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COMMENT ON
“FORMATION OF A NEW RURAL POWER STRUCTURE AND THE
FAILURE OF GENDER IN UTOPIA: LESBIAN IMAGE AND ITS
METAPHORS IN *WILDCAT LAKE*”

*Hailin Ning*¹

Commented Article: ZHE, Dai; JUAN, Wen. Formation of a new rural power structure and the failure of gender in utopia: lesbian image and its metaphors in *Wildcat Lake*. **Trans/Form/Ação**: Unesp journal of philosophy, v. 45, n. 4, p. 13-28, 2022.

Zhe and Juan (2022) explore the socio-political forces at play in Xiang'er's context, exploring her homosexuality. The said research article infers that apart from the “metaphorical meaning” of the lesbian symbol, the changes in socio-political aspects of rural life, that have arisen due to modernization and urbanization, are key reasons for the character's choice to become a lesbian in the context of the novel *The Wildcat Lake*.

The authors' description of the changes in rural life due to the hollowing of villages as a consequence of modernization and rural to urban migration of Chinese youth in search of better opportunities is valid both in the context of the literary work and the reality of the Chinese countryside. I'm afraid I have to disagree with the assertion that the rise of a new political power structure

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can lead Xiang'er to become a lesbian, the reasons for which I will go through in detail in the following paragraphs.

The authors are pertinent in pointing out the hollowing out of villages due to the migration of labor from the rural area to the urban one mostly youth and the subsequent changes in the socio-political order of the villages as narrated in *Wildcat Lake*. Xiang'er is portrayed as a peasant woman who adheres to the traditional and customary roles defined in rural life.

The description of Xiang'er's character in the novel is of a girl that has primarily been someone who has not achieved much success in her farming adventures on her own. She's described by the Zhe and Juan (2022) to have failed not only at farming but also after being left behind by her husband to protect her family's only valued possession, i.e., a cow. She's also helpless against Ma Biaozi and Niu Lazi's oppressive and unwanted advances, the two key proponents of the new political order in the village.

Faced with Ma Biozi's oppressive political power and the hopelessness of being unable to do anything against him and the village goon Niu Lazi, Xiang'er finds help in Sister Zu, hang a courageous widow with masculine features and the will to stand up to the oppression of the new political regime. Here the authors of the research article attribute the manifestation of lesbianism for Xiang'er as a manifest function of the new oppressive political order of the village and the loss of rural subjectivity due to the hollowing of villages as a result of modernization and urbanization.

I want to add that Zhe and Juan (2022) painted rather a gloomy picture of village life. Out-migration from villages to cities is an important process for urbanization, resulting in prosperity and uplifting of the lower strata of society. Moreover, the authors do not eschew fracturing some characters, such as Ma Biaozi, who is dubbed by the villagers as a "chicken head" This is certainly dehumanizing, especially for a person who provides chicken, tap, and le for the villagers and the main sustenance of life. The villagers blaming Ma Biaozi as a profiteer is also unjustified. Profit taking is the main motivation for any busing Providing health providing protein to the villagers at their doorsteps door step sreciated.

The authors portray Ma Biaozi as a symbol of oppression and exploitation, and rightly so because this village business tycoon makes most of the vulnerable and economically deprived women. Ma Biaozi exchanges his goods for sexual favors. Zhe and Juan (2022) did well to condemn such

exploitative measures. Ma Biaozi did partnership with Niu Lazi, what later proved disastrous. It is his naivety to trust a thief like Niu Lazi. The authors had this unique talent of portraying the characters in such a way that they look like people in everyday life. Their power of description is so robust. The authors depict the characters' appearance rate, person, ally, and other body contours masterly. The characters walk, laugh, move and talk as real. Imaginations get enriched while imagining such wonderful characters. The authors have fully demonstrated through their characters the collapse of the old order and the sprouting of the new systems from the debris of the old fallen social and economic structures of the rustic past. The protagonist character's portrayal, Xiang'er, and her thoughts desires, and moods are superbly jotted down.

As we read Chen Yingsong's story, we discover that Xiang'er has evolved into a more complex and significant justification for being a country lesbian. We appear to comprehend Xiang'er's motivation for murdering her husband. In other words, Xiang'er's journey toward becoming or being forced to become a lesbian exposes the challenges and crises that farmers in rural China face as a result of the modernization of China. She has experienced tremendous political oppression in addition to gender oppression, which accentuates the struggles and crises faced by peasants and rural areas even more. This is especially true for left-behind women. Therefore, contrary to some critics, Chen Yingsong's identification with homosexuality is not the ending. Although Xiang'er would unavoidably face legal repercussions – a more potent political entanglement – her confrontation was ineffective. Therefore, the significance of “killing her spouse” deeply illustrates the predicament in which the underprivileged groups, like Xiang'er, have nowhere to escape.

Chen Yingsong presented the overall breakdown of the country under the logic of contemporary growth and the new power structure as he detailed Xiang'er's journey from a rural woman who was left behind to a lesbian. This new political establishment not only prevents the nation/farmers from regaining their individuality but rather submerges them in a much more powerful political authority that is oppressive. Of course, the “lesbian love” that Xiang'er and sister Zhuang formerly shared had a gendered connotation in utopia that attempted to blame all problems – including racial and class oppression – on sexual and gender oppression. However, Sanyou's reappearance and his murder by Xiang'er signal the fall of sexes in the utopian world. In this regard, Xiang'er's terrible lesbian experience illustrates how farmers in the modernization process of China have nowhere to turn, which denotes the

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steady loss of the individuality and subjectivity of the country. Surely, Chen Yingsong's excellent portrayal of Xiang'er as a lesbian in *Wildcat Lake* has a symbolic significance.

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