**Maternal Love and Its Backfire in Mo Yan’s *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* from a Psychological Perspective**

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**Abstract:** Since its publication in China in 1996, Mo Yan’s *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* has caused hot debate and attracted scholars’ attention, among whom many focus on the female protagonist, the Mother, especially her image as suffering, yet persevering, self-sacrificing, loving, and thus sacred without any political stance. However, the present paper figures out that the worship of the greatness of mother should not be one dimensional, but dialectical, since the Mother depicted in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* is simply a common people who was deprived of all human needs and desires, having her weakness and shortcomings, especially when she was greatly influenced by the social contexts and ideology she lived with. In light of the Jungian psychologist Erich Neumann’s idea on archetypal feminine, the elementary character, as the foundation of the conservative, stable, and unchanging part of the feminine, of motherhood is researched, figuring out that maternal love in this selected work nurtures, nourishes and protects, but at the same time, castrates, devours and even kill. As the maternal love has its great side, providing stable security and sustenance for children and has its damaging side as well like a gentle trap, making those relying on it lost themselves. Based on case study of females extracted from *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, this research then further proposes that though maternal love is practiced out of feminine instinct, worth glorification, it should be moderate and restrained to empower the beloved to develop his/her own consciousness, becoming independent. Motherhood, or to be exact, maternal love has powerful energy and strong emotional value, but only when it establishes a connection with individual consciousness, and is successfully absorbed and assimilated by consciousness, can it become the content of consciousness, thereby enriching people’s conscious psychology and realizing the balanced and reconciliated relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness, rationality and irrationality.

**Key Words:** *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*; maternal love; Mo Yan; Psychology; worship of The Great Mother;

# Introduction

Though the publication of Mo Yan’s *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* in China in 1996 caused hot debate and attracted critics’ attention (Peng Jingfeng, 1996; Liu Beibei & Li Yihong, 1996; Tao, 1998; Huang, 2010), among whom most criticized that the title is erotic and a desecration of the mother image as well as an “inaccurate portrayal of modern China’s political landscape” (Du, 2016: ), the work still wins its popularity and researches on it are conducted from various perspectives, especially the selflessness of mother. Readers can find an extraordinarily powerful maternal figure in the protagonist Mother in this work. Shelley W. Chan analyzed the change of centered character from male to female in Mo Yan’s works of *Red Sorghum* and Big *Breasts and Full Hips*, pointing out that the female figures in the later work are all strong personalities, especially the Mother who is “disrespectful of the traditional values imposed upon women, overshadows all the male characters and turns Northeast Gaomi into a motherland” (2000: 496). Du Lanlan (2016) states that though the image of mothers is constructed as loving and self-sacrificial in the work, however, it is simply Mo Yan’s gendered approach to allegorically epitomize China’s national trauma in the twentieth century and such construction still contributes to the promotion of patriarchal ideology. Neil H. Wright believes that *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* is a work that “does homage to the women of modern China” and the Mother “is really a mythic mother figure, a modern Mother China” (2016:101). A comparative study on mothering/motherhood in Yan Mo’s *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, and Amy Tan’s *The Kitchen God's Wife* was conducted by Min Jiao who summarized that “cultivating an awareness that motherhood is a social and cultural, rather than biological inscription, is central to female agency, and that a mothering consciousness aligned against patriarchy and colonialism is essential for female empowerment” (2019: 541).

In memory of his late mother, Mo Yan writes, in the preface of *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* (2011) “To the spirit of my mother” and extendedly “the novel was actually written for all mothers everywhere” (Mo Yan: Nobel Lecture, 2012)[[1]](#footnote-1); In this respect, maternity, as the theme, drives the process of the plot and it can be speculated that the image of mother generally is supposed to be created as glorious, to a great extent if not fully since the protagonists are simply ordinary people who were “deprived of all human needs and desires, which were regarded as vulgar” (Chan, 2000: 495) and thus are believed having their weakness and shortcomings.

As a female greatly controlled by feudal patriarchal thought, Lu Xuan’er (the Mother’s name as a girl before getting married) endured great pain caused by foot binding, though trying to challenge the concept that “girls who don’t bind their feet grow up to be big-footed spinsters that nobody wants” (Mo Yan, 2011: 66). As a little girl, Lu Xuan’er failed to disobey the traditional values imposed upon female; physically “bent the toes back with bamboo strips and wrapped them tightly” the experience becomes a trauma to the Mother so impressively that “the pain was like banging her head against the wall” (Mo Yan, 2011: 67) but as one who had bravely withstood such anguish, every time she “talked about having her feet bound, it was a mixture of blood-and-tears indictment and personal glory” (Mo Yan, 2011: 67).

After marrying to the Shangguan family, the Mother suffered from giving birth to eight daughters and finally a son as forced by the Shangguan family’s demanding for a male heir. To avoid her mother-in-law’s maltreatment and domestic violence by her husband who actually was infertile himself but refused to confess, the Mother had to endure the humiliation of having affaires with other men to conceive children. From a traditional female following the ideology that a woman’s primary function is to bear her husband children so to carry on the family line, the Mother was forced to become disrespectful of traditional values through betraying her loyalty to her husband. Or in other words as Christopher Lupke concluded “to transgress on one taboo in order to avoid another” (2005: 71). Misfortune of living in a male-centered patriarchal world of violence and change, the Mother struggled to find her way of surviving, “extricate[ing] herself from her predicament between the family’s demand for a male heir and a sterile husband by having sexual relations with other men to produce an heir” (Liang, 2017: 773) while taking her responsibility, as a female, of bearing and raising children and finally fulfilling herself with the birth of the son, Shangguan Jintong. The Mother is worth glorification for her tenacious vitality and extraordinary power in enduring the sufferings in her life caused by patriarchal maltreatment and raising children, but she failed to challenge the irrational oppression of the patriarchal system upon females which finally leads to negative results, even jeopardizes those the mother cares together with maternal instinct of sacrificing herself to the children.

Influenced and inheriting from Jung’s analytical psychology, the Jungian psychologist Erich Neumann developed Jung’s archetypal feminine, summarizing two characters of it as the elementary and the transformative ones. Though being “the foundation of that conservative, stable, and unchanging part of the feminine which predominates in motherhood”, the elementary character has a “good” and a “bad” aspect (Neumann, 1991: 26). Suffice it to say that motherhood, or maternal love, is of profound archetypal significance with meanings both positive and negative. In accordance with Neumann’s view on the elementary and transformative characters of archetypal feminine and Mary Y. Ayers’s development on the duality, positive and negative poles, of the archetype of the Great Mother, the present research aims to analyze the image of the Mother in Mo Yan’s *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, proposing that the “good” aspect of the motherhood nurtures, nourishes and protects while the “bad” aspect castrates, devours and even kills. In this case, the function of the Mother as the giver of life and the force of protecting the family is out of her feminine instinct as explained in Jung’s archetype of the Great Mother, while her function in castrating, devouring and even killing is greatly impacted by the patriarchal thought of “son-preference” in feudal China.

# The Great Mother: Forces of Life-Giving and Damaging

In Jung’s theoretical system of analytical psychology, the structure of the archetype of the Great Mother is a complex network of psychological organizations; accordingly, every emotion of a person’s overall personality is believed to be a manifestation influenced by this archetypal dynamic. After tracing “genealogy and symbolism of goddess figures in world culture” (Paglia, 2006: 4), the Jungian psychologist Erich Neumann distinguishes (in his *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, 1991) two characters of Jung’s archetypal feminine: the elementary and the transformative characters of the feminine, “which, in their interpenetration, coexistence and antagonism, are an essential part of the Feminine as a whole” (Neumann, 1991: 24). The transformative character focuses on the dynamic elements of the psyche, inclining to motion and change while the elementary character accents conservative tendency.

Though the elementary character of archetypal feminine “almost always has a “maternal” determinant” (Neumann, 1991:26) and “is the foundation of that conservative, stable, and unchanging part of the feminine which predominates in motherhood”, it, “intrinsically as ambiguous and relative as transformative character” (Neumann, 1991:26), has the positive and negative aspects. The positive aspect nurtures, nourishes and protects while their negative aspect castrates, devours and even kills.

Based on her observation of the changing of facial features, especially eyes, of the carving of Mother Goddess’s figures through history, Mary Y. Ayer emphasized the duality, positive and negative poles, of the archetype of the Great Mother, proposing that “The Great Mother, originally a one-sided symbol of fertility, the life-giving forces of nature that ensures the survival of humanity and the family, takes on duality in the process of her evolution. She assumes the power that can damage or kill the very life she is meant to foster” (Mary Y. Ayers, 2003:118). The Great Mother thus becomes a symbolization of the mystery of birth and death, functioning as both the giver of life and the wielder of death. By comparing the mother to the earth/land, Mary Y. Ayers further developed that “Mother’s fertility came to symbolize the renewal of life as well as the delivery of the earth from the blight of sterility and death”, (Mary Y. Ayers, 2003:113). It came to be believed that growth and life can only between the two opposing forces in nature, those of fecundity and barrenness.

Based on Neumann’s positive and negative poles of the archetypal feminine and Ayers’s duality of the Great Mother as forces both ensure the survival of humanity and the family and damage or kill the very life she is meant to foster, it is believed that maternal love is not necessarily always to be good neither, but sometimes backfires on what it intends to protect. Since the Great Mother “takes on duality in the process of her evolution”, it is possible that this evolution is possibly impacted by social elements, such as feudal ideology of male and female hierarchies, though it is undeniable that she may assume the power that can damage or kill proactively for her own personal interest. The negative aspect of the elementary and/or transformative character of the archetypal feminine, the Great Mother as well as the maternal love is not necessary to be an intention, but may be the result of unintentional behavior, which the mother herself does not expect or realize in advance.

# Tenacious Vitality and Powerful Fertility: The Guaranty of New Life

In explaining the book title, Mo Yan said he was deeply affected by one of the primitive stone statues of a female with big breasts and wide hips shown on a slideshow in class, feeling that such physical features of women are the most beautiful, sacred, solemn, and of course the simplest material forms on the earth and in the universe, that is why he chooses the title *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* (Mo Yan, 1995). According to Neumann, big breasts and wide hips are elementary character of archetypal feminine. They are born from the earth and symbolize the earth. Behind The Great Mother’s figure of big breasts and wide hips “lay the realization of the complex rhythms of birth and growth, epitomized in the miracle of woman in her bearing of children” (Mary Y. Ayers, 2003:112), symbolizing fertility. As the life producer, mother heralds the origin of life, so the worship of the Great Mother appears in stone carvings and murals around the world. However, to be productive subjects to the conquest of the forces of death; the worship of the Mother in Mo Yan’s *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* is believed to lie first in the tenacious vitality of her own life, her power of overcoming barrenness, then in her powerful fertility. Shangguan Lu struggled and begged for her life in the ups and downs of the history as well as the entanglements in the fate of the family members; the combination of fortitude and tenderness in her personality made the best “footnote” for a typical great mother.

Born in a turbulent time, the Mother’s own life experienced death threats several times. When was six months old, Xuan’er (the Mother’s name before getting married) was hidden in a large flour vat to protect her from the German invaders’ killing and was barely alive with her body coated with flour when found by her aunt and uncle the following day. With her aunt and uncle, she lived a happy life; however, such happiness ended after marrying into the Shangguan family which is obsessed with the wish of having a son to carry the family line. The cruel reality taught her that not getting married was not an option for a woman, but bearing no children was again unacceptable as a woman.

“Trapped in the oppressive bonds of the traditional patriarchal family, [Shangguan Lu] is obliged to define her motherhood according to the traditional fertility ethics” (Du Lanlan, 2016: 31). Three years into her marriage but failed to bear any child, Shangguan Lu (Xuan’er) started her tragic life. To end her mother-in-law’s abuse and her husband’s maltreatment, Shangguan Lu conceived children from other men instead of her husband who was sterile but simply put the blame on his wife. However, delivery of daughters rather than any son still cannot end a woman’s suffering. “The age-old tradition of a lying-in month was abolished at the house” and “before she even had time to clean up the mess between her legs” (Mo Yan, 2011: 83) right after delivering the fourth daughter, the Mother had to work in the glare of the midsummer sun on the threshing ground where her husband hit her with a rake and where when she turned over the grain tassels on the threshing floor to speed up the drying process, bearing up as best she could with the pain racking her body, her husband and father-in-law rested in the cool shade nearby ( Mo Yan, 2011: 85-86). Living in such sheer torture, she thought of committing suicide, but finally gave up for the sake of her daughters. Corresponding to the implication that big breasts and wide hips indicates powerful fertility, the Mother with such body feature conceived children one by one (from different men) like fertile soil to get a son while enduring all miserable maltreament by the Shangguan family. After producing seven daughters, the last time when she gave birth to a twin satisfies her willing of having a son but the dystocia almost took her life.

Escaping from death over and over again, the experiences of the Mother is like the best proof of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche’s statement that “Was mich nicht umbringt, macht mich starker [What does not kill me makes me stronger]” (1998: 35, English translation). The Japanese military invaders beheaded the adult men of the Shangguan family, leaving nine children and a mad mother-in-law to the Mother to take care alone. As experiencer of the historical events of modern China such as the War of Resistance, the land reform movement, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution and the economic reforms and market economy, the Mother led all the children, including the grandchildren, survive all the wars, turbulence, famine as well as other hardships.

Out of the positive aspect of elementary characters of the feminine, the Mother accepted her destiny of producing children one by one as well as giving-life to daughters though she herself did not expect them, especially the seventh one who was conceived from a gang-rape. Designated as a “Great Round” or “Great Container”, the elementary character “tends to hold fast to everything that springs from it” (Neumann, 1991: 25) with “bearing and releasing belong to the positive side” of this character, which can explain why the Mother accepted all the children whoever their biological father was and her grandchildren, including one boy, Sima Liang, who actually was the son of her son-in-law Sima Ku and one of his concubines and was without any biological relation with the Mother.

The archetypal feminine view of life is supposed to be characterized by fraternity and inclusiveness. Women’s initial gestational experience and the most primitive maternal affection are the respect and care for life. The concept of life of the archetypal feminine goes beyond the narrow ethical vision, showing tolerance and cherishing of all life. “In so far as the Feminine releases what is contained in it to life and light, it is the Great and Good Mother of all life” (Neumann, 1991: 65).

With the Mother’s tenacious vitality and powerful fertility, the nine children got the opportunity to come to the world; with the Mother’s self-less maternal love, the offspring successfully survive all hardships or even life-threatening encounters. The daughters of the Shangguan family who share the characteristics of big breasts and wide hips can be seen as an imagined projection of the source of life and that of endless vitality. These women are the “soil” of life and sources of nurturing: the mother feeds the son with breast-milk, her lifeblood, while the daughters exchange themselves for food for the family, especially the youngest brother. The continuity of life is the most valuable thing in human life, and the succession of sufferings and death highlights the preciousness and tenacity of life, glorifying the greatness of the feminine.

# Backfiring Impact of the Greatness of Female Overshadowing Men

In contrast to the Mothe who is “powerful, tolerant, and defiant in the face of the cruel realities”, “the male characters are basically portrayed as impotent, fragile and mean” (Du, 2016: 29). It can even be extended to describe the contrast between most female figures and male figures in the work; besides the Mother, the aunt of the Mother, Shangguan Lü and Aunty Sun overshadow most male from various aspects like valor, tenacity, sense of responsibility, hard-working spirit. “Nearly all the men, traditionally considered the driving force of history in a male-oriented society like China, are mocked by the author” (Chan, 2000: 496). From the father and son of the Shangguan family, Big Paw Yu to Shangguan Jintong who cannot take his mouth away from a woman’s nipple, they actually are all castrated-worthless creature.

In the Shangguan family, though the “ancestors were men of iron and steel”, the father and son were in fact “worthless specimens” (Mo Yan, 2011:25); and it was Shanguan Lü, also the mother-in-law of the Mother, who was actually “the head of the household and the best blacksmith in the family” (Mo Yan, 2011:73). Comparing with Shangguan Lü, the son, Shangguan Shouxi “was small every and one would be hard pressed to spot any resemblance to his burly mother, who often sighed and said ‘if the seed’s no good, fertile soil is wasted’” (Mo Yan, 2011:73).

While “everyone knew [the aunt of the Mother] was the head of the household; the fifty acres of land, the two donkeys that worked it, the household chores, and the hiring of workers all fell to [her], who was barely five feet tall and never weighed more than ninety pounds” (Mo Yan, 2011: 67), her husband, Big Paw Yu, was good for nothing but gambling and bird-hunting. Therefore, when Big Paw Yu expressed his agreement on loosening their niece’s feet binding a little bit, his wife went so far as “picked up a broom and threw it at him”, and the latter had to jumped to his feet and ran away (Mo Yan, 2011: 67).

As to Aunty Sun, who saved the Mother and the twines from dystocia, was the head of the Sun family and once was a woman of ample martial talents, who could leap over eaves and walk on walls, but had no choice but to marry the stove repairman named Sun when fell afoul of the law. As a widow, Aunty Sun raised up five grandsons who were all mutes and always “glared at passersby, human and animal, the whites of their eyes truly menancing, […] converting the village into their private hunting ground” (Mo Yan, 2011:28); therefore, Aunty Sun had the absolute authority over the family and the mutes would become obedient even at her cough to stop their misbehaviors. However, Aunty Sun was killed by the Japanese soldiers breaking into the Shangguan’s house when she helped with the Mother’s dystocia. Her only survived grandson, Speechless Sun, then became the nightmare of the Shangguan family, rapped the third sister, Lingdi, and then tortured the eldest sister, Laidi, after their marriage.

The greatness of these females assures the stability and security of the family, “overshadow[ing] all the male characters and turns Northeast Gaomi into a mother-land” (Chan, 2000: 496), but at the same time deprives the men and the children of the development of their own sense of self-worth. When “bearing and releasing belong to the positive side of the elementary character” on the one hand, “the Great Mother in her function of fixation and not releasing what aspires toward independence and freedom is dangerous, on the other hand” (Neumann, 1991: 65). In the narration of *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, though the Mother led her children, including grandchildren successfully to survive all disasters and hardships with her love, sacrifice and incredible fortitude, she failed to empower the beloved to develop his/her own consciousness to become independent.

Following their mother’s example, or to be exact, to follow the requirement upon female by the patriarchal systems in old China, the daughters devote themselves to men, leading to their tragic ending: the eldest daughter Laidi killed her fiancé in order to elope with other man but was finally executed herself; the second daughter Zhaodi married a commander Sima Ku and died in a war; the third daughter Lingdi fell off a cliff and died of mental disorder after her beloved got kidnapped by the Japanese; the fourth daughter sold herself as a prostitute for the life of the Mother and her brother and eventually died of illness; the fifth daughter Pandi committed suicide; the sixth daughter Niandi was killed in a bombard with her American husband; the seventh daughter “sold” her body to a villain for food and died of overeating during the transformation labor; and the blind eighth daughter threw herself into the river to reduce the Mother’s life burden in feeding the offspring.

Moreover, it was the Mother’s unrestrained devotion and excessive indulgence caused the son, Shangguan Jintong, as a “weakling, who, even in adulthood, never grows beyond his dependence on maternal milk, and whose only obsession is his mother’s breasts, other women’s breasts, or, in fact, almost anything that lactates” (Fu Binbin, 2005:85). So that when the Mother realized such result, she helplessly said “I’ve been a fool all these years, but I finally understand that it’s better to let a child die than let him turn into a worthless creature who can’t take his mouth away from a woman’s nipple!” (Mo Yan, 2011: 523)

 In the elementary character, it is believed that there is an indissoluble relationship between mother and child, which is “the beginning of the relation of the Archetypal Feminine to the child, and it likewise determines the relation of the maternal unconscious to the child’s ego and consciousness as long as these two systems are not separated from one another” (Neuman, 1991: 29). The Mother’s maternal love carries with it the feature of blindness in this work. The blindness lies in the Mother’s unrestrained sacrifice to the male-child all her life and his indulgence in females’ breast milk and later the breasts themselves, on the one hand; and the Mother’s unfair treatment to her daughters, especially the twin sister, Shangguan Yünü, to whom the Mother’s caring was far from enough comparing to that to Jintong. From the moment she was born, the Mother regarded her as the superfluous human being and even left her on the *kang[[2]](#footnote-2)* to accompany the already-mindless Shangguan Lü when Jintong was held tightly with his little head burying in the warm valley between the Mother’s ample breasts. The Mother even played favorites when feeding the twines, she gave up giving Yünü her nipple but fed her some goat’s milk instead when Jintong kicked the baby-girl in the belly to stop the sister sharing the Mother’s breasts milk.

As the only male heir of the Shangguan family, Jintong is the most treasured one, thus having the right to enjoy the Mother’s breasts milk like a tyrant. Though he managed to live 14 years prison life without any female aside, he got seriously ill once he was released to join his mother. With the Mother, Jintong again lost his ego and consciousness, looking for psychological dependence, female breasts. “The good, personal mother can provide for the stability and creative development of one’s inherited potentials and true self” (Ayers, 2003: 110). However, the Mother could not realize this but to compromise: she sent her only-son, who was already more than 40 years old, to the single-breasted woman to breastfeed him with breasts milk. As has been given, the archetypal goddess of human beings, the Great Mother is also the goddess of death symbolizing hell and abyss, and has the absolute power to dominate death and destroy life. With indulgence and dotage of the maternal love, Jintong forever positioned his spiritual personality in his childhood and finally became “as much a figure of pathos as anything else” (Lupke, 2005:71).

# Irrational Patriarchal Ideology: Reason for Twisted Maternal Love

In introducing the purpose of creating the novel, *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, Mo Yan noted it was “to explore the essence of humanity, to glorify the mother, and to link maternity and earth in a symbolic representation” (Cai, 2002: 159). Though there is no fixed answer to explain what the essence of humanity is, it is not irrational to link it to the character of female since the other two purposes are about the mother or maternity. Based on the previous two parts, it is clear that the mother is glorified due to her tenacious vitality and powerful fertility as well as her selflessness in scarifying herself to the children, especially to the son, the only male heir of the family. However, it is also clear that the result of such greatness is not satisfactory----none of the children, daughters or son, developed her/his own consciousness or independence. To be exact, the greatness of female gives life to offspring, however, it is also the irrational and unrestrained maternal love backfires the beloved.

Another manifestation of the backfire impact of maternity can be found in linking it and the earth in a symbolic representation. The mother “was the fertile earth, the womb from which all life was born” (Mary Y. Ayers, 2003: 112); however, the earth is also the final destination—the graveyard—of all life and even the earth itself causes death directly. At the end of the Chinese version of *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, the only male heir Shangguan Jintong buried the remains of the Mother in the earth of a damp meadow on the edge of the swamp where the secretary of the deputy mayor was devoured when tried to pick up the swan shot by his superior to please him and his lover.

Before the secretary’s tragedy, two distinctively contrastive scenes were presented: the government leaders sought for fun by bird-hunting, while, right one hundred meters away, Jintong just buried his deceased mother and was forced to dig up the body by the police. However, personal identity or social statues means nothing to the earth. From the already deceased Mother, then the swans and teal got shot and fallen in the swamp, to the young secretary, the earth equally and fairly devoured everything on it, both actively and passively. The rescue team failed to find the secretary’s body and nobody came to bother the Mother’s newly built grave, leaving her body remain where it was buried. As the crowd dissipated, peace and tranquility were restored, as if nothing had happened. In the face of the absolute might power of the mother earth, human beings are small and powerless, even an energetic young man with a great future was devoured by the swamp in a matter of minutes. A deeper life perception is thus presented with Cao Xueqin’s words, the author of the Chinese chlassic *The Story of the Stone*/*A Dream of Red Mansions*, “All that’s left is emptiness and a great void” (Cao Xueqin, 1994:84); No matter it is human being or animal, or man once led a miserable life or one is entitled a bright future, none has the power to counteract the Great Mother’s destruction.

Similar to how Mo Yan describes the Northeast Gaomi, Shandong---- “the author’s hometown-turned-fictional locale” (Fu Binbing, 2005: 85): “easily the most beautiful and most repulsive, most unusual and most common, most sacred and most corrupt, most heroic and most bastardly, hardest-drinking and hardest-loving place in the world” (Mo Yan, 1993: 4), the protagonists in Mo Yan’s *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* are paradoxid with both “good” and “bad” aspects, since he chose not to write heroes but common people, particularly poorly educated ones, blurring the boundary between good and evil. Even the “bad” aspects of one are not necessary to be determined by the essence of his/her humanity, but may be out of unconsciousness or “things will develop in the opposite direction when they become extreme”. As to the Mother, who was illiterate and an orphan without parents’ rational guidance and protection, it was hard for her to figure out to what extent the maternal love was rational for the development of the children’s own personality and consciousness.

From the perspective of unconscious female instinct, the Mother’s maternal love is manifested in indulgencing the son’s breast fetish, but from the perspective of social consciousness, she was deeply influenced by the feudal patriarchal ideology of her time, being full of persistence and desire to give birth to a son and then getting obsessed with the belief that the male heir was the center of the family. “Only the birth of the son brings her the sense of fulfillment that in traditional China befits a deserving mother” (Lupke, 2012: 71).

As a brave mother who dared to violate ethics and morality to have affaires with different men to conceive children so to save her own life, Shangguan Lu lacked the consciousness to challenge the feudal ideology of male and female hierarchies. Without the consideration of the role of a real man play is to support the family, to contribute to the society and to protect the vulnerable group when he is needed, the Mother blindly devote herself to satisfy the son but never cut off the umbilical cord that connects her with the son, breaking free from the omnipresent cover. Without realizing the differentiation of self-consciousness, the narrator and other male figures like the father and son of Shangguan family, Big Paw Yu failed to achieve an independent state of individual existence, never formed their independent personality, nor acquired masculinity. They were like to have been castrated, unable to take on the responsibilities of being a husband, a father, or even a son.

The blindness of maternal love towards son was not rare in the history of China, especially during the feudal patriarchal time, the vital factor in preventing the beloved from getting castrated or worthless lies in the awakening of the mother’s rationality and sanity or effective advice from others. In *Records on The Warring States Period II*, the article named “Shortly After the Queen Mother of Zhao Took Over the Regime” recorded a story about the Queen Mother and her son Lord Chang’an. Shortly after the Queen Mother took over the regime, the state of Qin dispatched troops to invade Zhao. When Zhao asked the state of Qi for help, the later asked to have Lord Chang’an, as a hostage. Out of maternal love and a mother’s protection, the Queen Mother of Zhao was irritated at this requirement and refused to follow.

When the situation was in a deadlock, Chu Long, the Left Master of the Zhao state proposed that “Parents’ love for their children lies in the fact that they always plan for them properly and thoroughly” (*Records on The Warring States Period II*: 935). He further explained that though the Lord Chang’an had been appointed to a very powerful position, had been conferred a lot of fertile land and been presented with many valuable treasures by the Queen Mother, it would be hard for him to rely on in order to maintain the regime of Zhao after the Queen Mother passed away and without any contribution to the state himself. He thus persuaded the Queen Mother agree to send her son, Lord Chang’an, to the state of Qi as a hostage to get help to defend the state of Qin’s invasion. To the Queen Mother, was her son and the, she should protect him from any risk, refusing to do so. The Queen Mother thought it reasonable and sent Lord Chang’an to Qi who then saved the Zhao sate from Qin’s attack. It is the instinct of a mother to love her children, but the way she loves might be simply blind dotage which will harm the one she loves. However deep the maternal love is, it is impossible for the mother to accompany the children forever; Blind dotage castrates, devours and even kills those beloved.

# Conclusion

Focusing on the greatness of mother glorified in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, this paper argued that the worship of such greatness should not be one dimensional, but dialectical. In light of the psychologist Erich Neumann’s idea on archetypal feminine that the elementary character—the foundation of the conservative, stable, and unchanging part of the feminine—has positive and negative poles and Mary Y. Ayer’s duality of the Great Mother as forces both ensure the survival of humanity and the family and damage or kill the very life she is meant to foster, the dialectical impacts of the greatness of maternal love in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* are analyzed in detail.

The Mother’s big breasts, broad and rotund hips indicate the continuity of new life on the premise of her own tenacious vitality, that is the courage and power when face sufferings, grief and death threats. The greatness of the Mother stems from her tenacious vitality, surviving from hardships and trauma, and then from her powerful fertility, protecting the family members, the children, to be concrete. However, due to the unconscious maternal love out of female instinct, on the one hand, and ingrained patriarchal ideology that the male heir was the center of the family, on the other hand, the unrestrained and irrational maternal love backfires those beloved, including her most valued son who never became one “who stands up to piss” (Mo Yan, 2011: 523).

Even the daughters of the Shangguan family never developed their personal independence and consciousness, devoting themselves to the men they cared. After married to men with different political backgrounds (e.g., Sha Yuelaing, the commander of a guerrilla band against the Japanese but finally turned out to be a “traitor”; Sima Ku, an anti-Japanese hero in the Nationalist army and the only male hero gaining Mother’s admiration as “a real man”, but was executed by the Communists after 1949; Lu Liren, a Communist officer and the one fought with Sima Ku to grab the land of Northeast Gaomi Township), they were involved in the conflicts among their men, supporting them to fight against their sisters none of whom enjoyed a natural death.

“Parents’ love for their children lies in the fact that they always plan for them properly and thoroughly”. The maternal love has powerful energy and strong emotional value, but only when it establishes a connection with individual consciousness, and is successfully absorbed and assimilated by consciousness, can it become the content of consciousness, thereby enriching people’s conscious psychology and realizing the balanced and reconciliated relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness, rationality and irrationality.

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1. Negative Aspect of the Great Mother Overshadowing Men

“大母神原型的动力作用超出了无意识本能的范围，而作为决定人格的无意识继续运作，对情绪和人格倾向，并最终对其想象力、观念和兴趣，以及意识的特殊趋向施加某些决定性的影响“（崔成亮，2017：170）。

In his “Erich Neumann: Theorist of the Great Mother” (2006), Camille Paglia outlined four stages of Neumann’s theory in women’s psychological development and in the fourth stage “the development of the mature woman discovers her authentic self and voice. She borrows from the masculine; sex roles are blurred” (2006: 6). 孙大姑比母亲的角色要成 +《触龙说赵太后》

阿城《棋王》

罗翔《政治的》

Though a male heir is expected, the birth of these eight daughters works as a proof of the Mother’s stronger 母亲的女性特征太强大，以致于很难突出男性的作用。母亲之所以去找屠狗的屠夫就是因为认为他“是生儿子的料”，

“在母权世界里，女人是具有神秘创造力的容器，男人从它里面产生而且从它本身产生。巴霍芬正确地指出，在母权下，男人被视为播种者，而他并不了解这一形象的重要意义，在这个形象里，男人只是大地的一个工具，而他所播下的种子并不是“他的”种子，而是大地的种子”（《大母神原型分析》：61）

1. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2012/yan/lecture/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Kang*: a traditional heated platform, 2 metres or more long, used for general living, working, entertaining and sleeping in the northern part of [China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China), where the winter climate is cold. It is made of [bricks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brick) or other forms of fired [clay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clay) and more recently of concrete in some locations. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kang\_bed-stove) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)