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## FORMATION OF A NEW RURAL POWER STRUCTURE AND THE FAILURE OF GENDER IN UTOPIA: LESBIAN IMAGE AND ITS METAPHORS IN *WILDCAT LAKE*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Chen Yingsong created Wildcat Lake not just for telling a story about lesbians but also by describing how Xiang'er, a rural woman, becomes a lesbian in the villages. We can see the “richness” and “metaphorical meaning” of the lesbian symbol. As far as Wildcat Lake is concerned, it is more worthy of discussing how Xiang'er becomes a lesbian, which is not only about sex or gender, but also about political and economic oppression. Therefore, the so-called gender in Utopia will inevitably fail. Furthermore, the loss of rural subjectivity during modernization and transformation, the subsequent new power structure, and the resulting oppression and exploitation are the fundamental reasons for Xiang'er to become a lesbian and eventually “kill her husband”.


**Keywords:** Lesbian. Rural. Modernization. Power structure.

### INTRODUCTION

Chen Yingsong's “Wild Cat Lake” tells the story of rural lesbians, especially through the rural female Xianger's process of “becoming a lesbian”.

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Thus, it can be seen that the “richness” and “complexity” of the symbol of “rural lesbians”. Therefore, “Wild Cat Lake” reveals a deeper problem -- the loss of rural subjectivity in the process of modernization and the emergence of a new power structure, which inevitably brings new oppression: not only gender oppression but also exploitation in the political sense.

Chen Yingsong's *Wildcat Lake* was published in 2011. It tells the story of Xiang'er, a left-behind woman in the countryside, facing the difficulties of life alone and enduring male bullying, and thus being forced to become a lesbian and her husband's murderer (MILAN, 2014, p. 55). The story is indeed shocking. As a male writer, Chen Yingsong has created a lesbian as a peasant in the far flung areas of the country. Most homosexual images exist in foreign literature and urban literature, and they are mostly from intellectuals. In a sense, the literary narrative of “lesbian” is an attempt to write about elites. According to Chen Yingsong, author recalled the reasons for writing lesbian stories: “Li Tuo tried his best to persuade me to write this story and told me about its uniqueness. In the past, lesbianism was associated with intellectual women only. It is common in left-behind women in the countryside” However, in the novel, Chen Yingsong regards “lesbian” as a symbol, expressing his understanding of life and the world, as well as his criticism and thinking on the current status in the countryside (KOJIN, 2003, p. 20). Therefore, the lesbian, Xiang'er, in *Wildcat Lake* has a symbolic meaning in a sense. In other words, Chen Yingsong has presented more complicated things through the lesbian story, emphasizing how Xiang'er changes from a left-behind woman to a lesbian (PHILIP, 2013, p. 77). Chen Yingsong's concluded that Xiang'er's transformation is due to the dissatisfaction with her “physiological” needs as a left-behind woman caused by the “vacuous life” of the countryside to a certain extent. However, when Xiang'er's specific process of becoming lesbian is laid out, the physiological dilemmas faced by farmers in the modernization process are highlighted, but more importantly, the “new power structure” and new political and economic oppression hidden behind the village where subjectivity is lost are also revealed. Therefore, in addition to “sex” or “gender”, the discussion of *Wildcat Lake* should be made in the modern logic or “urban-rural conflict” with a broader perspective to explore the metaphorical meaning of lesbian in reality.

This is the new point of view provided by this paper and a fresh perspective on the rural problems presented by “*Wildcat Lake*”. The proposal of new viewpoints and the adoption of new perspectives are closely related

to the use of multi-disciplinary research methods and theories in the present study. Their search results of sociology and anthropology, critical social theory, and cultural research theory are absorbed more, and every effort is made to attach it with literary research. In this way, the research field of “Wildcat Lake” is broader, and the simple distinction between internal and external literature research is broken, which also provides a new perspective and idea for contemporary literature research.

## **1 ISOLATED AND HELPLESS XIANG’ER AND HOLLOWING VILLAGES**

At the beginning of the story, Xiang’er was not a lesbian. In other words, in the narration of Xiang’er’s character, a farmer, more importance should be attached to the specific details of her change, as well as the problems and significance of the manifestations in the process of “change”. Therefore, the first thing is to discuss what kind of a person she was before becoming lesbian (JAMES, 2011, p. 101). There is no doubt that Xiang’er was surely not a self-sufficient small producer in the early 1980s, nor a rational and economically independent woman with a certain amount of money in the mid to late 1980, she appeared as an “isolated” and helpless left-behind woman in Wildcat Lake after 2000 (RAYMOND, 2013, p. 253). When the small producers and the rural imagination constructed by them are declared invalid, and the economic ethics and development logic recognized by the “rational economic man” broke the traditional rural order-, Xiang’er, a rural female left behind, and her situation have become a symbol of Chinese peasants and their destiny since the 1990s. Thus, the village has been hollowed out, with rootless farmers.

Xiang’er was originally a person with persistence and belief in country life, just like her love for frogs. “The frogs have always been the reason for her to love country life. The frogs and the grass buds and hope in spring wake up together and warm up together, they are like a very charming call, which subconsciously motivates people to live.” (HONG, 2002, p. 223). However, the reality was that even the simplest farm work was difficult for Xiang’er. When she planted water chestnuts, the paddy field was flooded with a continuous rainstorm. Seeing this, Xiang’er was close to tears.

Her husband Sanyou was afraid of planting water chestnuts and fled to the city. Xiang’er did not give up and opened up a seedling field. However, the seedling field was also hit by heavy rain, and the rainwater could not be drained. She asked her brother for help, but her brother reluctantly refused her

because he needed to take care of her withered sister-in-law. When farming, a peasant's most important work, has already become a difficult thing, there is no need to mention that farming provides farmers with the satisfaction they need, let alone the pride of farmers as small producers (HONG, 1997, p. 91). Therefore, Wildcat Lake is like her paddy fields, filled with "a smell of corruption and stench".

Xiang'er's isolation and helplessness are more prominent when her safety cannot be guaranteed. On the one side, it is the safety of property – Xiang'er always needed to protect her cow from being stolen, which was the only property in the family. On the other side, thefts in Wildcat Lake were particularly common, especially cattle stealing (WANG, 2000, p. 20). A cow was equivalent to four or five acres of land. However, with all due care, Xiang'er's cow was still stolen in the end (WANG, 2003, p. 67). Meanwhile, she needed to worry about the safety of the child. Many people in the village used poisonous needles to poison dogs and cows. If being not careful, they might kill people. Xiang'er was especially afraid that her child would be hurt by poisonous needles when he came home alone from school every day.

Of course, what poses the greatest threat and challenge to Xiang'er's safety is the bullying by men in Wildcat Lake. For example, Ma Bianzi repeatedly harassed Xiang'er (WANG, 2005, p. 78). On the bus, Ma Biaozi saw Xiang'er and tried to squeeze into her seat while constantly teasing Xiang'er (HE, 1994, p. 99). Once, Xiang'er took a bath in the house and forgot to close the door. Ma Biaozi suddenly appeared at the door. Xiang'er had to hide in the bullpen naked and was bitten by mosquitoes to escape from Ma Biaozi. Even lame Niu Lazi in the village posed a huge threat to Xiang'er (DAI, 1999, p. 99). He coveted Xiang'er and her cattle. Most women in the village had to succumb to male bullying. In a village that could have been called a "village community", Xiang'er was reduced to the bottom of the underclass. Her "isolated and helpless" situation had become more and more prominent, ultimately pointing to the spiritual levels.

Xiang'er suffered constant bullying by men, which was due to the absence of her husband Sanyou. Furthermore, Xiang'er's isolated and helpless situation stems from village hollowing (CHEN, 2001, p. 101). Wildcat Lake was created after 2000, and it has long been a common phenomenon in rural China that peasants go to cities to work. The hollowed-out countryside has become a common sight in China's countryside (except for a few coastal villages). As Yan Hairong (2012, p. 27) said,

Scholars and governments have transferred rural labor to cities as a transfer of surplus rural labor. Ironically, the so-called surplus labor refers to mostly well-educated young people in the rural population, who are mostly needed for generating new agricultural production. Therefore, people going outside may not be the real surplus labor. Conversely, people staying at home may be the real surplus ones. (FEI, 2016, p. 216).

The so-called hollowing of the village points to the fact that there are fewer and fewer people in the village. Most of them rush to the cities, only the “three-six-nine” troops are left, namely women, children, and the elderly. The village is like a hollow shell. On the other hand, the “three-six-nine” troops cannot run the village at all – agricultural production or the cultural value of the village, such as the safety and the mental and psychological conditions of the individuals remaining in the village (CHEN, 2020, p. 255).

The outflow of labor has caused a large amount of land to be abandoned, which has reached an alarming level. The process of hollowing agriculture has depleted agricultural production, depressed rural life, and removed the backbone of the countryside. This process takes away all the values in the countryside from economy to culture and ideology. The problem faced by young people in the countryside is that they cannot see a path to the future in such an increasingly depressed countryside. (CHEN, 2005, p. 211).

For Xiang'er, since there was no way to go to the city, she could only choose to become a left-behind woman. Xiang'er's loneliness and helplessness are immediately revealed, having to face the difficulties related to agricultural production, physiological needs (including sexual desire), personal safety, and spiritual support (KUANG, 2007, p. 20). As a result, Xiang'er needed help, which only came from sister Zhuang. In other words, isolation and helplessness led Xiang'er to choose sister Zhuang in a macro sense (CAI, 2011, p. 97). So, what are the more specific and fundamental reasons for finally convincing her to become homosexual?

## **2 MA BIAOZI, NIU LAZI, AND THE NEW POWER STRUCTURE**

Xiang'er's isolation and helplessness symbolize the isolated condition of a village in the modernization of China, which has been gradually incorporated into the trajectory of western modernization (CHEN, 2012, p. 27). The village has become more and more isolated, and the peasants

and even the subjectivity of the whole village have been destroyed. Then a new power structure has quietly emerged. To put it simply, the new power structure refers to the fact that, in the process of urbanization, young and middle-aged people leave the countryside, which leads to the hollowing out of the countryside, and the groups left behind in the rural world are increasingly marginalized. New power group, the so-called structure not only fails to rebuild the rural subjectivity destroyed by modernization but also leads to new oppression. This oppression is so specific that it is difficult to get rid of. Therefore, Xiang'er had to regard sister Zhuang as the only person she could rely on, and fundamentally accepted sister Zhuang's "lesbian love" and sank deeply into it.

When expounding the new power structure in detail, let us first answer what new oppression is. The so-called new oppression is first manifested as gender oppression in Wildcat Lake. As mentioned above, Xiang'er had long faced sexual harassment and even assault by Ma Biaozi and Niu Lazi, and of course, other women in Wildcat Lake were also in a similar situation (SHI, 2011, p. 211). Ma Biaozi and Niu Lazi were lascivious persons (CAI, 2016, p. 96). Furthermore, their attempts at Xiang'er and other women are not just the result of men's desire for the women's bodies but behind the oppression of gender is political and economic oppression, which is more prominent in Ma Biaozi (LIANG, 2012, p. 20). Cai Xiang suggested that "[i]n the narrative of the novel, gender issues are replaced with political issues – the oppression of women by men often shows a political and economic oppression." (CHEN, 2007, p. 66).

The oppression of the political economy revolves around the new power structure. In the hollowing Wildcat Lake, there is a power structure that seems to be secret but is obvious. In a sense, Ma Biaozi and Niu Lazi have become representatives of the "residues" after the hollowing villages, equivalent to the real bullies and rascals (XIANG, 2004, p. 67). What is interesting is that they have become the "masters" of the rural world and possess a certain big "power" (LIU, 2006, p. 206). In other words, when the "main force" in the Wildcat Lake flows to the city, a new power structure appears in the hollowing village (WEI, 2007, p. 233).

Former bully Ma Biaozi in the village turned into the village head and the maker of the discourse system (SHAO, 2011, p. 34). The villagers must obey him, and also they must be under his control and even be exploited by him. Physically disabled gangster Niu Lazi, inferior to Ma Biaozi, was able

to get out of the control of the village chief and do whatever he wanted in the Wildcat Lake (LUO, 2001, p. 21). In a sense, he and the village head Ma Biaozi had formed a “conspiracy” to a certain degree and jointly “controlled” the Wildcat Lake (YAN, 1990, p. 39). Of course, the formation of this “power structure” with “collusion” also benefits from the failure or escape of public power.

Cai Xiang defined the departure of Xianger’s husband (Sanyou)

On the level of experience, this departure is accompanied by a large-scale trend of entering the city, and countless people are leaving their homes. However, on the level of metaphor, he is willing to regard it as the escape or loss of some public power. At the moment comes another power, village head Ma Biaozi, or rogue Niu Lazi. (HE, 2007, p. 207).

In a power structure dominated by Ma Biaozi and supplemented by Niu Lazi, other left-behind villagers become the most vulnerable group and cannot escape due to this structure (LIN, 1994, p. 94). Especially left-behind women like Xiang’er have become the main targets of exploitation, bullying, and suppression.

What is the escape or loss of public power? In this regard, the novel is presented from Ma Biaozi’s perspective. When faced with doubts from sister Zhuang and other villagers, Ma Biaozi said, “I earn only 5,000 yuan a year. It has become an unspoken rule to use free foods, drinks, and cigarettes to entertain leaders.” (WEN, 2011, p. 134).

After buying and burying 500 meters of culvert pipes, they ask me to buy another 5,000 meters. The office expenses in the village are only 5,000 yuan. The police stations also work for their own interest. They set up two guards here, and we have to send them to Jingzhou for entertainment. They are not afraid of the old, weak, and sick, while male villagers left the hollowing village. During the period of President Mao, there were not so many robbers. If you were caught, you would be fought fiercely in the class struggle, until you gave in. Or rather, the society has gone bad. (HONG, 2018, p. 81).

Ma Bianzi’s speech-style expression is, of course, to shirk responsibility. However, it inadvertently reveals some of the problems faced by the villages during modernization when young men flee the villages. Bureaucratization appears, especially the alliance between public power and capital for the pursuit



of interests. The novel mentions that the “cow-stealing case” in Wildcat Lake was solved relying on the strength of Xiang’er and sister Zhuang, not because of the efforts of the police station. Interestingly, the police station used the detection of the “cow-stealing case” to publicize their political achievements.

A celebration party was held in the town with great fanfare. Bureau leaders and reporters in the county and city were invited and said they would pay the lost cattle – two thousand two hundred yuan per owner of the lost cows. They were given big red signs saying 2,200 yuan for show, and actually received no money. The newspaper reported it on a very large page with a close-up of the buttface director-general. (GAO, 2006, p. 211).

This detail undoubtedly confirms the rural issues revealed in Ma Biaozi’s speech. The ineffective public power, such as the buttface director-general, undoubtedly prompts rural “powers” such as Ma Biaozi and Niu Lazi to have “power” and even become the “master” of the countryside.

Ma Biaozi is taken as the core of the power structure. Where does his power come from? It is because of “economic strength” rather than the status of “village head”. In other words, Ma Biaozi’s economic strength determines his status in the village. Material success has become the only criterion to measure a person’s success, which in a sense implies the logic of reform and development. Therefore, another identity of Ma Biaozi in the novel is more important than that of the village head. Ma Biaozi was the largest professional chicken farmer in the village. People in the village called him “chicken head”. His chicken farm is the largest, with tens of thousands of chickens, and the sounds of the chickens are overwhelming. He instructs everybody in the village to raise the chickens with the chicks, feeds and vaccinates he provides. And then you need to be responsible for the specific raising work and sell the meat worthy chickens to him at a throwaway. Ultimately, he gains the most from the chicken farm business and the rest of the villagers involved in the business gets very little profit. He once said that he would lead the whole village to riches. With careful calculation, the profits are found really impressive. One chicken is sold at a price of 4 yuan, and one thousand chickens cost 4,000 yuan.

Ma Bianzi knows the “capital logic” well – striving to reap the greatest profit with the least effort. Therefore, he becomes a rich and powerful “self-employed” in the village, which is the so-called “rational economic man”.

On this basis, a person with misconduct turns out to be a village head. It is precisely because of his “economic strength” that he has the “power” to act recklessly against the left-behind women in the village. In this sense, Ma Biaozi’s oppression of women seems to be the oppression of gender, which is rooted in political and economic oppression. He has “capital”, which has given him power; he can do whatever he wants with the women in the Wildcat Lake due to the power. In the novel, because of “economic” needs, most women naturally depended on and obeyed him. This is a symbol of Ma Biaozi’s “power”. The so-called political and economic oppression is most prominent in Ma Biaozi’s “domination” of the village and the “exploitation” of the villagers.

In comparison, Niu Lazi was just a footnote in the new power structure, but even so, he still acted recklessly in the Wildcat Lake. He could suddenly appear in front of Xiang’er, harassing and assaulting at will. Not only that, he stole cattle from the Wildcat Lake unknowingly and killed dogs by blowing poisonous needles to make money. Therefore, disabled and spurned Niu Lazi became one of the “masters” of the Wildcat Lake in a sense. Rather than saying that Ma Biaozi knows nothing about Niu Lazi’s theft, Ma Biaozi and Niu Lazi has reached a certain tacit understanding in their face-to-face oppression and secret oppression, which makes Xiang’er and even the entire Wildcat Lake fall into their control and oppression.

However, Xiang’er refused to feed the chickens of Ma Biaozi, which meant that Xiang’er refused to enter and even tried to resist the “words power system” constructed by Ma Biaozi. Meanwhile, Xiang’er expressed great disgust for Niu Lazi, and even finally confirmed that Niu Lazi was the badman. However, as a left-behind woman who is “isolated and helpless”, how can she resist the oppression of power represented by Ma Biaozi and Niu Lazi? Sister Zhuang appears in our sight under this situation, and the novel also lays the most reasonable pavement for Xiang’er to change from an isolated and helpless left-behind woman to a lesbian. As Li Yunlei said, “the uniqueness of Chen Yingsong lies in the fact that through describing the specific living environment of these two people, he fully wrote the ‘reasonability’ of the two people coming together. This ‘reasonability’ distorts human nature, based on which the novel deeply criticizes the current rural social reality.”

### 3 XIANG'ER'S LOVE AND FALSE GENDER IN UTOPIA

Xiang'er and sister Zhuang's experiences are somewhat similar. They both were from the villagers who married into the Wildcat Lake from the Luomao Bridge, and their husbands were not around. Sister Zhuang was more tragic. Her husband passed away unfortunately, and she raised her child alone. Xiang'er and sister Zhuang's intersection began with an encounter in the town. Xiang'er and other people went to watch the dispute between sister Zhuang and the buttface director-general. Sister Zhuang went to the police station to issue a death certificate for compensation after her husband died accidentally. However, buttface director-general of the police station deliberately embarrassed sister Zhuang, causing her to become angry and intolerable, and overturn his table. The police detained sister Zhuang for seven days on the grounds of disrupting public service. Since then, Xiang'er had a favorable impression for sister Zhuang as a fellow sufferer from the same place, and often went to sister Zhuang's stall to buy vegetables. To end with, they became good friends.

Unlike effeminate Xiang'er, sister Zhuang was quite masculine to fight face-to-face with the director of the police station. She had never been afraid of any difficulties, whether it was farming, taking care of children, and protecting herself. Not only that, she did her best to help Xiang'er, such as borrowing a machine to help Xiang'er drain away water from her rice fields, taking care of her child, helping her watch the cow at night, and even helping her catch thief Niu Lazi. More importantly, in the face of oppression and bullying from Ma Biaozi and Niu Lazi, sister Zhuang always rushed forward without compromise. For example, sister Zhuang dared to expose the collusion between Ma Biaozi and Niu Lazi, and Ma Biaozi's attempt to let women in the village feed chickens.

In a sense, she even became the only person in the Wildcat Lake who dared to confront the power structure centered on Ma Biaozi. Because of this, sister Zhuang's appearance and actions undoubtedly had a certain resistance and political significance when the male force in the Wildcat Lake went out, the public power similar to the "buttface director-general" escaped, and the left-behind women like Xiang'er were "isolated and helpless", enduring Ma Biaozi's oppression and exploitation. In addition, she even carried the functions of both the escaped male force and the escaped public power. In this sense, Xiang'er was attracted to sister Zhuang until she was completely attached. Because of sister Zhuang's help and company, Xiang'er broke away from the

situation of being “isolated and helpless” and became braver. They formed a “community”, which seemed to be strong enough to resist any oppression.

What is interesting is that in the process of Chen Yingsong’s narration about the “relationship” between Xiang’er and sister Zhuang, we seem to have seen a story of gender in Utopia. The so-called gender in Utopia, on the one hand, means that as the narrative advances, the feelings between Xiang’er and Zhuang’s sister become more and more like a pure “love story”, so even the narrative itself becomes “warm”. Just like this description: “The scent of rape blossoms has been replaced by the smell of ripening pods, and the sweet smell of wheat filling has been delivered to the window. With her company, Xiang’er is not afraid of anything. She sleeps quietly as the wind. She hears her talking about the rapeseed harvest... She puts a hand on her arm. In too many nights of inexplicable fear in the past, she closed the door and windows of her house. If someone stole her beautiful cow, she might not dare to leave the room. However, now the world has seemingly been safe with a person by the side and a helping hand.” The delicate landscape description and the character’s psychological support complement each other, and the sweet and safe feeling surrounds Xiang’er. Similar narratives can be seen everywhere in the novel.

The most important aspect is that this love is warm enough to resist male oppression. When Xiang’er asked why sister Zhuang did not marry anymore, sister Zhuang’s answer was a good sign: “Besides, what do you want a man to do? When Xiaofen’s dad was alive, I was often beat by him. We can live without a man, and live better!” In this passage, sister Zhuang pointed the finger at the women’s oppression by men. However, this oppression is only in the sense of gender, especially under the traditional feudal machismo, the unequal women’s treatment by men is just like the domestic violence committed by Zhuang’s husband against her. Similar expressions appear many times in the novels, and the difficulties faced by Xiang’er seem to be men’s oppression/gender to women, irrelevant to strong political and economic oppression as well as the strike of development logic to the traditional order and structure of the countryside. According to the logic of gender in Utopia, the ending of the story should be “Xiang’er and sister Zhuang have been living happily together. However, it is not the case. The ending of Xiang’er and sister Zhuang or that of Xiang’er did not go according to the logic of ‘Utopia’.”

Before discussing Xiang’er and sister Zhuang’s emotional ending, it is necessary to discuss Zhuang’s process of accepting , which does not happen overnight. In the beginning, Xiang’er was kind of rejecting sister Zhuang.

She did not know if she could accept this homosexuality, and she even had a hint of shame. After experiencing sexual harassment by Ma Biaozi, she was locked in a bullpen and was bitten by mosquitoes. She knew that only sister Zhuang could protect her, and she began to accept sister Zhuang. “Sadness and discomfort are all diluted by this. The guilt is also diluted by her re-arrival and the child’s voice and figure. Maybe that’s just the way life is. Whether it is sex or friendship, it does not matter. It is neither a sin nor greatness. Since it is here, just admit it.”

This psychological description shows that although Xiang’er has accepted sister Zhuang, there is still a hint of helplessness. It was not until Xiang’er finally killed her husband Sanyou and sent a message to sister Zhuang to call her the husband for the first time that she truly accepted sister Zhuang’s love without hesitation. Xiang’er’s rejection is of course related to the constraints of traditional morals and customs. However, Chen Yingsong presents the difficult decision by Xiang’er to accept sister Zhuang to highlight Xiang’er’s root cause of becoming lesbian, which is related to the oppression from the power structure led by Ma Biaozi related to gender, politics, and economy.

As Cai Xiang said, “I will not interpret this process of exclusion as merely the repression or control of instinct by a certain custom... I just think that this process provides space for narrative or imagination in politics.” Nor is it possible that Chen Yingsong simply hopes to present a discussion about the oppression and liberation of gender for women. He emphasized in the creative talk, I am writing about the countryside. I want to pour out the reality of the countryside like a bucket of water. This is my basic idea of this story. The novel should be a rich thing instead of writing about a country lesbian, and the countryside is a huge social issue. I let everyone walk with me into the touching struggles and groan of women deep in the countryside, hoping that everyone can see more complicated things, something that wakens us. I do not want to write this story to make everyone sympathize with and tolerate homosexuality. I am not a volunteer for the legalization of homosexuality. I am a writer willing to take greater responsibility and further devotion.

Therefore, Chen Yingsong is to present a stronger oppressive political power behind gender oppression instead of constructing a gender Utopia. When we believe Xiang’er and sister Zhuang can “live happily”, the warm “utopian narrative” suddenly changes. At the end of the story, Xiang’er’s husband suddenly returned from the city in despair, and she had to return to

real life. Xiang'er immediately sent a text message to sister Zhuang and got a meaningless reply, "I see, my wife" the implication is to let Xiang'er return to a normal life. At this moment, a certain "resistance" force carried by sister Zhuang seems to be disappearing, which means the failure of gender in Utopia.

Surprisingly, Xiang'er killed her husband and seemed to be attached to the gender in Utopia constructed by sister Zhuang. For the first time she called her husband, "my husband, he died of eating a poisonous dog". However, sister Zhuang's answer completely shattered Xiang'er's utopian imagination, "Where do you want to go? You are an evil woman." In this sense, Xiang'er's character seems to have more resistance than sister Zhuang. Rather than saying that she killed her husband because of her "love" for sister Zhuang, she was unwilling to step out of the "utopia" and return to the power oppression dominated by Ma Fangzi. Her husband returned "like a beggar", which was not strong enough to resist the oppression and exploitation represented by Ma Biaozi.

Going through Chen Yingsong's narrative, we will find that Xiang'er has gradually become a more complicated and profound reason behind being a rural lesbian. We seem to have some understanding of why Xiang'er killed her husband. In other words, the process of Xiang'er becoming/having to become lesbian reveals the difficulties and crises encountered by farmers in the process of the modernization of China. Especially as a left-behind woman, in addition to the oppression of gender, she has encountered a strong oppressive political power, which further highlights the difficulties and crises of peasants/countryside. Therefore, the ending is not, as some critics have suggested, Chen Yingsong's sinful and morbid identification with homosexuality. On the contrary, it symbolizes the confrontation of a disadvantaged individual at the bottom of the political context, highlighting Chen Yingsong's presentation and criticism of the shocking current situation of rural areas and farmers.

However, Xiang'er's confrontation was ineffective, because she would inevitably encounter legal sanctions – a more powerful political entanglement. Therefore, the significance of "killing her husband", and lies in more profoundly presenting the situation where the disadvantaged groups such as Xiang'er have nowhere to go. Just as "[...] the result of nowhere to go, you can only resort to a kind of instinctive confrontation. Then, life blooms and is disillusioned in instinct. Perhaps, this is originally a tragic era. Chen Yingsong just unfolds and reveals the tragic logic of this era."

## CONCLUSIONS

Chen Yingsong described the process of Xiang'er's transformation from a left-behind rural woman to a lesbian and its rationality, presenting the all-around collapse of the country under the modern development logic and the resulting new power structure. This new power structure not only fails to allow the country/farmers to regain their subjectivity but instead plunges them into a much stronger oppressive political power. Of course, the "lesbian love" between Xiang'er and sister Zhuang once has the meaning of gender in Utopia, which tries to attribute all difficulties, including political and economic oppression, to gender/sexual oppression with revolt. However, Sanyou's return and his murder by Xiang'er declare the failure of gender in Utopia. In this way, Xiang'er's tragic experience as a lesbian shows in a sense the situation where farmers have nowhere to go in the process of modern transformation of China, which indicates the gradual loss of rural subjectivity. In the present case, Xiang'er portrayed by Chen Yingsong as a lesbian in Wildcat Lake has a metaphorical meaning.

ZHE, D.; JUAN, W. A formação de uma nova estrutura de poder rural e a falha de gênero em utopia: imagem lésbica e suas metáforas no *Lago Gato Selvagem*. *Transformação*, Marília, v. 45, n. 4, p. 13-28, Out./Dez., 2022.

**Resumo:** Chen Yingsong criou *Lago Gato Selvagem* não apenas para contar uma história sobre lésbicas. Ao descrever como Xiang'er, uma mulher rural, torna-se lésbica nas aldeias, pode-se ver a "riqueza" e o "significado metafórico" do símbolo lésbico. No que diz respeito ao *Lago Gato Selvagem*, **é mais interessante tratar** como Xiang'er se torna lésbica, que não se refere apenas sobre sexo ou gênero, mas também sobre opressão política e econômica; assim, o chamado gênero, entendido utopicamente, poderá ser identificado. Além disso, a perda da subjetividade rural durante a ampliação e a transformação posterior, a nova opressão e a exploração resultantes são as razões fundamentais para Xiang'er se tornar lésbica e eventualmente "matar seu marido".

**Palavras-Chave:** Lésbica. Rural. Modernização. Estrutura de poder.

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