



# The Two Paths to the End in the Film and Novel *Lust.Caution*

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**Abstract:** The novel of Zhang Ailing — *Lust.Caution* was designed in 1953, and after almost 3 decades, until 1978, it was published. In 2007, Lee Ang's film *Lust.Caution* was released, and achieved great fame at home and abroad, which again triggered the upsurge of Zhang Ailing. Lee Ang made the novel of 130000 words a film of two and a half hours, and you can imagine the differences between the novel and the film. This paper will compare Zhang Ailing's novel and Lee Ang's film *Lust.Caution*, and will analyze the differences between the two's understanding of the story plot and definition of the heroine Wang Jiazhi. Further, it will analyze the reason why Wang Jiazhi came to different end in the film and novel.

**Keywords:** *Lust.Caution*, Wang Jiazhi, Zhang Ailing, Lee Ang, Ferguson road, Yuyuan road

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On the 11th April 1978, Zhang Ailing's novel *Lust.Caution* was published in the supplement of *China Times — The Livings*. Later, in the preface of the sequel to *Lust.Caution*, Zhang Ailing said that she started designing *Lust.Caution* in 1953. This work, spanning almost 30 years from design to publication, was made into a movie by Lee Ang in almost 30 years after its publication, and Lee Ang turned it from a short novel of 13000 words into a two and a half hours' film. This paper will compare Zhang Ailing's text *Lust.Caution* and Lee Ang's film *Lust.Caution*[1], analyzing the differences between the two's understanding of the story plot and the definition of the heroine Wang Jiazhi. Further, it will analyze the reason why Wang Jiazhi came to different end in the film and novel.

## 1. The similarities and differences of the heroine's cognition of self-image between the two

In the *Lust.Caution* of Zhang Ailing's edition, Wang Jiazhi who decided to start the assassination plan, seated in the Commander Kai's café, waiting quietly for her scene, saw unintentionally a middle-aged man noticing her secretly, so she performed the man's inner drama in her heart: "It is hard to guess what she does. Is the jewelry she wears real?" and he will come to a conclusion: "She seems not like a dancing girl. If she were a drama actress, I should know her." Here, the text defines Wang Jiazhi's identity: "She was an actress, and now she is still working herself to the bone on the stage, but no one knows that and she will never make the scene." [2]

In the text of Zhang Ailing, we can find that, Wang Jiazhi defines herself as an actress. This self-orientation has been formed long before the fall of Guangzhou. She, Wang Jiazhi, is the head of the school troupe. Moreover, the leading actress plays a good play — it's not bad for Hong Kong people who don't care about state affairs to join the audience; at the same time, this leading actress has a dominant influence in the troupe — after several "performances", because she is too excited to relax, she can lead the whole group to stroll in the rain, eat midnight snack and go happy until dawn.

This is a clear contrast with the image of Wang Jiazhi in Lee Ang's version, who is only a freshman in college and has never acted. In Lee Ang's film *Lust.Caution*, Wang Jiazhi is an ignorant female student who is accidentally pulled into the troupe. She not only didn't know how to act, but also had little talk in the troupe, so that she was not invited in the first secret meeting of the "assassination action team". It seemed that she broke into the meeting "accidentally" and became a member of the group.

This difference in the initial image setting determines that in the following plot, the character Wang Jiazhi also plays a different role in the development of the plot. After a beauty trap was set, Zhang Ailing said in her text "this role is certainly taken on by the feminine lead of the school troupe." The word "certainly" in the article is used to modify "take on", which not only reflects Wang Jiazhi's popularity, but also reflects Wang Jiazhi's sense of responsibility. It can be said that Wang Jiazhi in the text took the initiative and shouldered the role of "beauty". So next, Wang Jiazhi took the initiative to play the role of Mrs Mai. It is expected that a womanizer like Mr Yi can only draw with the acting school who has been busy resisting men's pursuit since the age of 12.

In Lee Ang's film, Wang Jiazhi was the last to reach out during the ceremony of the assassination team shaking hands

to form an alliance, and she was hesitant and passive in the process, so that Kuang Yumin almost gave up her. Such a female student Wang Jiazhi can't even play mahjong well. A small emerald ring has been worn for several years. How can she accompany the ladies in officialdom to shop in Central? Let alone become the "center" on the wives' card table.

Therefore, in Zhang Ailing's works, Wang Jiazhi was turned from an actress to a female spy. And because the female spy's task is a "beauty trap", she is more and more handy. The first time she sat down to play cards, she could seduce Mr. Yi successfully "not that he didn't pay attention to her, but he didn't dare to take the liberty". She knew it and can naturally and carelessly performed a good play of leaving the phone number. It is expected that Mr. Yi would bite the bait. In Zhang's writing, Wang Jiazhi understands the spy operation as "an unprecedented successful performance... Looking around, even she herself felt that she is brilliant." [2]

The prototype of Wang Jiazhi in Lee Ang's film is a freshman girl who doesn't rhyme with the world. She is astringent and innocent, knows nothing about the world of men, and has no experience in flirting between men and women. Therefore, Lee Ang must arrange her to conduct a profound and lasting self-examination after Liang Runsheng's sexual lesson for her. In this scene, Wang Jiazhi, who has lost her virginity, gets up to open the window and repeatedly looks at her nudity in the sun in the mirror. In the film, this is the symbol of Wang Jiazhi's awakening of female consciousness. What she is slowly looking at is a waking female body. At the same time, Zhang Ailing's Wang Jiazhi, who has long been carrying her two breasts, goes to battle with man.

## 2. Differences in the positioning of the protagonists in the troupe

From Lee Ang's script, we can know that Lai Xiujin is so used to playing the heroine like Nora of Henrik Ibsen that she can recite her lines. She is the pillar of the women's drama club of Lingnan University.

How on earth does Wang Jiazhi, a worthless and insignificant female student, replace Lai Xiujin and become the heroine in this "big play"? Ironically, the answer is that Wang Jiazhi can play mahjong, and has been familiar with mahjong skills and card table politics since she was ten years old:

"WANG CHIA-CHIH:

I know how to play mahjong! We had mahjong at home. I started playing when I was ten, to make up the foursome!  
(smiles)

I've seen how those rich ladies behave at the mahjong table, how they talk...

(All heads turn to Wang.) [3]

In the novel, this setting seems to be tenable. Wang Jiazhi can accurately grasp who is jealous of her, who should be flattered and who should be suppressed on the card table; but in the film, this setting is obviously betrayed by Wang Jiazhi's poor card skills and failed observation. This paragraph was written in the script, but it does not appear in the film. Lee Ang must have this concern mentioned above.

However, the lack of this paragraph, especially the key plot of the transformation of the protagonist "all heads turn to the king", makes the logic of how a female student like Wang Jiazhi is chosen to be a female spy in Lee Ang's film somewhat weird.

Of course, there is no need to care about such a drama in which a minor role catches the opportunity to become the protagonist. After all, it's just a play in the play. However, from the analysis in the previous chapter, we can see that Wang Jiazhi in Lee's film is a female student pushed forward by fate. From joining a drama club to acting as a heroine, she is passive, even a little forced. But in Zhang's text, Wang Jiazhi is a soldier who controls her own destiny, although she is also coaxed and praised by some people with ulterior motives.

Therefore, the plot that she is promoted via mahjong is subtracted, but it should not be underestimated in the logical integrity of the film. It completely shows that Wang Jiazhi has once again become the protagonist of the assassination mission passively — because she can play mahjong, it also completes the clue of Wang Jiazhi's growth from a minor role to protagonist. At the same time, it also buried a clue for Zhang Ailing's people with ulterior motives.

In Zhang's text, Wang Jiazhi devotes her chastity to Liang Runsheng in Hong Kong, but the plan dies because the Yi family suddenly returns to Shanghai. Then this sacrifice naturally becomes a joke. She regrets it, and everyone knows that she regrets it. They all avoid her. She suspects that "someone" has an ulterior motive when "everyone" coaxes and praises her this time. Therefore, in the following text, these "everyone" changes their title to "they", and this "someone" is never mentioned again.

Lee Ang was acutely aware that this "someone" is unified into "they" later, so he planned to find this person. This is not necessary in Zhang's text, because even Kuang Yumin is like those others, so a "they" is enough to summarize. "Someone" and "they" are unified in Zhang's text, and there is no need to separate them. However, Lee Ang still needed to give the

audience a clue that "someone" has ulterior motives, so the camera fell on Lai Xiujin.

In Lee's film, Lai Xiujin is the pillar of the troupe, the leading actress and the only candidate for the leading role. She is confident, decisive, fearless and assertive. She is only willing to yield to Kuang Yumin, who she likes. But Kuang Yumin likes Wang Jiazhi. Therefore, Wang Jiazhi robs Lai Xiujin of her leading role and her sweetheart. Therefore, Wang Jiazhi, who is toasted and sought after by many male characters because of the great success of the patriotic drama in Hong Kong, became the object Lai Xiujin is jealous of. Lai Xiujin's revenge plan is also launched at the same time. After the public performance in Hong Kong, Ang Lee uses a tram game to explain how "everyone" evolved into "they"; it also uses a close-up of Lai Xiujin before the end of the camera to explain how "someone" gives Wang Jiazhi's body to Liang Runsheng and gives Wang Jiazhi's "wife" title to Ouyang Lingwen.

### 3. Two different paths to the end

The most obvious difference between the film of *Lust.Caution* and the novel is that after Wang Jiazhi releases Mr. Yi, she gets on a three wheeled rickshaw by the side of the road. In the film, the young man who pulls the rickshaw asks her where to go, and Wang Jiazhi replied, "Ferguson road"; in the novel, she got on the bus and said, "Yuyuan road".[2]

If the differences between the film and text analyzed in the previous two chapters are more due to Lee Ang's need to add a lot of details and clues in order to be responsible to the audience, the differences here are intentional.

Let's take a look at these two places first. According to the book, on the day of the assassination, Mr Yi receives Wang Jiazhi from Commander Kai's cafe and tells the driver to go to Ferguson road, "that's the apartment they went to last time". It's an English's or American's house. The owner enters the concentration camp and it falls into Yi's hands. Mrs Mai wants to find a room to live and makes it be the nest where they meet, so as to avoid those women with sharp eyes and covetous eyes.

On Yuyuan road, there is a relative no one knows including those of Chongqing or even "their group". She can stay there and hide for a few days, and then make the next plan.

From this we can see Lee Ang's logical clue. He arranged for Wang Jiazhi to start as a female student, and then an actress. However, in order to be true enough, she loses herself in the performance and is trapped in the identity of "Mrs Mai". In the film, Lao Wu, an intelligence officer in Chongqing, defined the "Mrs Mai": the advantage of Wang Jiazhi is that she only thinks she is Mrs Mai, not an intelligence officer. Wang Jiazhi also agrees to this definition and adds: as Mrs Mai, to hook the old fox, we must let him in like a slave and let him drill deeper and deeper in my body and heart. Only by staying faithfully in the role of "Mrs Mai", can I get into his heart. In the dark, only he knows that Mrs Mai and he are true.

This further explains why Wang Jiazhi lets Mr. Yi go when the assassination is only a foot in the door — it is not Wang Jiazhi who lets Mr. Yi go, but "Mrs Mai". So she couldn't be out of the play even when she goes out of the door. She gets on the rickshaw and thinks about going to Ferguson road to continue the affair.

Wang Jiazhi, who returns from actress to female identity, goes to Yuyuan road. She wakes up from the play and weighs the fake drama and real love between her and Mr. Yi. She plays from time to time in the whole drama of the assassination in the jewelry store and thinks about all kinds of things that are none of her business: from the fashion that girls couldn't afford to buy to even being not good at ripping off; from a small Guangdong citizen to a big city citizen; from the props that only used for a little while on the stage to the market in *Arabian Nights*; from Gu Hongming's vaginal theory to her several sexual experiences; from whether he loves Mr. Yi or not to whether Mr. Yi is looking at her or not; half of her is asleep, in a dream, knowing that something is going to happen soon, and in a trance, knowing that it is just a dream.

Wang Jiazhi at this time is a naked girl, a girl who belongs to herself rather than any group. Wang Jiazhi wakes up from this dream, but it's too late. She experiences countless expectations, assumptions, fantasies and rejections, and finally finds that love is like this. She is too resistant to fall in love. This time, she jumps into the river alone — but she changes direction and runs after others with her breasts. She flees from a group of suitors, Liang Runsheng and Kuang Yumin, but she bumps into Mr Yi's arms. However, this person really loves me, she suddenly thinks, and her heart explodes, if something is lost.

Lee Ang knows acting and Zhang Ailing knows women.

### 4. Conclusion

At the end of the film, Mr. Yi signed the execution of a group of students of the assassination action team and signed the word "Mocheng" on the document. Here, Lee Ang arranged Ding Mocun and Hu Lancheng to become Yi Mocheng, which is a tribute to Zhang Ailing's text and puts her pale, beautiful and slightly mouse like lover in this ambiguous position. It is said that Lee Ang also embedded more identities in Mr. Yi: Hu Lancheng, Ding Mocun, Dai Li and Li Shiqun. This is the text more than Zhang Ailing's text.

It can be seen that in Lee Ang's card table politics, not only Wang Jiazhi is hung outside the Bureau, but also Zhang

Ailing. However, on the battlefield of Zhang Ailing's love, Lee Ang's Mrs Mai can only move herself in the end, while Zhang Ailing's Wang Jiazhi doesn't have to ask whether it's worth it, because she feels love.

## References

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- [1] Lee Ang (director). *Lust.Caution*. USA: Focus Features, 2007.
- [2] Zhang Ailing, *Lust.Caution*. Beijing: Beijing October Literature and Art Publishing House, 2007.
- [3] Screenwriter: Wang Huiling and James Schamus. For the full text of the script, see the website of Focus Features <http://www.filminfocus.com/>