

Chinese Men's Marital Violence Related To Hegemonic Masculinity -- The Case Of *Night And Fog*

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Abstract

Connected with Raewyn Connell's concepts, this article showed how marital violence was illuminated through hegemonic masculinity in contemporary Chinese society. It is well-known that China is a patriarchal country where the men's dominant status of society is unshakeable. To some extent, male supremacy is equal to social acquiescence of men's violent behaviours, which are represented in the form of marital violence to wives in heterosexual families. Though China is in modern society nowadays, the phenomenon still exists that men use violence against women. Night and Fog (Ann, 2009), a Chinese fact-based movie, was taken as a case study in this review to portray the reasons of the formation of hegemonic masculinity in marital violence. According to the findings, it is visible that the influencing factors including men's characteristics and thoughts, women's attitudes and cultural identities in local society. In addition, several measures also were cited to improve this phenomenon, incorporating the field of private family and society. Through an in-depth analysis, this study aims to develop healthy masculinity for men and reduce marital violence, as well as promote gender equity from regional areas to the world.

Keywords: *Hegemonic masculinity; Raewyn Connell; Chinese marital violence; Night and Fog; gender*

1. INTRODUCTION

Marital violence is not simply a matter of a few isolated incidents but is a relatively serious social problem in contemporary China. Although people are now in modern society, this phenomenon still exists in some regional areas. Some researches by Chinese scholars and the Women's Federation proved that the phenomenon of men's violence against their wives was still widespread and common (Fang, 2011: 58).

In view of this, combined with Connell's thoughts, this article tries to illuminate the reasons why men tend to have such attitudes or behaviours in the family. Since Raewyn Connell defined the sociological concept of hegemonic masculinity (2005b: 77), many scholars have paid attention to this field and cited the thoughts into their studies. Merry, for example, deemed that one of the factors of

violence against women was linked to the images of masculinity and power (2011: 70). Actually, relevant research is just in the early stage in China. There are few researchers who have studied hegemonic masculinity, such as Fang Gang, the earliest initiator and practitioner of the study on masculinity and men's movement in China. He included the relations of violence between masculinity into his research, especially cited Connell's concepts in his books and connected them to Chinese present situations. He assumed that a man who tends to present the feature of hegemonic masculinity was prone to use violence, particularly in heterosexual families. Apart from that, he also emphasized that men's violent hegemony was partly related to their masculinity (Fang, 2017). In fact, most of the relevant literature in China are analysed in the sociological domain, therefore, it is necessary to consider the combination of the knowledge of sociology and other fields, such as media and culture.

Hence, the article selects a fact-based movie (*Night and Fog*) as a case study and tries to explore the specific representation in particular character who has the tendency of hegemonic masculinity. This movie states a tragedy that a man uses violence to his wife frequently that leads to the death of his wife and the breakdown of their family eventually. Tracing the reason for the fact tragedy, there are several influencing factors. By drawing on the thoughts of Connell and Fang, it was observed that there were some relations between marital violence and men's temperament of hegemony. The factors that will cause marital violence is complex, not only include husbands' hegemonic masculinity, but also involve wives' attitudes and cultural cognition in society.

Traditional Chinese thoughts should not be neglected nowadays. In the male-dominated society characterized by "men's superiority to women", women are deemed as the attachments of men and had a lower family status (Deng & Fang, 2017: 146). In some way, it is identified that marital violence (especially men to women) have connected with husband's hegemonic masculinity. In light of these, several corresponding solutions are also listed in this article to improve this sort of condition in contemporary society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

All societies have their cultural definitions of gender, however, might not have the concept of "masculinity". The term emphasizes that one's behaviours are rooted in what kind of person he or she is. In other words, Connell argued that a masculine person would behave like being violent rather than peaceable, dominating instead of conciliatory and being interested in sexual conquest (2005b: 67). She said that normative definitions provided a norm that masculinity is what men ought to be (Connell, 2005b: 70). Similarly, positivist social science embraces this notion that masculinity is what men actually are (Connell, 2005b: 69). Apart from that, Connell also mentioned the idea of "male sex role". The strict sex role theory regards masculinity as a social criterion for men's behaviours. According to this theory, similarly, boys are "socialized" to be masculine and they are trying to obey the social stereotype of machismo (Breines, Connell&Eide, 2000: 23).

Masculinity mostly used to describe men's personality of strong temperament and will. It needs to be considered in the structure of gender relations. It is not just a static state, but also a positive social structure and a pattern of social actions that respond to the circumstances in which people discover themselves.

Indeed, the meaning of becoming a man is equal to that of becoming different masculine. In specific circumstances, the form of certain masculinity seems to be the most effective performance way(Jiang, 2011: 2). In multicultural societies, there may be multiple definitions of masculinity. Equally, over one kind of masculinity can be detected in the existing culture (Breines, Connell&Eide, 2000:23-24). Connell put forward four major types of masculinity: hegemonic masculinity, subordinated masculinity, complicit masculinity and marginalized masculinity (2005b: 76).

In many different circumstances, there are awareness systems that are shaped by different forms of masculinity within society. This kind of ideal masculinity and its series of standards are used to judge other men and contribute to the composition of social masculinity prototypes. In view of the dominant status of patriarchy in China for a period of a long time, this article mainly focuses on the first type of masculinity: hegemonic masculinity.

Connell (2005b: 77) said, "Hegemony" originating from Antonio Gramsci's studies of class relations, means the cultural dynamics by which a group argues and maintains a predominant status in society. And the notion of "hegemonic masculinity" stems from the recent work of gender sociology (Craig,

1992: 190). It can be understood as a special category of masculinity to which women and others (the young, the effeminate) are subordinated rather than the “male role” (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1987: 179). Craig also perceived that hegemonic masculinity stood for the social ascendancy of a particular version or model of masculinity that operates on the territory of common sense, namely, conventional morality that terms what it means to be a man (1992: 190).

Entering the 21st century, Connell renewed this definition: it is a leading or “hegemonic” form of masculinity and the centre of the institution of gendered power (2000a: 24). She regarded it as the configuration of gender practise which reflects acceptable answers to the problems of the rationality of patriarchy at present and which embodies the dominance of men and the subordination of women in the sex/gender system (2005b: 77).

Referred to characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, there are five types proposed by Hong (2007: 186) in gender, namely, the power of the body and control, the professional achievements, patriarchy in the family, pioneer spirit, and heterosexuality. This article may mention, first, hegemonic masculinity represented in individuals when power is defined as the power of body and control. In view of the advantages of the male body, power gradually can be regarded as masculinized men’s power, speed, govern and so on. Subsequently, this study mentions hegemonic masculinity that represented in a patriarchal society. In other words, men’s control is performed in heterosexual families and importantly, it can be considered under present institutionalized society. In Chinese traditions, the consensus of patriarchy includes that the man is “a breadwinner” or “a protector in the family” and the woman is “a housewife”, “a sex object”, or “a child-rearing mother” (Hong, 2007:187).

Sometimes people may connect hegemonic masculinity with violence, which presents in heterosexual families like the husband against his wife. Connell assumed that violence was a relationship between bodies and a kind of power exercised directly on the body (2000b: 218). In heterosexual families, as marital violence, it belongs to gender violence. Most of the analyses of gender-based violence assume that this violence basically comes from the advantaged (mostly men) and targeted mainly towards the disadvantaged (mostly women) (Walby, Towers & Francis, 2014: 194). In the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women by the UN General Assembly, one of the definitions of marital violence is: physical, sexual and psychological violence in the family, including battering, sexual abuse and marital rape (Walby, Towers & Francis, 2014: 195). Men occupy a large proportion of violence to women, and predominate across the spectrums of violence (Connell, 2000a: 22). In China, there are several prominent types of men’s violence against women (particularly to their wives in families), including mental violence, economic violence, physical violence, and sexual violence.

We noticed that men’s violence is the representation of their power and of their driving forces, for domination and control. Men’s violence has been theorized as an expression of their predominant drive (Breines, Connell & Eide, 2000: 240). And such violent behaviours also reveal a close correlation with men’s traits. Messerschmidt and Tomsen emphasized that violence always appeared in the construction of masculinity, as part of the practice by which men require respect, menace opponents, or attempt to occupy ascendancy. Violence can be regarded as a measure for men to defend privileges and maintain superiority or preponderance (2015: 83).

In China, Deng and Fang proposed that not all men supported violence, and in fact, violence was a vital method often used by a man who has the tendency of hegemonic masculinity (2017: 147). It is a suitable resource for masculinity practice and it can reflect hegemonic male characteristics of tenacity and bravery. Influenced by traditional patriarchy, it is not uncommon in China.

In Chinese society, although the traditional thoughts have changed a lot in recent years, male supremacy which emphasizes control, toughness and power still exist. Some proverbs are still prevailing in China now, for example, “men act a crucial part in society while women in the family”, “men have a superiority status and women have a subordinated position”, etc. Affected by the traditional culture of patriarchy, many Chinese people identify this kind of pattern (Chen, 2015: 15).

In the later section, more details about the performance and reasons of hegemonic masculinity in marital violence will be discussed with the fact-based Chinese movie.

3. METHOD

The review paper mainly focused on secondary literature collected from various sources, ranging from books, journal articles, film reviews and so forth. The topic area explored in the review was diversified

and complicated, then it is proper to carry out the methodology of case study, which put a macro problem into specific context for thorough demonstration.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

On a global scale, men remain an overwhelming majority of power in many fields. In the field of power, men jointly control violent means (Connell, 2005a: 1808-1809). They hold more rights of hegemony in their families as well. As Connell put, private violence is also masculinized...in private life, violence is more prone to be used by men (Connell, 2000b: 63).

Violence appears to have an impression of damage, hurt or death, nonetheless, it is shaped by cultural meanings. Different forms of pain depend on different social and cultural contexts in specific areas (Merry, 2011:66). Therefore, it is proper to examine hegemonic masculinity and marital violence under a certain cultural background. Chinese phenomena of male hegemony as well as men's violence against women in families are no exception. Based on regional circumstances, it is easier to understand the relationship between a man's masculinity and his behaviours of violence against his wife.

The film this study chose is *Night and Fog*, which is adapted from a shocking massacre happened in 2004 in China. It is a sad story that a man named Li Sen used violence against his wife (Wang Xiaoling), even resulting in Wang's death. This movie is a good example to show the presentation of hegemonic masculinity in Chinese martial violence, and the reasons of its formation.

4.1 Men's Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic models of masculinity are present in families (Connell&Messerschmidt, 2005:839). To some extent, a husband's violence against his wife is a way to display his hegemonic masculinity and dominant status in the family. Men's physical (including sex) and psychological hegemony trigger marital violence.

Physical differences offer different forms to the social gender pattern. One is that men take a leading role in society for their hormonal "aggressive advantages" (Connell, 2005b: 69). Depending on the strong physical strength, men show their supremacy by physical violence. In this film, Li always abuses Wang by the tape or the knife and uses sexual violence forcibly (Figs. 1 and 2).



Figure 1. The stage photos of Li's physical violence.
Li used the tape to tie Wang's hands and tried to rape her.



Figure 2. The stage photos of Li's physical violence.
During the process of sexual abuse at Wang, Li took a knife and tried to threaten her.

Men are different from women in physiology. The reproductive differences are directly represented in the following aspects: physical force and speed (men: stronger and faster), sexual demands (men: having sex drive), characters (men: aggressive; women: nurturant), and so on (Connell, 2000a: 22). To some degree, violence seems to be the direct form that power impacts on bodies (Connell, 2000b: 62). From this movie, Li relies on his physical advantages to abuse a weak woman, which can be exemplified by the hurts to Wang by the body (particularly sexual violence) and the weapon.

Actually, violence is not only reflected in physical hegemony, but also embodied in mental hegemony which is linked to personal masculinity. Male batterers with hegemonic masculinity often support the backwards-looking views of women's domestic characters (Ptacek, 1988: 136). A controlled use or the threat of violence are regarded as part of men's repertoire in solving their wives (Connell, 2002: 93). For instance, Li always blames Wang in daily life, such as "without me, you wouldn't be what you are today", "as a wife, you even cannot make a good meal", etc. Li considers that as a breadwinner, he has a dominant status in the family. Furthermore, he thought it is the duty of his wife to do well in housework. If she disobeyed his rules, he has the right to use violence, as shown in the following pictures (Figs. 3-5):



Figure 3. The stage photos of Li's mental violence.

The top close-up shows Wang's painful expression when Li said: "Without me, you wouldn't be what you are today". The pictures below respectively show that Li forced her to say the words that "without you, I wouldn't be what I am today" and that Li asked her to say the words aloud during his abuse.



Figure 4. The stage photos of Li's mental violence.

These abusive lines are from Li: “the girl from country is useless”; “only eating without doing, and doing a little even breaking things”; “get out! Don't stay in front of my gate shamelessly”.



Figure 5. The stage photo of Li's mental violence.

Li said to Wang: “believe it or not, I will kill you!”

It is difficult to separate Li’s physiological violent behaviours from his hegemonic characteristics, which are represented both in his behaviours and attitudes towards violence. It seems that marital violence, for Li, was equivalent to husbands’ possessive privileges.

In fact, the physical capacity to commit violence, for many men, becomes a portion of their sense of masculinity, and they are willing to place their bodies into violence which is still regarded as an examination of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2000b: 218). Similarly, Fang also mentioned that some husbands with hegemonic masculinity believed that they had “rights” to use violence against their wives; otherwise, it would be contradictory to the so-called men’s traits (2016: 23).

In China, many men portray their “power” through marital violence to prove that they are so-called “tough guys” (Deng & Fang, 2017: 146). Moreover, most of the marital violence embodies a kind of men’s control over women. Men acquiesce in their absolute initiative at home and they force their wives to obey them by violence.

Therefore, marital violence tends to be a crucial method that leads to the construction of hegemonic masculinity in the family. In other words, a man with hegemonic masculinity supports the implementation of violence. In this film, it is notable that Li had strong desires of hegemonic masculinity (due to previous failure experiences), which made him become a symbol of some Chinese men. Socialized hegemonic masculinity requires a strong male image characterized by courage, ruggedness and being beyond women. When one cannot meet these requirements with a successful career or in other ways, he will be derogated as “not like a man” by the patriarchal culture. Thus, he perpetrates violence against his wife to vent his pressure and satisfy his psychological needs of the so-called “like a man”, which can be exemplified by the behaviour that Li forced Wang to admit his dominant hegemonic position through various violence.

4.2 Women’s Attitudes

Apart from husbands’ characteristics and thoughts, the wives attitudes towards marital violence cannot be overlooked. In Chinese history, the Chinese had long been in society with family hierarchy. Women were perceived as the attachments of men and their families, and hence they had a lower domestic position. Influenced by the traditional culture, there are still many people that affected by the ideassuch as "men are superior to women" (Deng & Fang, 2017: 145). The aggressive images of perpetrators are connected to the traditional features of fighters, and women are viewed as men’s properties, or they fear to speak out (Breines, Connell & Eide, 2000: 14), which reflected that part of the reasons of hegemonic masculinity’s formation stems from wives’ compromise.

In some way, women accept or admit the social structure of male dominance. They keep loyal to men and hold naive thoughts to patriarchy, which collectively sustain men’s rights and promote the construction of their hegemonic masculinity in this male-dominated social pattern.

In this film, Wang, as a sufferer of violence, yielded to the traditional concepts of the patriarchal culture. She could not jump out of the traditional system of male hegemony, for example, she agreed that “men should hold the initiative and women should be placed in a passive position”. Despite she had to bear dual torture: physical and spiritual violence from her husband, she also chose to compromise instead of resisting. Wang was afraid to say it out because she feared that Li would hurt their daughters and abuse her even worse.

Although she was subjected to battering and severe abuse (Fig. 6 and 7), the concept of dependency on men still lived in her thoughts. People can find far-reaching impacts of male hegemony on her in this movie. One example is her reactions after a neighbour suggested her to seek help from others. Wang refused and said, “It’s not good to let all neighbours know such things” (Fig. 8). There is another example reflecting her minds as well. When others called her name, she blurted out without any consideration: “my husband’s surname is Li”. It can be seen that despite her struggle, she has yielded to the male-dominated reality in Chinese society.



Figure 6. The stage photos of Li's physical violence and Wang's bodily injury.

Li's violence caused serious injuries to Wang (see bruises on her face and her back). But she tolerated all of these silently under a patriarchal society.



Figure 7. The stage photos of Li's physical violence and Wang's bodily injury.

Wang ran to the downstairs and cried lonely after suffering sexual violence from Li. The second close-up shot shows that the wound is bleeding freely from her thigh to calf.



Figure 8. The stage photos of Wang's refusal of help.

A warm-hearted woman came to help Wang after she was abused. She suggested Wang speak out; nonetheless, she refused and said, "It's not good to let all neighbours know such family affair. He cares about his reputation".

In Wang's mind, Li was the centre of her life and she took herself as the property or the appendix of him (Huang, 2011: 86). To some extent, Wang's compromise to marital violence is the acquiescence of male supremacy in families, which exhibits the wives' compromise to the social culture. It also caused their children to be in stake. At the end of the story, their daughters also are killed unfortunately.

4.3 Cultural Cognition

It has become evident that marital violence is not simply a matter of a few isolated incidents but is a general social problem. This incident makes people deeply think about the influences of the traditional concepts of hegemonic masculinity on both individuals and the whole society.

In many places of the world, there exist ideologies that justify men's supremacy on grounds of cultural conventions, beliefs, etc. (Connell, 2005a: 1811). This situation is also prevailing in Chinese contemporary societies. Connell and Messerschmidt mentioned that hegemonic patterns of masculinity were rooted in specific social environments (2005: 839). Tracing back to the pre-modern period, despite there was a certain distinction between men and women, male supremacy was remarkable (especially in the ruling class under the influence of Confucianism). One of the major features of Confucianism is the definite difference between the public (outer) space occupied by men and the domestic (inner) space took up by women. These spaces were linked by firm gender hierarchy that was dominated by men. For instance, Li Zhi, a Confucian representative in China, conceived that women should conform to the art of "following". In contemporary China, although some of the Confucian traditions have been rejected by some people recently, the idea that the male has a dominant status in society does not change radically (Kimmel, Connell & Hearn, 2004: 133). In a way, it conveys the thought that women should be put in a subordinate position.

The social consciousness of the masculine reality is shaped by local hegemonic masculinity. Regional hegemonic masculinity offers a cultural configuration that might be materialized in daily practices or interactions (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 849-850).

Because of long-standing male dominance in China, the hegemonic attitudes or behaviours have been regarded as very normal and natural. Connell once mentioned males are inherently more aggressive than women (2000a: 22). Thus it is accepted that men with hegemonic masculinity equate it with their violence, which is applied in heterosexual families as the form of marital violence by husbands against their wives.

Referring to this film, the attitudes of Wang's parents, communal councillors and local policeman can be seen as epitomes of the conventional ideology in the male dominant society.

For instance, Wang's parents did not think that men's violence to women is an important thing, however, it was really normal. When Wang phoned her parents for spiritual consolation, her parents just replied, "In our country, it is common that men beat their wives". Li, acted as an "abuser" and Wang was fully accepted as a "battered woman" by her parents (Huang, 2011: 86). In the eyes of her parents, the value of women was solidified in local society due to the long-standing unequal gender fates in Chinese families. As a woman, Wang had to accept the fact that "men are dominated and women are subordinated". Similarly, councillors in Wang's community also told her, "It is your domestic thing, so we cannot intervene". Even the policeman said, "Madam, such things are family disputes. We are policemen, and we are in charge of investigating into the legal cases". From these words, it is obvious that male hegemony and men's violent behaviours in families are acquiesced (Huang, 2011: 87), which portrays that the patriarchy family arrangement is still deeply entrenched in many Chinese minds.

Marital violence is closely related to traditional norms of the gender role and relations of gender power. This kind of culture encourages men to pursue manliness, "boldness" and "power", as well as allows them to verify their status in violent ways. Accordingly, the values of women are inferior to those of men. Therefore, women should be obedient to governance by men (Fang, 2016: 23). Cultural cognition in society is not only a cause of marital violence, but also a booster for the formation of hegemonic masculinity.

Broadly speaking, in Chinese modern society, there always exists the phenomenon that men with

hegemonic masculinity oppress their wives with various forms of violence. And a man with hegemonic masculinity can be easily connected with his violence in marriage life as many people have taken it for granted. In this film, violence is a kind of way that Li showed his hegemonic masculinity and his domestic dominant position (Fang, 2011: 59). Such traditional thoughts were also deeply rooted in his wife's minds and local people's minds. Regional culture defines the position through the default of gender inequity within the private sphere or even within the public sphere, which constantly develops men's hegemonic masculinity and their behaviours of marital violence. In general, the process of socializing male's role is a process of cultivating violent behaviours, which makes gender equality in the private and public spheres become out of reach.

5. CONCLUSIONS

After the release of the film, increasingly people concern about this incident. Many people advocate zero tolerance for domestic violence. More attention should be focused on female's helplessness and social cognition (including family's tolerance, social worker's ignorance, police's ruthlessness, etc.). Accordingly, it is necessary to carry out a gender-informed strategy, for the happiness of each small family even the harmony of society (Huang, 2019: 155). Connell conceived that the arenas for the action to reduce masculinity violence should involve: personal life, community life, cultural institutions and so on (2000a: 30).

In the facet of marital relations involving private life, couples need to express thoughts reasonably and communicate with each other regularly. In the heterosexual family, there is an equal system between the couples and they have equal rights to express their ideas or demands. Due to the constraints of traditional gender awareness, most Chinese women have been in a passive position in families for a long time. Therefore, both the husband and the wife need to be aware of the importance of gender equity in the family (Zhang & Chen, 2014: 532). Mentioned the friendship between couples, involving the sexual role as well as family violence in the constructions of masculinity (Connell, 2000a: 30). Masculinity is changeable in different circumstances, thus it is possible to develop positive and healthy masculinity for Chinese men. Although each family is different, the couples can jointly explore a suitable pattern where they can get well along with each other (Zhang & Chen, 2014: 533).

In terms of community and cultural institutions, it is proper for them to increase publicity of the rejection of family violence. More importantly, they need to improve their consensus, such as gender equality. Whether it's male-to-female violence or female-to-male violence in marriage, they both need to take into account. In fact, it also exists wives' violence to her husband in China. However, considering the total number and frequency, the former one is more typical to analyse. Therefore, the foundation of family mediation institution in community or women aid institution in the local area is necessary. Besides, although the legal agency makes strong corresponding laws and regulations to protect the rights of vulnerable groups (especially women) and to punish those family perpetrators, it still needs social cooperation to achieve. The rise of social awareness relevant to the changes of each individual.

To conclude, this article illustrates the topic of hegemonic masculinity in marital violence. By combining Raewyn Connell's concepts with the Chinese cultural context, it expounds how hegemonic masculinity leads to marital violence. Accordingly, marital violence is a crucial aspect that contributes to the construction of hegemonic masculinity.

From this film, it can be found that men's marital violence to women related to men's personalities and traditional thoughts, women's compromise, and cultural cognition in society. In other words, hegemonic masculinity and collective actions mainly lead to marital violence in contemporary China. Although such situation gradually improved recently, this study still expects to develop healthy masculinity for men, reducing marital violence against women. Importantly, it is necessary to improve the cultural consensus and then promote gender equality in society.

However, this article still has some deficiencies. Due to the page limitation of the article, there are many points that the author do not bring into, which needs to be supplemented in the future. Besides, this study has used the Chinese case as an object, which may not be necessarily applicable to other places in the world. Despite all of these, the author still hopes that this article will provide some references or practical experiences to relevant studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my great gratitude to my supervisors who provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted this research. I also should thank the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia for the support provided during the research process. Besides, I would like to thank Dr. Zhang who offered precious suggestions to this study. In accordance with the regulations of the conference and my ethical obligation as a researcher, I declare that all authors of this study have no conflict of interest. We are reporting that we have no financial and/or business interests in any company.

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Film

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