

Rupture or Transformation

-- The survival dilemma of the new citizens in the 1980s through the lens of Chi Li's *Troubled Life*

Jingjing Huang*

College of Humanities, Hangzhou Normal University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 311121, China

*hjjmzmc@163.com

Abstract: This article analyzes the existential dilemmas of the new citizen class in the 1980s through the life dilemmas of Yin, Jiahou, the protagonist of Chi, Li's novel *A Troubled Life*. Facing the multiple pressures of husband and wife, father-son relationship and career development, Yin, Jiahou reflects the identity dilemma of the new citizens in urban life. Meanwhile, starting from the clues of his son, Yin, Lei, and his house, he explores the problems of rupture and transformation faced by the new citizens during the period of social transformation. Under the background of reform and opening up, the new citizens both harbor aspirations for a better life and face existential dilemmas, presenting a complex and multidimensional state of existence. This is not only a personal predicament, but also an inevitable product of the transformation of the times.

Keywords: *Troubled Life*; Chi, Li; Existential Dilemma; New Citizen.

1. Introduction

Troubled Life takes a day in the life of Yin, Jiahou as the main axis of the story, and vividly depicts the image of an ordinary and troubled citizen and his dreary and helpless mental outlook through the various life troubles he faces due to the change of his social identity. The work meticulously shows the minutiae of an ordinary man's life in a day. The purpose of this paper is to start from the inescapable helplessness and troubles in real life experienced by Yin, Jiahou, the protagonist of the novel *Troubled Life*, as well as the frustrations and difficulties he encounters in the ideal world, and to analyze in-depth the existential difficulties faced by the new citizen class in the 1980s as reflected behind these appearances of life. We try to explore the real face of the citizens' life in this period, whether they are on the verge of rupture, or looking for a new way out in the transition?

2. Yin, Jiahou: Conflict and Struggle in the Pursuit of Identity

2.1. Conflict between the Roles of Husband and Wife

Chi, Li's Yin, Jiahou is first and foremost portrayed as a husband who is the main breadwinner of his family. Despite being a man, he is unable to fulfill his family's desire for housing and his wife's desire for a better life due to his limited financial means. In daily family life, Yin, Jiahou is unable to fulfill the promise he made to his wife when they got married, and has to rent a small house in a chaotic and cramped environment, which inadvertently weakens his dominant position in the family. At the same time, outside of his marriage, Mr. Yin also faces temptation many times, as the three young and beautiful women, Yali, Xiao Xiaohui, and Nie Ling, all make his heart flutter. However, as a married man, his social role and moral norms have always bound him to take up the responsibilities and burdens of his family.

2.2. Father and Son

In Chi, Li's novel *Troubled Life*, the emotional bond

between Yin, Jiahou and his son stands out. The day's story begins when his son accidentally falls out of bed due to the small living space, and his son's existence becomes a source of hope and confidence for Yin, Jiahou to regain his life. However, as a father, Yin, Jiahou is unable to educate his son. He fails to answer his son's questions about "sleeping in a cage", teaches his son to lie to his wife, and chooses to ignore his son's behavior of shooting at others with a machine gun toy, but deliberately shows a kindly manner to his son when facing Xiao Xiaohui, the kindergarten teacher whose appearance resembles that of his first love.

Obviously, there are obvious deficiencies in the fulfillment of the father's educational duties by Yin, Jiahou. But despite this, he devoted most of his time and energy to his son's daily care, doing his best to fulfill the responsibilities of a father. People like Yin, Jiahou, they are the bearers of the pain of reform, but also the most direct experience of the economic transition, market competition in the sadness and joy and [1]. The backwardness of concepts and endless work lead to this contradiction between the distribution of family roles and the assumption of educational responsibilities.

2.3. Employees and Units

On the ferry ride to the kindergarten with his son, Yin's first encounter with his coworkers also unveils the mystery of this group of colleagues to the reader. Although deep down in his heart, Yan Jiahou harbors a deep-seated dislike for the factory and his colleagues, which has been repeatedly observed by the readers in his previous psychological activities, the chance meeting on the ferry gives the readers a glimpse of a group of colleagues who are different from him. However, the chance meeting with the ferry allows the reader to see another side of the story that is different from what he had imagined. The beautiful female coworker who takes care of Yin, Jiahou's son, Yin, Lei, as well as the male coworkers who appreciate Yin's poetic talent, such as Xiao Bai, all show that they are not bad human beings. However, as soon as he enters the factory, bad luck follows him. The first prize he thought he could win was downgraded to a third prize, and his apprentice Yali's unexpected confession puts him in a dilemma.

What's more, the factory manager's suspicion and the spurning of a few female coworkers who are "traitors" to him come one after the other. Yin, Jiahou's diligent work did not exchange due material returns, but instead attracted the risk, suspicion and isolation. He works diligently, but is reduced to an unpopular employee in the workplace. This contradiction between hard work and reward has brought India Jiahou unspeakable frustration and a sense of loss. When he sent his son Lei Lei to kindergarten, the kindergarten aunty said, "There are too many monks and not enough meat, how can we make it? This is the confusion faced by Yin, Jiahou, who thought that the ultimate answer to the problem was to work hard to achieve success, but the reality was different.

3. An Inquiry based on a Double Trail: Harbinger of Social Rupture or Inevitable Stage of Transition?

The role conflict between husband and wife, the lack of father's responsibility for education, the conflict between effort and reward, all these conflicts bring endless confusion and bewilderment to Yin, Jiahou, where will it lead him to? After his eyes have adapted to the darkness, he realizes that the darkness is not so dark. This is the answer of Yin, Jiahou, and also the answer of the times. It is difficult to glimpse the dawn of hope in the pitch-black streets dotted around, yet the faint and flickering lights seem to herald the existence of hope in the gloom

3.1. Starting with My Son, Indre.

The son, Yin,Lei, can be said to be a kind of spiritual projection of the main character, Yin, Jiahou, who in his mouth has almost exactly the same appearance as his father, and also has similar experiences with his father. When Yin, Lei first entered kindergarten, the aunts complained about his "temporary account", while Yin, Jiahou also has the story of the youths returning to the city, where he did not have his own house, but had to rent a cramped, temporary hut, and was even ridiculed and teased by the neighbors in the rented room. And the son of Yin, Lei also has a clear difference with Yin, Jiahou, he dares to do everything that Yin, Jiahou thought but did not dare to do, do everything that Yin, Jiahou can not do. When seeing his son's back on the side of the ship, Yin, Jiahou thinks of how the Yangtze River always pushes the waves ahead, and how the prospect is finally an attractive color. Both of the two bridges in the middle of the "Troubled Life" have rekindled Yan Jiahou's hope and confidence in life. When he takes his son, Yin, Lei, to the kindergarten, he squeezes into a bus, and while he doesn't say a word in the face of the accusation that he is a pervert, Yin, Lei dares to stand up for his father, who is accused of being a pervert. This made Yin, Jiahou secretly happy in his heart, in his imagination, he did exactly as he did. Even his son's behavior did not result in bad consequences; it turns out that there is another way in life besides compromise.

The second time is the Indian Jiahou pick up his son from kindergarten home, the road met Indian Lei's kindergarten classmates Xin Xin, Xin Xin's mother sympathized with Indian Lei running around to catch up with the difficulties, so that the Indian family will be put in their own home occasionally to take care of the Indian Lei, Indian Jiahou readily agreed. In this incident, Yin, Jiahou clearly notices a change in himself, from a man who never easily talks to women and does not easily accept others' sympathy to a different direction. Similarly, when we look at the two

characters in this incident, Yin, Lei and Yin, Jiahou, in contrast, Yin, Jiahou is on the weaker side of the rental house neighborhood, being cut in line and ridiculed. While the son was able to Xin Xin in the first day of kindergarten will conclude a deep friendship, and even let Xin Xin mother to speak out to help. The reason for this is that Yin, Lei and Xin Xin are young and get along with each other in the first place to the exclusion of many other factors, and the second is that Yin, Lei's own personality is lively and cheerful, good at making friends.

Continuing with the above statement that his son Yin, Lei is a spiritual projection of Yin, Jiahou and what Yin, Jiahou said before he left his home that he seemed to have had a very long dream about his family, there seems to be a very mysterious connection between Yin, Lei and Yin, Jiahou, and that Yin, Lei is more like Yin, Jiahou himself, or the future direction of Yin, Jiahou. Whether it is said that Yin,Lei is the spiritual projection of Yin, Jiahou or that Yin,Lei is himself, we can see the integration of these new citizens with the city, which precisely proves that the conflicts faced by Yin, Jiahou do not represent the breakup and disintegration of the society, but rather an inevitable way of the social transition period.

3.2. Let's Start with the House.

House can be said to be throughout the "troubled life" the whole novel a clue, we can see the beginning of the story son Yin, Lei will be because of Yin, Jiahou rented the cramped house can only sleep in the narrow folding beds fell off the bed injured triggered a family conflict. The topic of the house is also the unspeakable pain of Yin, Jiahou, who was one of the candidates who could be allocated a house in the factory, and he promised his wife so, but the reality is not satisfactory, which is one of the reasons why he hates working in the factory, and also one of the biggest conflicts between him and his wife.

The story ends with the impending demolition of their small house, leaving the family without a place to live. When he hears the news, he first hides it from his wife and tries to find a way out on his own, but of course in the middle of it, he is filled with anxiety and the desire to destroy himself. But when he realized that his wife had already known the news and had found another house to rent and was willing to ride out the storm with him, he burst into tears. From the details in the article, we can know that Yin, Jiahou's salary is more than ninety dollars a day, his son's food cost is three dollars a day, and the rent of the small house found by his wife is more than thirty dollars a month. It can be expected that the couple's future life is almost not enough to make ends meet, and Yin, Jiahou himself must have done a calculation, in the face of such enormous economic pressure, it is reasonable to sit up and down, anxious and difficult to sleep. But at the end of the story, Yin, Jiahou fell asleep at ease.

In the traditional Chinese mindset, having one's own house is the only way to have real peace of mind, even in today's society. However, from the perspective of the social environment at that time, a large number of Zhiqing returned to the city, and not having a house of their own can be said to be inevitable. This is also a problem that this group of new citizens who want to stay and work in the city have to face. Does this mean that they have a hard time integrating into the city, or does it mean that there is a break in society? Although Yin, Jiahou can only rent in other people's small houses and even face the plight of displacement, it is difficult for him to have a sense of belonging to the city and society. However,

the peaceful sleep of Yan Jiahou shows us that the power of family can make people forget the pain of displacement and regain confidence in their lost lives. The end of belonging to the city and the society is not the concept of a material house, but a family. Yin, Jiahou's eventual return to his family shows us this, and lets us see a bright future on the road to social transformation.

3.3. An Analysis of the Existential Dilemma of New Citizens in the Perspective of History and Social Development in the 1980s

In the 1980s, with the deepening of reform and opening-up, Chinese society ushered in a period of unprecedented transformation. During this period, the process of urbanization accelerated, and a large number of people poured into the cities, becoming the so-called "new citizens". These new citizens have taken root in the peripheral areas of the city, and they are faced with the desire for a better life as well as the difficulties of survival, and Yin, Jiahou is one of them. They are free to stay or go, one step forward to become a new citizen, one step backward to return to the farmers, they do not understand the city, and they have not experienced the full baptism of socialist civilization [2].

From a historical point of view, the 1980s was a critical period in the transformation of Chinese society from traditional to modern. The traditional agricultural society gradually gave way to industrialization and urbanization, and this transition brought both opportunities and challenges to the new citizens. On the one hand, they could obtain more employment opportunities and a higher standard of living by entering the cities; on the other hand, they had to face the pressures and uncertainties of urban life. Yin, Jiahou's income of more than ninety dollars a month from his factory job and his son Yin, Lei's daily allowance of milk and cookies were already ahead of most people, but the difficulties faced behind this high income were also enormous.

In terms of social development, the urbanization process in the 1980s was a process full of contradictions and conflicts. The construction of urban infrastructure and public service systems lagged behind the rate of population growth, resulting in new citizens facing enormous pressure in housing, education, and health care. Yin, Jiahou's family of three can only rent in other people's houses, and his son, Yin, Lei, has

to catch buses and ferries with him in order to go to kindergarten. At the same time, due to the restrictions of the household registration system, the identity and social status of new citizens in the city are also affected. This is the case with Yin, Jiahou and his son, Yin, Lei, the former of whom is teased by a neighbor's grandpa and the latter of whom is complained about by his kindergarten aunts because he is a "temporary household member". They are often regarded as "second-class citizens" in the city, and are discriminated against in terms of employment and social security. When we put aside these social backgrounds, we may not understand Yin, Jiahou's confusion and wandering, and we may wonder if Yin, Jiahou is not just Yin, Jiahou. "In the daily life of the individual, however, he is not directly associated with a class; the individual does not possess his class norms, his class demands, or his class-set sphere in this direct relationship." [3].

It is against the backdrop of the plight of these new citizens in the 1980s that writer Chi, Li's *The Troubled Life* tells a story about "caring". In an age of materialization and technologization, what it promotes is a spirit of "cultural care": for the strong, care for their souls; for the weak, care for their survival [4].

4. Conclusion

Generally speaking, through the perspective of the new citizen "Yin, Jiahou" for a day, we can see the survival difficulties of the new citizens in the 1980s, but these difficulties do not mean a social rupture, but witness an inevitable trend of social transformation.

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