennis is deeply frightened by the scene of a battered gay's corpse beside the road when his father showed it to him. Perhaps since then he has perceived the hostility against homosexuality in this society:

Ennis. You ever get the feelin'... I don't know, er... when you're in town and someone looks at you all suspicious, like he knows? And then you go out on the pavement and everyone looks like they know too?

Unlike heterosexuals, homosexuals always undertake unbearable pressure from surroundings. Michael O'Neil in *Beyond Brokeback: The Impact of A Film* describes gay people's struggles while they have no choice but to hide themselves:

No man who is gay does not live in the closet, betraying the truth about himself, denying who he is by presenting himself as who he is not, often many times a day—in the bank, at the laundry, at the gas station, to a neighbor, to a stranger—not just for convenience but out of fear, mistrust, anxiety that is a low-grade constant, because no gay man has not seen the

hostility, not encountered the contempt at one time or another. (17)

Once again, it goes without saying that the mindset of cowboy culture in 1960s “cannot accept any man, especially a cowboy, who does not meet its definition of masculinity: to be strong, stoic, successful, and heterosexual. Both Jack and Ennis struggle to achieve manhood in an environment where men, perhaps because of a macho mentality, seem to be unable to express love” (Rose and Urschel 247).

Heterosexual society not only limits people in many ways but also frightens man-loving men in active hostility. Therefore, homosexual love becomes invisible to others. Furthermore, Boucher and Pinto, after inquiring into the historical background of Wyoming in the 1960s, conclude Ennis and Jack’s forbidden love in this way:

In effect, the problem of Ennis and Jack’s relationship was an historical one; in Ennis’ words, they would find trouble if their love took hold in the wrong times and wrong place they were unfortunate enough to inhabit. In many ways, the tragedy of Ennis and Jack was that they fell in love at the wrong time and in the wrong place. For this film Jack and Ennis’ love wasn’t the problem, rather, the political and social restrictions of rural Wyoming in the past were the source of their misery. (321)

Owing to homophobia, they both do what is expected—marriage. However, they both live a double life, being dishonest to their families. “The tension between their love and their everyday lives drove the film’s narrative, making any such return to normalcy impossible and providing an explanatory schema for each other’s character’s ultimately tragic trajectory” (Boucher and Pinto 312). On the one hand, they try to fulfill their duties in their families. Jack marries Lureen, working for Lureen and her father selling farm implements. Ennis still remains in his relationship with Alma and his daughters even after the divorce. On the other hand, they fail to establish an intimate relationship with their families due to the unspeakable love affair.

Richard Buxton analyzes in *Tragedy and Greek Myth* that Greek tragedy unfolds the status of in-betweenness (171). “Spaces between” are usually found in tragic characters’ state of minds. It is about “what constitutes being out of one’s right mind, and what the causes and effects of such a condition might be” (175). Thus tragic characters easily tend to fall into dilemma and are thus tormented. What’s more, individuals are therefore driven out of their usual frameworks. The harder they struggle to escape, the faster they collapse. The force of Apollo and Dionysus which explains Li Mu Bai’s situation can confirm this idea. Floyd writes that:

Man has two sides, each struggling to dominate him. One, personified by the Greek deity Apollo, the sun god, represents man’s rational nature: logic, order, discipline—qualities. Society is Apollonian in the laws it makes to legislate conduct, in its codes of morality, in its insistence on conformity. Dionysus, god of wine and fertility, signifies man’s irrational and highly emotional nature, his creative power, his free-spirited, uninhibited urges, what Nietzsche labeled the ‘dark’, tortured subterranean. (281)

The force of Apollo and Dionysus is a source of Ennis and Jack’s sufferings. The Apollonian force endows them with reason, and also social disciplines. The Dionysian force gives them the passion for each other. The two opposite forces tortures especially Ennis between the family and the society. In his family, Ennis realizes his responsibility and takes care of his wife and daughters. He attempts to fulfill his duty. However, after the reunion with Jack, Ennis no longer represses his desire of seeing Jack even when he still takes routine care of his family. Therefore his love becomes the destroyer of his family. Ennis’ personality is complicated because he always lingers between conventions and selfhood, struggling for a balance. As a result, Ennis, on the one hand, cannot completely leave his family behind; on the other hand, he is

unable to quit his relationship with Jack Twist. Nevertheless, no matter how hard Ennis tries, everything still spins out of control.

In tragedy, all characters suffer. Alma and Lureen are also victims of forbidden love. Ang Lee is scrupulous in displaying “the disappointment and despair of the women, their loss of joy and spirit” (Kitses 27). Alma counts as the first female who discovers this homosexual liaison. Due to the unfamiliarity of dealing this situation and not smashing her normal family, she backs away from the window and keeps emotion inside when she witnesses Ennis and Jack’s kissing on the stairs. With her sensitive and domestic personality, Alma endures and suffers so much that she represses the trauma brought by this homosexual affair inside. Her agony grows day by day and when Ennis quarrels with her about not making dinner, she leaves without looking back. Furthermore, not until the last moment after she divorces with Ennis does she completely burst out all her torment which has lasted for many years in front of Ennis. Unlike her docility in the past, for the first time she uses the word of “Jack Twist? Jack Nasty.” Her devotion to the family, long-termed repression towards her husband’s affair and internal breakdown reflects the grief and indignation of a wife who is cheated by her husband. Similar to Alma, Lureen also has quite a brief emotional burst-out at the last moment when she only realizes until then the whole truth about why Jack said Brokeback Mountain was his place and wanted his ashes to be scattered on it. When Lureen was young, everything for her was wonderful. She was enthusiastic and she pursued for what she loved. By the time she grows into an adult, she becomes more and more cynical and suspects that Jack has something hidden from her. “The scene where Jack’s wife Lureen makes a final phone-call to Ennis, the rage of love and hate on her face providing one of the film’s most startling and affecting moments” (Clarke 30). Even though Lureen confirms the suspicion in her mind, she, instead of accusing of Ennis, represses the agitation. Audiences are

only able to see the whole picture of her trauma slightly behind her plain voice and tears in her eyes.

Apart from fate, pain and suffering are also caused by characters' choices. Acting and choosing are tragic figures' responses to necessity. "Characters manifest themselves in the kinds of decisions they make, especially those decisions or mistakes that precipitate tragic suffering, and in the way they cope with the consequences" (Baxter 3-4). The ability of tragic characters' making a choice can be traced back to Aristotle's viewpoint of freedom. Most of time in tragedy such decision is fatal and leads to death:

The freedom that Aristotle thinks is germane to tragedy includes the freedom to make big mistakes. Such freedom is premised on a view of the dignity of a human nature that is not mechanically determined, either by the will of the gods or by an inherited and unalterably fixed disposition, and the soul of tragedy is the tracking of that freedom.

(Baxter 5)

In *Brokeback Mountain* the ethical choice has two layers: one, like that in *Hamlet*, is to be or not to be and the other is to go back or not to go back. The story background is set in Wyoming, where masculinity and conservative social values dominate. Homosexual love which happens in the wrong place and wrong time is doomed to be a tragedy, like an unchangeable destiny. While facing destiny, there are usually two ways to deal with it. One is to suffer and live on, which is the meaning of "to be," and the other is to die and to be against destiny, which is "not to be." Obviously Ennis represents the former and Jack the latter, and the consequence of struggling against fate leads to death.

In *Brokeback Mountain*, it is Ennis and Jack's homosexual love that is unaccepted by the masculine cow-boy culture. "Practical and conservative types of a

rough and ready manhood are by no means ready for man-love. It is precisely because their involvement is such an irrational and implausible event that it can elude easy categorization and is so persuasive and affecting” (Kitses 25). Being such afraid of transgression, the conservative society, like jiang hu in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, can never allow this unspeakable love affair to exist. However, if someone finds it easy to compromise, this story will not be a tragedy because his compromise can bring reconciliation with the impending conflicts. The starting-point of all tragic patterns, in Peter Burian’s view, is conflict. The so-called dramatic conflict exists between a tragic hero’s will and the external obstruction. Take *Antigone* as an example, Antigone’s strong will of burying her brother comes into conflict with Creon’s order as an external force. If Antigone is willing to reconcile with Creon and yield to his order, there won’t be any tragedy. If Phaedra determines to veil her eroticism toward Hippolytus, or Medea accepts Jason’s remarriage, it would be to negate these tragic figures’ very natures. In other words, insistence is a characteristic trait that brings about tragic conflict. In the film, *Jack Twist* is a romantic character who passionately embraces love. He defies all fixed rules, such as his refusal to the job arrangement and rules made by his boss. From this perspective, it implies that Jack also tend, to defy the fixed rule upon the impossibility of homosexual love. Therefore, his character attempts to challenge the rules and is willing to break through them. Furthermore, the behavior of eating canned beans and his will of scattering cremains in *Brokeback Mountain* indicate Jack’s inclination of maintaining control of his life, not being manipulated by anything else. But in fact, the ending shows that he cannot change any fixed rule and that turns Jack into a tragic character. Combining the elements of necessity, external force and assertive personality, Jack is destined to be the victim of the destiny, homosexual love, and his death, the tragic casualty, becomes an inexorable result.

In addition, while facing destiny, human beings' behavior has a serial process which involves how people make their choice. Ignoring is one kind of choices, and so is quitting. Of course Ennis's response to Jack's postcard is also one choice. Such behavior has certain sort of consistency and continuity which can be regarded as insistence. Similar to the case in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Lust, Caution*, behind such an insistence is a forced power affecting how characters make their decision. In *Brokeback Mountain* this powerful force is the mountain, the nature which is embodied and forms an intimate relation with the characters in the film. Ang Lee's film creation in *Brokeback Mountain* is that he turns nature into a character, and his way of doing so can be traced back to Hou Hsiao Hsien's *Dust in The Wind*. Hou Hsiao Hsien is well-known for his landscape shots, or so-called transitional shot, to convey the meaning of life. There is only landscape in the opening of *Dust in The Wind* and the sequential transitional shots are all about landscapes, mostly faraway mountains. The only background music is guitar but there is an arranged order in Hou Hsiao Hsien's landscape shots which are usually in extreme long shots: Scenery shows up first, and then people walk by, and the guitar sound comes the third. Hou's intention of delaying background music sometimes makes the landscape shots stand apart from diegetic drama and that is very similar to the beginning of *Brokeback Mountain*, which first starts with extremely long shots of mountains, a car driving by and guitar music coming out the last. The way of doing so seems to convert every impressive event that happens to every character into guitar music, even into an art. Both Hou and Lee try to make use of filmic image, which is landscape, and music to tell a story. What happens down there has been seen and wrapped within nature. In other words, Hou's and Lee's landscapes can tell everything, more than words can convey, and the only difference is their perspectives and the outcome. Hou Hsiao Hsien attempts to tell his audience that life is the accumulation of ordinary

experiences which usually involve uncertainties and emotional shifts. Although in some particular moments you may feel terribly painful, life is like a circle and everything will begin to fade eventually. As for Ang Lee, he intends to depict a sad story about “longing for lost love, for lost opportunity, and a bittersweet yearning for that impossible, unfinished love the two men shared” (Dilley 169). *Brokeback Mountain* enacts a role in itself, symbolizing Ennis and Jack’s desire and desperation for love, says Ang Lee. *Brokeback Mountain* is so haunted and mysterious that people will be unconsciously fascinated and cannot get rid of it. The time Ennis and Jack spend in the wild and the insistence on their love cannot ultimately be tolerated by necessity and can only exist in their memory.

The importance of nature lies in that Ang Lee not only portrays *Brokeback Mountain* as an extremely beautiful place but also makes it a sharp contrast to tough reality. Ang Lee recognizes in *A Journey of Ang Lee: from Breakback Mountain to Lust, Caution* the role of landscape by presenting its serenity, peace and vastness. He slightly tilts up the camera so as to show the magnificence of the sky, making audiences indulged in emotions which the film tries to convey, such as loneliness, grief and love. In order to express something abstract to audiences only through images, the landscape in *Brokeback Mountain* must be extremely superb. “Layers of blue mountain recede into the distance, overlooked by menacing stacks of cloud; a hillside wriggles with sheep; an undisturbed lake that stretches out before lack as he berates Ennis for falling to act on his feeling seems to represent the future the men will never have together” (Gibley 50). Sometimes landscape is beyond beauty to become the sublime that it is a convincing filmic construction and possess as a beckoning force to seduce Ennis and Jack to go back. Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, compliments Ang Lee’s craft in his “The Formal Design of *Brokeback Mountain*” in handling natural scenery in the very first paragraph:

One of the most striking aspects of Ang Lee's achievement in *Brokeback Mountain* [...] is the way he squares unweaving verisimilitude with visuals of remarkable beauty and finesse. Almost every frame [...] is beautifully assembled [...] first in the termination of the cliff toward which the sheep are moving in the first aerial shot of them, then in Ennis's hat brim, then in the escarpment edge in the shot that follows and then in the unfocused branch across the following scene. (2)

This is the sublime beauty in landscapes, just like that in *Dust in The Wind*. "Hou Hsiao Hsien's unstained and innocent countryside is usually portrayed as the embodiment of deception, corruption, and exploitation" (Tay 155). Contrary to spacious suburb scenery in Jioufen, characters' living quarters are like being caged in a crowded city life. For example, in A-Yun's work place, she always talks to A-Yuan through a barred window.

Jim Kitses probes in detail into the so-called "Mountain literature" which defines "the extremes of ideology that have been influential in shaping understanding of such landscape" as in *Brokeback Mountain* (25). As far as he is concerned, "mountains are like the oceans, aggressively visible and yet mysterious in offering a variety of meaning--threat, challenge, spectacle, the eternal" (25). It sounds like there are endless possibilities in the mountains without boundary or social constraint. While spending time together on mountains, within that sealed environment there are only Ennis and Jack galloping on horses traversing their own world. No matter how many times they go up there, these two characters, along with audiences, can still perceive the power of nature which "naturalizes" not only Ennis and Jack but also audiences. "The isolation of the wilderness and the utter loneliness of their lives both make possible the love that overwhelms these two men and also renders it intelligible, for us if not them. In open range, feelings, gender, and sexuality cannot be fenced in or

legislated. What is sinful or perverted or deviant in the natural world, the world of the sublime?” writes Kitses (25). What Kitses mentions happens to correspond to Anne Proulx’s point about natural scenery: “In such isolated country, away from opprobrious comment and watchful eyes, I thought it would be plausible for the characters to get into a sexual situation. That’s nothing new or out of the ordinary; livestock workers have a blunt and full understanding of the sexual behaviors of man and beast” (131). To some extent, scenery plays a role which not only internalizes characters but also reflects characters’ state of mind. Here the connotation of what Kitses and Proulx have implied that as long as human beings go into wilderness, they will be spontaneously affected by the power of nature beyond the limit of time and space, releasing their inner desire which has been smothered by social and moral codes. Outside the wilderness is the world governed by a homophobic society. This sense of feeling “macho drives and fears” is best illustrated by the opening scene of Ennis and Jack’s first meeting, where both of them purposefully avoid giving the direct eye contact on each other, constructing Ennis’ self-denial of being queer (24). Later on, even though their encounter on Brokeback Mountain has left an indelible mark on Ennis’ heart, as soon as the herding job is over, Ennis still gets married to Alma, burying in mind everything that has happened between him and Jack despite his vomit by the roadside, feeling like mourning for the loss of his Brokeback Mountain.

In *Brokeback Mountain*, the real world out there, the community, or society in Wyoming is dominated by masculine values but also, according to Anne Proulx, holds subliminal fantasies¹⁷. Whereas the surrounding is pastoral and poetic, people like

¹⁷ The definition of fantasy is noted in Freud’s work as a fulfillment of a wish, and is usually related to desire. There are different levels of fantasies, and one of them is called unconscious fantasy which seems to be subliminal, and not necessarily

Ennis and Jack still have a hard time making for a living on this barren land. What's worse, these two cowboys rarely expose their homosexual relationship to this patriarchal system. Mountains or wilderness not only unlock their transformative experiences but also offer a savage joy and ecstasy which afterwards become a life-long haunting memory. After Ennis receives the postcard from Jack, mountains become their transient and precious reunion. It is only in the cloistered wilderness that Ennis can briefly stop struggling against the fact that he is homosexual, and Jack is able to acquire Ennis' authentic love. Only by being situated in the wilderness can both of them truly be who they are without restraint or social expectation towards them. To some extent, the mountains and wilderness serve as a place where Ennis and Jack "are isolated geographically and emotionally" from moral or social restrictions (Dilley 5). Whenever mountain camping comes to wind up, they both will return to reality playing the role of the father in the family. Compared with herding sheep up to mountain meadows and the image of Ennis on the horseback, "dimensions of crowded kitchens, closets, trailers, and window-framed views" not only reduce Ennis' spirit of freedom on mountains but also project social cruelty in front of the audiences (26). Ostensibly, the boundary between desolate wilderness and Wyoming community slices into two different and contrasting realms: fantasy and reality, fulfillment of

reflexively apparent. Moreover, Freud suggests that certain unconscious fantasies are related to unconscious wishes or desire. As Freud analyzed, if desire is articulated through fantasy, then fantasy itself is a mediator between protagonists, and their wishes, and the negation of acting on their desires in reality. All in all, fantasy functions as desire, an escape from reality through an imaginary scene representing the fulfillment of a wish. In the case of *Brokeback Mountain*, Ennis and Jack obviously hold a subliminal fantasy representing their wishes to escape from the strict society and their impoverished lives. And Ang Lee, through the medium of this film and the filmic language, vividly presents such an abstract object.

personal desire and responsibility of individual burden. The natural beauty of landscapes in the film hence features the tragic figures' poignancy. It is obvious that Ennis does his best to find a balance between two opposites. Even though they desperately try to quit this relationship, they hardly succeed and will never get rid of "this thing" as they always call their homosexual love. However, unlike Ennis, Jack is always the one who hopes for the future and waits. When he finally realizes the impossibility of living a life with Ennis, he bursts out his anger:

"Tell you what, we coulda had a good life together! Fuckin' real good life! Had us a place of our own. But you didn't want it, Ennis! So what we got now is Brokeback Mountain! Everything's built on that! That's all we got, boy, fuckin' all. So I hope you know that, even if you don't never know the rest! You count the damn few times we have been together in nearly twenty years and you measure the short fucking leash you keep me on - and then you ask me about Mexico and tell me you'll kill me for needing somethin' I don't hardly never get. You have no idea how bad it gets! I'm not you... I can't make it on a coupla high-altitude fucks once or twice a year! You are too much for me Ennis, you son of a whoreson bitch! I wish I knew how to quit you."

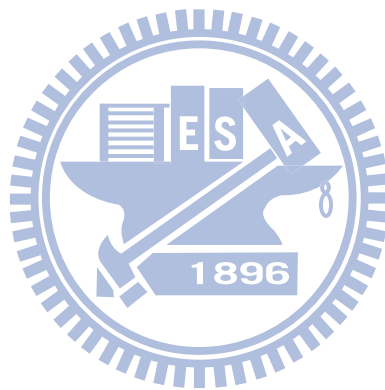
Jack refers that all he and Ennis have is just memory. The first experience on Brokeback Mountain sets that parameter of their relationship. Ennis cannot dismantle heterosexual opinions from the society. Jack's optimistic dream for them is unrealistic for Ennis. The balance they find is solitary and irreversible love with one or two exceptions a year. This shivering confession also expresses their dilemma of whether to quit or not.

Therefore whether to go back or not becomes another ethical choice of quitting the force which Ennis and Jack drives them back to their tabooed love. However, they cannot resist this force since they have already tasted how sweet it is to fall in love

within such a seductive landscape. But their insistence on love is destined to be tragic since homosexual love cannot take place in such a society and in such a place. The only way they can do is either to suffer or to deceive themselves, just as what Ennis says, “if you can’t fix it, you have to stand it.” This is how necessity works in this way: once someone doesn’t buy it, then tragedy occurs, like Jack as the victim of the choice of “not to be.” As for the one who survives, Ennis not only carries the grievous consequence of Jack’s death but is also left behind, alone. “The only thing he has left to keep his company for the rest of his life are the two old shirts, soiled, entwined, and quietly closeted for years, that he salvages from Jack’s sparse belongings” (Chow 199). The ending of the film fits in with the reconciliation of “late learning” which is one of the common patterns in Greek tragedy (Burian 182). Such reconciliation reveals the fact that the realization comes too late. For example, in *Antigone*, Creon recognizes his mistakes only after he has resulted in Antigone’s death and Haemon and Eurydice’s suicide. Theseus finally learns about his unjust accusation of Hippolytus, and Hippolytus forgives him before he dies, but it is too late.

The ending is full of tragicness, regret, loss and love. There is so much emotional wave to say but Ang Lee, analogous to what Hou Hsiao Hsien does in *Dust in The Wind*, turns everything into Ennis’ sobbing voice of “Jack, I swear...” and leaves everything to a lingering shot of a framed scenery throughout the window. However, regret and late learning do not alter the tragic ending. Jack’s death by the same token cannot relieve Ennis from their forbidden love. On the contrary, Ennis is left alone and still indulged in the relationship. All in all, “the movie is about longing for lost love, for lost opportunity, and bittersweet yearning for that impossible, unfinished love the two men shared. Ennis blames his lover, for he could never move on his life and failed his marriage. Jack blames himself for never quitting this love” (Dilley 13). Everything Ennis and Jack has experienced, like endurance, anguish, pain,

fear, shame, desire, loneliness, humiliation, ethical choices and injustice, results from love which in many ways is doomed and unacceptable.



Chapter 5

Conclusion

These three films, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Lust, Caution*, and *Brokeback Mountain*, present the essence of Greek tragedy in the modern way. Almost all of Ang Lee's works follow the formula of going from conflicts to solutions. Ang Lee converts the conflicting elements in melodramas into social obligations, proprieties, conservative values which repress humanity and emotions, while Western films often consider violence as the only solution to all conflicts. Lee's repression is mostly experienced by those who are raised in Confucianism. Beginning with the father trilogy, what Ang Lee portrays is the confrontation between two opposite values, tradition and modernity under all kinds of authority figures. In his interview with Michael Berry in "Freedom in Film," Ang Lee recognizes that such a conflicting element is essential to his works:

Up until today, I think one thing I have always been exploring through my work is the concept of freedom against social propriety. It is not merely someone putting a force upon you, but you putting a force upon yourself... Other than that, as long as you are still dealing with people, you are enslaved in a relationship. (Berry 355)

Ang Lee's outlook on his characters mainly pictures how they try to do things right and survive in their daily life while various collisions arise. As a matter of fact, Ang Lee himself is aware of the meaning of "collision" since he lives in a Chinese environment and that is something that cannot change. Meanwhile, he receives education in filmmaking in the West. These two opposite backgrounds are interwoven together when he makes a film. Whether in real life or in film, Lee attempts to strike a balance between different cultures. During the process of achieving mutual

understanding, there are always conflicts occurring. However, Lee does not mean to criticize any culture or value system, but examines the differences which may help us to adjust to what is difficult to comply with every culture.

Ang Lee's success in Hollywood proves that his attention to conflicting elements is not only confined to time and space, but also deals with the critical issue human beings face. Within these three films, Ang Lee explains that in fact everyone's bitterest battle comes from the individual desire being smothered by the dominant collective value. Compared with heroic events, a person's inner struggle and restrained fantasy make one suffer more. Thus when Ang Lee peels away characters' inner suppression layer by layer, there would be a critical scene in each of his films in which all oppressed emotions burst out. Since such a conflict struggling between two opposite forces dwells permanently in human nature, the solution to all sufferings and confrontations seem to be even more inconceivable. In the Father Trilogy, conflicts are solved on account of a certain compromise. Yet when a compromise cannot be reached, as in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Lust, Caution*, and *Brokeback Mountain*, where personal desire cannot be satisfied, everything ends up with tragedy.

To conclude on the characteristic of Greek tragedy, we know a tragedy depicts a tragic protagonist, mostly a hero, who suffers some serious misfortune which is logically connected with the character's actions. Furthermore, it also stresses human vulnerability brought by a combination of human and divine actions. However, some features of ancient Greek tragedy have been modified to fit the modern settings. Arthur Miller's essay "Tragedy and the Common Man" argues that tragedy may also depict ordinary people in domestic surroundings. He believes that "the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were" (1461). It is this belief that causes Miller to use a common man, Willie Loman, as the main character of his tragedy, *Death of a Salesman*. Ang Lee has indeed employed these ingredients

in these three films in which tragic protagonists are ordinary like the audience so that we are able to identify with their dilemma and unspeakable grief. Hence Ang Lee uses a large number of close-up shots to allow audiences to observe those characters' inner struggles beneath the veil of reason and obligation. For example, in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the camera follows Li Mu Bai and Jen steadily when they fight in the bamboo grove, and their fixed gaze at each other obviously reveals this unordinary affection between a man and a woman. In *Lust, Caution*, most close-up shots center on Wang Chia Chih. Whether in the secret chamber, during the sexual intercourse, or in the jewelry shop, we are able to perceive all kinds of Wang's feelings, such as pain, tenderness, struggling, love and so on. In *Brokeback Mountain*, Ennis is the only one who turns his back to the camera. We audiences hardly get to probe into his inner state of mind, but we can intensely sense that Ennis is trying to conceal his personal emotion both from the camera and from other characters. It is after Jack's death that Ennis starts to confront the camera and reveals his love and regret to this bittersweet relationship. The way in which the camera is used in these three films expresses the vulnerability of humankind while falling in love. What Ang Lee tries to convey through his eye and camera is universally understandable, which does not categorize his films as gay films or *wuxia* film, but as Ang Lee films which represent a life style and attitude toward life.

Although *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Lust, Caution, and Brokeback Mountain* occur in different time periods, social backgrounds and cultures, there is a common ground which causes them to become a tragedy: an individual who escapes from a powerfully structured collectivity. Such a collectivity is sometimes presented as a family, sometimes as the *jiang hu*, the nation, or the society. Living within this fixed frame, humankind is unavoidably affected by disorder, rebellion, and impulsion. Most of the time, we are educated to defend the public interest and take the

community as our first priority. Whenever personal behavior contradicts with collective welfare, we are obligated to abolish any thought of self. It is a common belief but does not apply to everyone, however, particularly to the tragic protagonists. Abandoning the self might please the majority, but life would become flat and insipid. No one can ever instruct another which way to choose; all you can do is to follow your heart. Hence tragic figures are born: they emerge as they refuse to surrender themselves to fate or social obligations. In the end of these films, every character learns to face up to their heart and love. Li Mu Bai confesses his feeling which he has never revealed before; Jen jumps off the cliff for a faithful heart to make her dreams come true; Wang Chia Chih gives her life to acquire love; Ennis eventually mourns for Jack's death and lives in eternal regret.

Except for characters' actions, everything else is destined in a tragedy. Once people are forced to make a choice, they will find out that there are limited options. More specifically, no matter what the tragic figures choose, the outcome is foredoomed. Hence characters in tragedy usually decide in favor of their own pathos, just like what Hegel comments in his essay *The Phenomenology of Spirit*:

Modern characters, on the other hand, stand in a wealth of more accidental circumstances, within which one could act this way or that, so that the conflict which is, though occasioned by external preconditions, still essentially grounded in the character. The new individuals, in their passions, obey their own nature...simply because they are what they are.

(Hegel 567)

Every decision made or every action taken reflects the tragic subjects' authentic emotion. To demonstrate characters' logical behavior, Ang Lee introduces accidental causality to function as a turning point to affect their state of mind. The way Ang Lee portrays tragic characters does not mean to criticize their behaviors

or condemn the collective system. Rather, he holds a lot of sympathy toward these characters. In the case of *Lust, Caution*, in the last scene he conjures up Mr. Yee's humanity. No matter how ruthless this man can be, he appears fragile when it comes to the losses of love. Furthermore, although Ang Lee indeed sympathizes with his tragic protagonists, he does not intend to pass an ethical judgment or challenge the system. Tragedy in Ang Lee's films, on the one hand, arouses audiences' sympathy, and on the other hand, does not deny collectivity. Such a tolerant attitude can be perceived in his interview in "Freedom in film," where both self-desire will and culture have great influence on him:

I had a lot of guilt that I didn't follow his [my father's] path. Instead I became the funny guy who wanted to make movies. And somehow that has become my creative force, and the irony of how I see the world. It is not that I set out to believe in, but what I see is something different [from what others see]. That comes with the Nationalist regime, that whole Chinese cultural influence in Taiwan and the social structure. That is what I grew up with, and I cannot really get out of it... You try to get as far away as you can, but somehow you always come back. That is the impact of my father. (Berry 329)

The essence of traditional Chinese morals and ethics which deeply affect Ang Lee and people in Asia mainly originates from Confucianism. Confucianism emphasizes the order and system of social hierarchy. Confucianism also allows and forbids what we should do or should not do. It is the law that we live by. Collectivity like this constructs a set of system which builds our lives and vice versa. These moral codes can be seen as part of us cannot therefore be taken away. Nietzsche's theory of Apollonian and Dionysiac forces correspond well to this ambiguity inside humankind. Rationality and ecstasy usually dominate our state of mind and are constantly in

conflict. However, neither of them can be abandoned because they are part of our spirits. It is just that at some point people would fantasize what other options or paths in life might be like. Sometimes such a personal desire could torment people and these three films examine such a psychological issue inside human beings to some extent. Jen is born in a traditional and patriarchal family, but she longs to roam freely in the world of *jiang hu*; Li Mu Bai tries to reach the ultimate goal of acquiring the Tao, but he fails as he is still confined to Confucian morality. Wang Chia Chih strives to find something lacking in her heart even though she almost accomplishes her mission; Ennis still seizes every opportunity of staying with his daughters even though Jack drives all the way to see him. To describe such an intense human emotion is part of what Lee's films convey. In reality, we may not have a chance to make a choice that leads us to a tragic end, but maybe films like this is actually one authentic way to fulfill our romantic fantasy about tragedy and love. After examining these three films, I believe that there might be a hidden dragon, a pink diamond ring, or Brokeback Mountain, which represents emotional repression inside us. That is the hardest part to tame even though normal people identify more with the role models like Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien.

These three films are not involved in complicated plots, but indicate that there are two sides to everything, and emotional entanglement cannot be so easily explained away. The main issue haunting us here is love. It is believed that falling for someone you do not know is possible and it occurs everywhere. Walter Benjamin and Aristotle both mention the coincidence which influences protagonists at the crucial moment. Under the function of coincidence, protagonists will possibly take another path which is opposite to the original plan. In terms of love, at some particular moment, location, or just one glance, love shows up without any warning. Since it happens out of a sudden, it is too late for us to resist it. Moreover, love can bring

people happiness, but also extreme suffering. Thus it always challenges humankind and seems to be unavailable. The more you try to reach it, the more you get hurt. For Li Mu Bai, Wang Chia Chih, Ennis and Jack, love is not only a motivation or result to their choices, but a process which embodies individual spirit. Only this kind of love can be inscribed on our minds. In tragedy, love does occur, only that it happens in the wrong place and at the wrong time.



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