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사회학석사 학위논문

Confrontation between gender ideology and  
female desires

——Only daughters’ femininities in sexual relationships  
represented in 4 Chinese youth films from 2013-2015

2020 년 01월

서울대학교 대학원

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이 논문을 풍사랑 석사 학위논문으로 제출함

2020년 01월

서울대학교 대학원

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## **Abstract**

Confrontation between gender ideology and female desires

—Only daughters' femininities in sexual relationships represented in 4 Chinese youth films from 2013–2015

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In 1954, the People's Republic of China promulgated a constitution that clearly declared the equality of men and women. The Chinese government has been still controlling the issue of fertility while partially withdrawing from the control of people's private lives. Since 1979, China has implemented the one-child policy and strictly controlled the birth of Chinese families. From 2013, China has partially implemented a second child policy, and some Chinese families were able to legally give birth to a second child. At the same time, the Chinese government has increased its publicity of traditional Chinese culture, calling for Chinese to value the family, and the voice of women giving up work and returning to the family is growing. At the same period, under the "socialism from afar", Chinese females, who were born after 1980s, were raised as

only daughters have gained more individualities than former generations. Under such social environment, this essay explores what femininities in sexual relationships is forming under the confrontation between gender ideology and female desires, and also focuses on defiance towards gender ideology of only daughters born after 1980s in sexual relationships through analyzing four representative youth films released between 2013–2015.

**Keywords : one-child policy, traditional Chinese culture, socialism from afar, only daughters , gender ideology, female desires, defiance**

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# **I. Research background**

The birth of the People's Republic of China in October 1949 created a new era of Chinese women's liberation. The Marriage Law of 1950 was the first law promulgated after the establishment of People's Republic of China, which abolished the child bride, opposed the arranged marriage, advocated free love, strictly enforced monogamy, and liberated the majority of Chinese women from the feudal marriage system. In 1954, the People's Republic of China promulgated a constitution that clearly declared the equality of men and women. The Chinese government intended to make all Chinese women, who are labor force of half of the population, to participate in social production by shaping a gender-equal social environment. Before reform and opening-up policy was implemented in 1978, the biggest characteristic of Chinese women's femininity was "de-gendering" which means the female characteristics were almost eliminated.

The Chinese government has been still controlling the issue of fertility while partially withdrawing from the control of people's private lives. Since 1979, China has implemented the one-child policy and strictly controlled

the birth of Chinese families. From 2013, China has partially implemented a second child policy, and some Chinese families were able to legally give birth to a second child. At the same time, the Chinese government has increased its publicity of traditional Chinese culture, calling for Chinese to value the family, and the voice of women giving up work and returning to the family is growing. In 2011, Zhang Xiaomei, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference(CPPCC), proposed to encourage women to return to their families in national CPPCC.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, the labor participation rate of Chinese women has gradually declined.

China was a patriarchal society ruled by Confucianism and formed the social environment of equality between men and women after the establishment of P.R China. Chinese political and economic environment has gradually been developed and changed after performing reform and opening-up policy. In an increasingly open era, with the second-child policy implementing and fertility rate continuing to declining, Chinese society

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<sup>1</sup> *Zhang Xiaomei: Encouraging women to return to home*  
张晓梅：鼓励女性回归家庭  
[http://news.ifeng.com/gundong/detail\\_2011\\_03/12/5116061\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/gundong/detail_2011_03/12/5116061_0.shtml)

intends to call for females who have left home for work to return to their families. Under the oriented influence of government, the gender ideology are becoming increasingly traditional in China. At the same period, under the "socialism from afar", Chinese females who were born after 1980s were raised as only daughters have gained more individualities than former generations.

Under such social environment, this essay explores what femininities in sexual relationships is forming under the confrontation between gender ideology and female desires, and also focuses on defiance towards gender ideology of only daughters born after 1980s in sexual relationships through analyzing four representative youth films released between 2013-2015 and related previous studies、 policies and dates in China. This is a case study in Culture Sociology that argues Chinese only-daughters are actively expressing their desires in their ways, although facing negative social environment, using Althusser's theory "ideological state apparatuses" and Judith Butler's Performativity theory.

## **II.literature review**

### **1. Studies of the Chinese government shaping gender ideology and femininity after 1949**

The main research purpose of this study is mainly about gender ideology and femininities that the Chinese government expects to construct as a manipulator of the ideological apparatuses. Therefore, in this part, those previous studies that the Chinese government influences femininity through directly controlling ideological apparatuses are explored, which is divided into two parts according to the time when China's reform and opening up policy was implemented in 1978.

#### **1.1 In 1949-1978**

Li Xiaojiang mentioned the historical development of the Chinese government and Chinese feminism in her book '*Women's & Gender Studies in New China*'<sup>1</sup>. In 1954, the government of China enacted a constitution that clearly declared the equality of men and women. In the 1950s, women

from rural areas of China were granted plowland in the Land Reform and women from urban areas were assigned to participate in work. Many people who were illiterates learned basic knowledge in the national cultural movement. Since then the development of Chinese women has been inseparable from national liberation and the establishment of China, and inextricably linked with the implementation of Marxist ideology and the principle of socialist equality.(Li,2016)

Li thought, since modern times, the issue of Chinese national liberation has preceded the issue of Chinese women. National consciousness is higher than female consciousness in China, which is one of important features of differences between Chinese women and Western women. Through participation in social production, women in China have generally improved their abilities, which has further strengthened women's dependence on society and the country. The biggest characteristic of Chinese women's femininity was "de-gendering" which means the female characteristics were almost eliminated. Li thought strong socialistic identity of Chinese women hinders the development of women's self-consciousness and constrains the actual process of women's liberation. (Li,2016)

## 1.2 After 1978

After the Chinese government implemented reform and opening-up in 1978, the operation of economic and political policies in China was gradually dissimilating. Li Zhang has referred to post-socialist China as being in a "late socialist condition". A unique historical moment at which the Chinese economic system has largely shifted toward a capitalist mode of production mixed with reduced state-managed production, while the political-legal system remains largely dominated by one-party rule, which has led to many contradictory situations.<sup>2</sup> (Li, 2001)

Aihwa Ong and Li Zhang have called the situation in China "socialism from afar", a particular articulation of neoliberalism, which means that "the adoption of neoliberal reasoning has made possible a kind of socialism at a distance, in which privatizing norms and practices proliferate in symbiosis with the maintenance of authoritarian rule."<sup>3</sup> (Li and Ong 2008)

Travis S.K.Kong has mentioned that "this reconfiguration has produced new social spaces that, on the one hand, allow for possibilities and

opportunities for citizens to pursue individual interests, personal desires, and private needs, while at the same time confining and sanctioning “improper” desire, nonnormative identities, and deviant behaviors within state-set parameters, or ruling them out entirely. (Kong, 2012) <sup>4</sup>According to his study, the femininity and related gender roles are highly affected by Chinese government, which is also the basis of this study.

According to studies above, it is obvious that, Chinese government is consistently shaping Chinese gender ideology through different ideological apparatuses for helping social development and making a stable society. After the gradual implementation of the second child policy since 2013, the government and the media mentioned letting women return to their families many times. Chinese women who were born after 1980s are facing these problems in the process of having relationships and marriages. Modern development and traditional thought under the special political environment make their lives full of contradictions, which can be reflected through the change of femininities of Chinese females.

## **2. Studies about femininities of Chinese youth born after 1980s in sexual relationships**

Those sociological studies emphasize that the post-80s Chinese females live in the transition period from traditional culture to modern culture. The post-80s Chinese females pay more and more attention to the equality of their personalities and the independent status in the family. Their concepts of marriage and love are very diverse, and more and more people are actively pursuing love following their desires. The concept of traditional marriage and childbirth has gradually faded, and everyone has begun to pay attention to marriage based on love. On the bases of love, the post-80s Chinese females also pay attention to the materiality and utilitarian part of marriage. The post-80s Chinese females' attitudes towards sexuality are also more open, and many post-80s Chinese females have sex relationship before marriage.

According to a study adopting method of field research, the changing concept of marriage and love of female college students is analyzed. The popularity of love is higher, and the mate selection criteria and the ways of

courtship are diversified. In the field of sexual attitudes, there are situations of openness and conservatism at the same time.<sup>5</sup> (Zhang, 2008) The changing characteristics and trends of the post-80s concept of marriage and love is analyzed in another similar study. The contemporary post-80s youth showed autonomy and diversity in the way of mate selection. Focusing on the basic role of love, it is more realistic and utilitarian in mate selection, and the traditional concept of marriage and childbirth gradually fades and people's openness to sexual attitudes increases, which makes the sense of responsibility and loyalty in marriage gradually decrease. It is not difficult to find that the diversified characteristics of marriage and love of post-80s generation are products of the traditional thoughts and the current social and cultural environment.<sup>6</sup>(Cui, 2010)

Yang Yanling also took college female college students as the research objects, and believes that their current motivations of love are mainly finding a life partner, and the motivations of marriage are relatively simple, mainly "true love", and the attitude towards sex is relatively open.<sup>7</sup>(2007)Zheng Chun believes that post-80s Chinese graduate students

in generally pay attention to character, ability, appearance, economic ability, in mate selection. The attitudes towards sex are also relatively open.<sup>8</sup>(2011)

Li Bo argued some reasons about the changing femininities of the post-80s generation. He believes that their concepts of marriage and love is increasingly showing the importance of focusing on the equality of their personality, the independence of the family, the liberal and democratic family atmosphere, and the economic foundation, the gradually opening characteristics of sexuality. The reasons come from two aspects: First, the traditional cultural concept is advancing with the times and is transforming into modern culture; second, the development of the market economy shows more secularization and profitability, for example, more emphasis on occupational, income, housing and other economic conditions.<sup>9</sup>(2008)

These studies are based on the post-80s Chinese females to explore their femininities and gender roles in intimate relationships in the transition period of Chinese society. In these studies, they ignored the presence of state power, which is an essential perspective when analyzing Chinese issues, and did the discussed the positive defiance of females towards

traditional gender ideology. Unlike previous studies which are all empirical researches in sociological fields, this study will study it in cultural sociology perspective. It will analyze this topic through four representative films that the government intends to form new gender ideology and femininities in sexual relationships with the resistances of increasingly independent modern females and focus on the confrontation between gender ideology and females desires.

### **3. Studies of femininities in Chinese youth movies**

Impacts of youth films have not been valued in academic and industry research areas of China. The film's propaganda and teaching functions often appear as ideology propaganda tools in China. The spread of social mainstream values is based on the ethical preaching of ideology.<sup>10</sup> (2016)The promotion of education is equated with political thought and policy propaganda in China. Chinese Scholar Zhu Hong believes that the film should contain ethical content, and reconstruct the propaganda function of film and television dramas in view of China's unique national

conditions and the current international environment. The ultimate social value of films and television dramas lies in its ethics and connotation.

In the 1990s, China's representative youth films depicted anxious feelings of people growing up in the edge of the city. The representative youth movies around 2005 mainly describe the personal gray memories growing in the background of the 1970s (Huang&Huang, 2014).<sup>11</sup>

Studies have pointed out that from the early 1990s to the beginning of the 21st century, the production of youth movies in mainland China was relatively small. During this period, women in youth movies were suppressed and imprisoned, and their fate was not controlled by their own. In this period of time, the female roles in the youth movies is marginal, and the female characters does not have its own words, showing an almost aphasic image. In 2007, the heroine in the "*Thirteen Paulownia*" directed by Lu Le was brave, strong, yearning for freedom but rebellious. From this film, the female characters of Chinese youth movies began to become independent (Wang&Lie, 2017).<sup>12</sup>

Since the beginning of 2013, the movies of high school and university lives of people born in the 1980s-1990s have appeared in the Chinese film market, including *So Young* and a few high-end boxing movies of the same type. Zhao Wei directed *So Young*, which achieved great box office success and was regarded as the beginning of the local youth film in China. After that, a large number of youth movies were produced. Then the nostalgic youth film continued to emerge, and there was a tendency to become one of the film types in China.

Similar views can be found in the studies of female characters in the youth movies after 2013. These films have independent female characters who do not escape away from hard part of life. After experiencing various lives, the heroines in those films gets rid of the subordinate status of men in society and regains insight into their own values (Zhou&Yang, 2015).<sup>13</sup>

In previous researches, the female characters pursuing romantic love in these movies were mainly focused on, from which the independent image of Chinese women was represented one-sidedly. Those studies ignore the ending of so-called independent women who pursue romantic love in

movies, as well as the plots of female roles pursuing secular marriage relationships.

These films are ostensibly telling stories about post-80s Chinese female's love stories, and actually describing the contradiction between romantic love and stable secular families. These films are based on personal discourse, describing the love stories of young people and the general mentality in society at the same time. There are still many details worth discussing in these film plots. The complexities of gender roles of Chinese females who was born after 1980s are showed through these details. This paper studies the newly forming femininity in the special era using these films as research materials.

### **III. Theories in this paper**

This paper uses four films as analytical materials to discuss the femininity of Chinese females who were born after 1980s. From a macro perspective, in order to explore the state's interference in femininity, this study uses Althusser's ideology state apparatuses theory. According to the theory,

Chinese government implements policies and media etc. as ideology state apparatuses, especially using four representative youth films, to influence the formation of new femininities. From a microscopic point of view, the narratives in the films are influenced by Chinese practice and at the same time, the narratives in films which are influenced by the government are also affecting everyone who watched these films. In order to explore these influences, the study uses Butler's Performativity theory to analyze that femininities are reproduced in performances of individuals, withstanding the state power.

### **1. Althusser's theories "ideological state apparatuses"**

The French philosopher Louis Althusser creatively proposed the concepts of "ideology" and "ideological state apparatuses" in the article *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* published in 1970, which provides the most important analytical tools for studies towards gender ideology and femininity.

The implementation of state power can be carried out in two state apparatuses: one is state apparatuses of repression, and the other is ideological state apparatuses. The former includes government, administrative agencies, police, courts, prisons, etc., which perform their functions through violence or coercion; the latter includes religion, education, family, law, politics, labor union, and media, such as broadcasting, television, film etc., culture such as literature, art, sports competitions, etc.<sup>14</sup>(1970)

According to Althusser's theory, the state uses the "ideology state apparatuses " to shape people's ideology. The ideology will make the specific individual a special subject by means of "calling the subject", so that the subject does not regard its situation and identity as a real existence. (1970) Feminists believe that ideology make people into “men” and “women”. From the first time we fill on the small square about male/female on the application form, we have officially entered the gender system and social relationship of the gender, and got the society gender, which is the establishment of women.<sup>15</sup>(Lauretis,2007)

The generation of femininity is not inborn, but the construction of social ideology. Dai Xuehong proposed that there are different "gender ideologies" in different periods in China. Those ideological female liberation discourses shaped different femininities, body shapes and emotions that meet the needs of the government.<sup>16</sup>(2015)

Masculinity and Femininity are regarded as ideological structures, which are the products of social formation and gender ideology. China's national ideology apparatuses is obviously affecting China's femininity and the films are part of the national ideology apparatuses in China. Therefore, this article analyzes the femininity of post-80s Chinese females through 4 Chinese representative youth movies. In the case of the second-child policy and the continued decline in fertility rates in China, the Chinese government requires Chinese women to have those femininity and related gender roles.

## **2. Judith Butler's Performativity theory**

Judith Butler pointed out that "gender is not a noun, and it is not a set of free-flowing attributes, because we have already seen that the real effect of

gender is related to control practices."(1990) Through the construction of femininity, the society develops a heterosexual marriage model, thereby realizing the organization and effective management of the society.<sup>17</sup>

In Butler's view, gender is primarily a cultural and social construction, and the dual division of gender is imposed. In fact, sex and gender are constructed by the society. Butler believes that gender is cultural construction rather than natural facts. As early as in the article *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988), Butler draws on theories of speech acts, dramatic performances, and phenomenology to discuss how gender is constructed through the performance of physical and discourse behavior. The body is a kind history exists, depending on the repeated performance and production of specific gestures and movements.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler further pointed out: "If gender is the object that one wants to be (but it can never be fully realized), then gender is a process of becoming or acting. Gender should not be used as a noun, an essential existence, or a static cultural label, but should be regarded as an act of

repeated repetition(1990, 43)." Gender behavior must follow certain norms and need to undergo a normalization process and repeat within the limits and then form self and subjectivity. Butler puts forward the famous theory of Performativity in this book. She believes that people's gender performance (gay, heterosexual or bisexual behavior) is not a solidified identity, but is in a constant repeated "performances". Butler believes that no any gender is a true gender, and gender is not a manifestation of a natural gender identity. Gender has no essential being, and is only repeatedly doing in constantly flowing situation. (1990)

Gender performance refers to the continuous consolidation of identity made by the body through citation and repetition of existing norms, but repetitive performances are not passive. In the process of implementation, they simultaneously generate resistance to norms and weaken the mandatory effects of norms. Butler said that the citation must also constitute an interpretation of the norm, and then reveal that the norm itself is just a privileged explanation. The process of gender identity includes both the compromises to norms and the resistance to norms, including the deviation produced on the basis. In this regard, Butler explained that the process of

gender formation, that is, the process of standardization, is a compulsory and coercive practice, but this is not because the process is completely stipulated. Gender is a task, to a certain extent, whose implementation will never be complete, and executor will never be able to achieve the goal he/she should accomplish. (1990)

Butler also attached a certain degree of subversiveness to performance repetition and citation. In *Sex in Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion*, Butler introduces Althusser's theory, that the influence of inquiry on the subject, pointing out that such a question may also produce a series of disobedience. The rules may not only be rejected, but may also generate breaks and have to be reinterpreted, so that people may have doubts about its one-sidedness(1993). <sup>18</sup>If rule itself is violent and harmful, then the process of subject construction are inevitably more complicated, like wrestling between constructions and subversive resistances. For Butler, gender performance has the power of normalization, but also contains the reaction to resist it.

In films studied in this paper, there are influences done by females who live in the confinement of states and still produce the resistant actions while performing the femininities shaped by state power, including female producer, writers, audiences etc.

### Theoretical framework

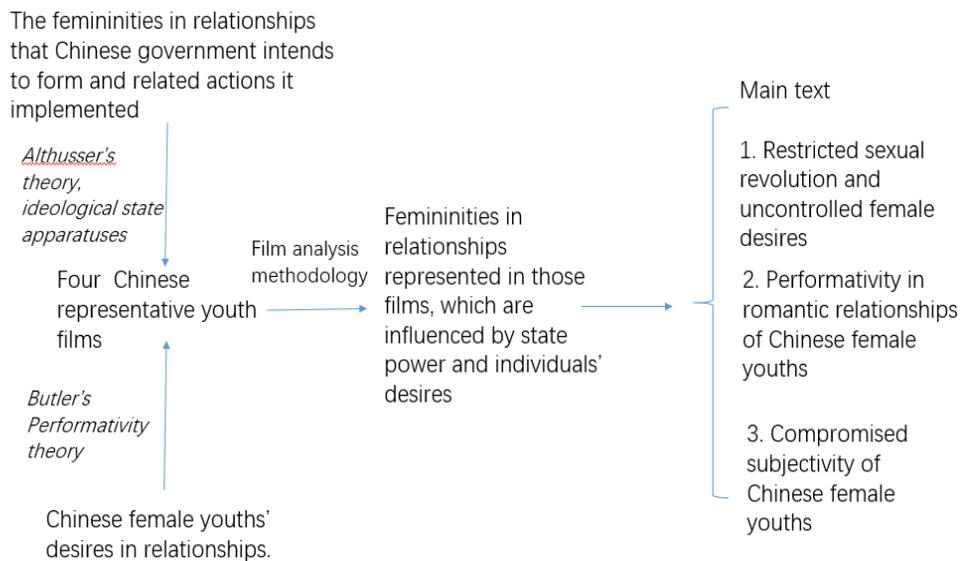


Table 1-1

## IV. Research methodology and materials

### 1. Research methodology

Jacques Aumont and Michel Marie in their publication *Analysis of Film*(1988) propose several key points regarding film analysis.(Aumont, Marie 1988), including contextual analysis, narrative structure analysis and mise-en-scene analysis are used in this paper.

Contextual analysis is the analysis of the film as part of a broader context, including the culture, time, and place of the film's creation. In every chapter, social culture and political background related with those films are analyzed by using method of contextual analysis.

Narrative structure analysis is the analysis of the story elements, including plot structure, character actions and lines analysis etc. With using the Analysis of plot structure and character actions, this paper analyzes the confrontation, which are represented in 4 youth films, between state power and individual desires in forming new femininities in romantic and sexual relationships.

Mise-en-scene analysis is analysis of the arrangement of compositional elements in films. Audiovisual elements that can be analyzed including

frames, special effects, choreography, music, placement of characters etc. Some stage photos belonging to Mise-en-scene parts are analyzed in chapter 1 and 2.

In terms of related study focused on China, Lisa Rofel's analysis of Chinese television drama named *Yearnings*, which were aired in January 1991, is a good example. *Yearnings* is about the intertwined lives, loves, and tragedies of two ordinary families, the intellectual Wangs and the worker Lius, as the vicissitudes of their joys and sorrows unfold over the two decades from 1966-1980s. It is a melodramatic tale of romantic loves found and lost, of a baby abandoned and raised with no one knowing her true identity, of families rent apart and tenuously held together. *Yearnings* gripped at least vast urban audiences when it aired a year and a half after the June 4<sup>th</sup> movement.

Rofel analyzes the context and plot structure and character actions of *Yearnings* to study how individual's desire linked to national identity in a post-socialist world was implicated in this popular narrative and how Chinese state power constructs social identity through this program. As

Rofel mentioned, both the institutionalization and the ideological contours of state power are implicated in the decision-making process determining what will be aired on television and how a television series such as *Yearnings* becomes constituted as “popular”. And the scriptwriters also include daily lives of spectators and have their skills at indirect political criticism and elude official censure.<sup>19</sup> (1994)

## **2. Reasons to use those research materials**

The research materials selected in this study are "*So Young(致青春)* (2013)", "*Fleet of Time(匆匆那年)* (2014)", "*My Old Classmate(同桌的你)* (2014)", "*The Left Ear(左耳)*(2015)". The reasons why these films were selected as research materials are as follows.

### **2.1 Film Censorship in China**

Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh & Darrell William Davis studied the re-nationalizing situation of film industry in China through case study on the China Film Group and film marketization. According to their essay, from the 1950s, film of the

People's Republic of China has exemplified a radical cinema in both content and industrial structure, with national subsidies, central planning, and tight management of output and exhibition. Led by a socialist creed, PRC cinema was imbued with convictions of national authenticity and party-state sovereignty. But this state-backed radical cinema crumbled in the 1980s when the socialist system was riddled with inefficiency and mismanagement after the market economy was established by the government. Chinese government made the blockbuster(Dapian 大片) function to control and regulate films market by making an invisible censorship. Chinese marketization has adopted the blockbuster functions of high budget tent-pole spectacles, but it also cleaves to a quite narrow range of subjects and styles.

Dapian are entertainment pictures, with astounding attractions and booming consumerism; and they sell stories and ideas inclined strongly toward national glorification and ideology, as prescribed by CFG(China Film Group) in order to find entry into the marketplace. In itself this is unremarkable, but when such films are inevitably successful, the market speaks: it is made to say 'serve the people', as the Communist motto goes.

<sup>20</sup> ( Yeh and Davis, 2008)The four films in this study are blockbusters(Dapian 大片) which represent the ideology of the country.

## 2.2 Big enough influence - more than 400 million yuan box office

In 2013, "*So Young*" won 800 million box office and is China's first youth movie with great influence. In the following 2 years, there were more than a dozen youth movies similar to "To Youth". This article selected other 3 movies with a box office of more than 400 million yuan, which means that these films have big enough influence in China.

2013	<i>So Young</i>	726 million (yuan)
2014	<i>Fleet of Time</i>	586 million (yuan)
2014	<i>My Old Classmate</i>	456 million (yuan)
2015	<i>The Left Ear</i>	486 million (yuan)

Table 2-1

## **2.3 The same background of the growing up of normal post80s-90s**

### **Chinese youth**

These films are all about the stories of young people born in the 1980s to 1990s in China from junior high school to working after graduating from universities. Ordinary Chinese young people's learning experiences, romantic experiences, work and marriage are explored in those films.

In the context of China, the government needs to censor every publicly screened film, so these films represent the values recognized by the government to a certain extent. The high box office of the film also means that those films are accepted by majority of Chinese.

In order to maintain a stable population of the country with a declining birth rate, the Chinese government has begun to propaganda that the women should gradual return to the family while adjusting the birth policy. In 2011, Zhang Xiaomei, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference(CPPCC), proposed to encourage women to return to their

families in national CPPCC.<sup>11</sup> In 2013, the Chinese government launched a comprehensive second-child policy. The movie *So Young* was also released in the same year and received a high box office. Just as Althusser's ideological state apparatuses theory, state powers control people's ideology through political machines and shape the femininity as they expect. From above, it can be told that the government also uses films as cultural ideological state apparatuses to shape femininity in China.

These films all depict the stories of Chinese college students after 80/90s. Main characters in those movies all successfully entered the university after the national college entrance examination, which is in line with the current situation of China's advanced education development. After the enrollment expansion in 1999, the process of popularization of advanced education has accelerated markedly. The general expansion of advanced education enrollment has greatly increased women's access to higher education.

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<sup>11</sup> *Zhang Xiaomei: Encouraging women to return to home*  
张晓梅：鼓励女性回归家庭  
[http://news.ifeng.com/gundong/detail\\_2011\\_03/12/5116061\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/gundong/detail_2011_03/12/5116061_0.shtml)

In 1980, the number of female university students in higher education institutions was 268,800, accounting for only 23.4% of the total number of students. In 2009, the number of female college students in China exceeded that of male students for the first time, accounting for 50.48% of the total number, and girls were 200,000 more than boys. In 2012, there were a total of 23.91 million colleges and universities in China, including 647,800 female students, accounting for 51.35 percent of total students.<sup>21</sup> With the development of higher education in China, more and more Chinese youth are receiving higher education. This is one of the reasons why the study chooses these films as research materials.

#### **2.4 Women's important participation in those films**

Considering female desires are the opposite of Governmental will, those films selected to be the research material share the common point that females participate the production of those films as key roles. As the form below shows, each film's production team involves at least one important female.

So Young	Director: ZHAO WEI(赵薇) Writer of Original book: Xin Yi Wu(辛夷坞)
Fleet of Time	Writer of Original book and scriptwriter: Jiu Ye Hui (九夜茴)
My Old Classmate	Producer: Du Yang (杜杨)
The Left Ear	Writer of Original book and scriptwriter: Rao Xue Man (饶雪漫) Producer: Sun Yong Huan(孙永焕)

Table 2-2

### 3. Introduction of these films

#### *So Young*

The 18-year-old girl Zheng Wei finally got her wish to be admitted to the university next to Lin Jing, the brother and playmate in her childhood. When she stepped into the university campus with full of expectations, she was depressed that she found out Lin Jing went abroad to study without noticing her. Zheng Wei felt lost, and at the moment of adversity, she forged a deep friendship with her roommates Zhu Xiaobei, Ruan Guan, Li Weijuan.

At the same time, the wealthy classmate Xu Kaiyang started a crazy pursuit of Zheng Wei. An accidental mistake made Zheng Wei and Xu's roommate Chen become rivals. In repeated counterattacks, Zheng Wei found that she fell in love with this apparently cold-hearted but actually kind-hearted and talented young man, so she furiously turned into pursuing him. Chen finally surrendered under the love action, and enemies eventually became sweet lovers. Upon graduating from her senior year, Zheng Wei's life was tested again. Chen chose to study abroad and he was afraid to tell Zheng Wei till her heard about it from her roommate. Feeling cheated again, Zheng left Chen in pain. After many years, Zheng Wei has transformed into a white-collar beauty in the workplace, and once again tastes the impermanence of destiny that Lin Jing and Chen Xiaozheng with regret and love returned to her life at the same time. After a struggle, she decides that she did not want to be with any of them.

### ***Fleet of Time***

When attending a high school friend's wedding, Chen Xun accidentally recalled his first love, Fang Hui. He met her on the high school, experienced the first heartbeat in his life, and had been in a complicated relationship

more than ten years. In the memory of their youth from high school to college, from the millennium to the era of SARS raging, their emotions sprang up, sublimated, and ended helplessly. Together with their friends Qiao Ran, Lin Jiamo, and Zhao Yan, they are the epitome of a generation after the 80s. They have shared their passion for love, adhered to the original innocence in their hearts, and have been tricked by fate together because they did not want to give up. In the hurried years, they grew up tenaciously, but lost each other helplessly. This unforgettable memory allowed Chen Xun, who was over 30 years old, to cherish the regrets in his life, regained the courage of his youth, made him determine to start over, followed the clues of memory to find Fang Hui, and pursued that bright life.

### *My Old Classmate*

The movie tells the sweet first love and lush memories of a pair of young ignorant classmates from middle school to college. In the midsummer of 1993, Zhou Xiaozhi, a transfer student wearing a pair of small glasses and very quiet, became acquainted with a boy Lin Yi sitting next to her, who likes tricks. Since then, they have gone through middle school and college together and the pure love between the two also bloomed. They broke up

after graduated from university because Lin got an offer to study in USA and Zhou failed in admission. We all had close classmates sitting next to us. They accompanied us throughout our unforgettable school days. In our youthful memories, they must be important and beautiful. The movie reproduces familiar fragments of our school days, showing the collective youthful memories of 1980s generation.

### *The Left Ear*

A 17-year-old girl, Li Er has poor hearing in her left ear. If you stand on her left side, she cannot hear you. Li, an introvert, suddenly falls in love with the boy Xu Yi one day. Li Bala helped Zhang Yang to seduce Xu Yi because of falling in love him. Li Er, who had a crush on Xu, accidentally became friends with Li Bala and saw her beaten by Zhang Yang. The relationship between the two got closer and closer. Li Ba la died in a car accident, and Li Er hated Zhang Yang because of this. Zhang Yang and Jiang Jiao broke up and started a business with a friend.

Li Er and Xu began a relationship when they met again in Shanghai and they broke up after Li found that Xu cheated on her. Zhang Yang though Li Er was a good girl and he insisted on sending gifts to her for several years.

The two met again in their hometown, and they might have a good relationship.

## **V. Governmentality over Chinese female youths' gender ideology after 1949**

### **1. The development of official attitudes toward Chinese female's sexuality since 1949**

Since ancient times, Chinese government has linked women's body to fertility and sex, such as saying "母健而后儿肥"<sup>22</sup> which means only the healthy mother can bear healthy babies. As Foucault mentions it in *Sexual History*, the official discussion points out the content, themes and representative practices, through which the sexual knowledge was generated and controlled. This is a relationship between knowledge and power. (1984, 92-102) In the mutual internalization of power and knowledge, state power intervenes in the construction of the human body subtle, less perceptible and gradually internalized way, and then controls

bodies. (Foucault, 1975) In different times and spaces, female bodies are hard to escape the control of state power. State power always regulates women's bodies through certain knowledge, discourses and science. (Pan, 2019)<sup>23</sup> China's fertility policies is also closely linked to women's bodies after 1949. As the same time, there are many discourses and new knowledge about female sexual behaviors appearing.

The public discourse in China from 1950s to the beginning of the reform and opening up was biased towards accusing individual passion. Individualism is derived from capitalism and when people are addicted to personal passion, individuals will “lose the strength controlling themselves”.<sup>24</sup> Young people are told that love should not be confused with passion and sex. The danger associated with the passion and sex comes from its manifestation of basic physical desire and moral degeneration and its antisocial nature.<sup>25</sup> (Evans, 1997)

After the reform and opening up, the words in public speech directly linking the private life and the national politics are gradually reduced. Although privatization of private lives of Chinese is one of the biggest characteristics

after the reform and opening up, at the same time, the state's requirements for marriage and family are maintaining the same as those since the establishment of the People's Republic of China. It is necessary to maintain a family in a stable social environment, therefore women's premarital sexual behavior can be threaten as actions that can destroy stability of the family. In accordance with the principles of appropriate gender-based behavior based on biology, ideal women should exist in the private sphere as the corresponding wife and mother. Female sexual desire must be bound by marriages as a marital duty. Outside the domestic environment, female sexual behaviors become a source of potential danger. pollution and confusion. <sup>26</sup>(Evans, 1997)

The same nature of discourses after reform and opening up are linked to the scientific factual description, trying to show that premarital sex can bring bad results to the individual's body and mind. "Premarital sex is an unpleasant thing because it is different from sexual behavior in marriage. It can impair the physical development of both men and women and may leave long-term psychological effects that undermine future marriages." (Wang, 1988, 67) Unlike the benefits of sexual behavior in marriage,

premarital sex may result in sexual dysfunction after marriage because of anxiety and fear of being discovered or because of pregnancy. (Su & Huang 1992, 20) In summary, public discourses do not encourage premarital sex.

Before the reform and opening-up, public discourse requires abstinence before marriage. Although strictly speaking, it is not illegal, but if it is violated, it would be considered a crime.<sup>III</sup> After the reform and opening up, premarital sex is not considered a criminal act, but it is usually associated with antisocial behavior, ranging from the destruction of public morality to crime. Public discourse focuses on the standard of premarital sex in women, such as a section of the education manual titled "Why are some young women losing virginity", that women's premarital sex is the result of succumbing to physical desires, which is the first step in the social and moral decline of women towards crime. There were many similar typical women appeared in the news in that period. The females in these films are the transformation of women at that time. They were all "bad girls" who were established by public opinion.

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<sup>III</sup> SHANGHAI Court, 1950

After the reform and opening up, the country's class concept was gradually replaced by the idea of the market economy. The government strengthened the ideologies and moral principles that were clearly related with the collectivist orientation before 1978, and summarized the gender characteristics into biological sexual differences. The government also uses scientific discourse to influence public speech. In addition to expressing medical and biological views, "scientific facts" also express moral and scientific views, naturalizing women's responsibilities, and making them a proactive, parenting, and reactionary role. The description of gender characteristics in mainstream sexual discourses turn women into the general standard to maintain sexual ethics and the main force of family order.(Evans,1997)<sup>27</sup>

The state has not only been controlling women's sexual attitudes, but has also controlled women's bodies through the one-child policy. The impact of China's family planning policy on women's health is multifaceted. Family planning has greatly reduced the fertility rate of women. In the 1950s, the total fertility rate of women was 5.84. In the 1960s, it was 5.68 and it fell to 4.01 in the 1970s. By the 1990 census, the average born children of each

woman is 2.10 and the total fertility rate is 2.31.28 (Zhu&Jiang, 1985)

According to Althusser's theory, state power uses the ideological state machine of media, policy, and family etc, intending to make women to have conservative sexual attitudes, not to have sex at random, and to return to families according to state will.

In the past ten years, the central government of China and local governments have been revising the restrictions on the media's sexual discourse. It can be seen that the Chinese government is increasingly strict with the boundaries of the media's sexual discourse.

September 5th, 2007	2007年9月5日，四川成都两家电台“低俗下流”的“五性”节目被叫停，禁止各广播电视播出机构策划、制作、播出涉“性”节目。  Sichuan Province banned 2 broadcasting station programs because they were vulgar and nasty, and forbade broadcasting stations to plan/produce/broadcast any program about sex.
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<p>December 25th, 2008</p>	<p>广电总局向全国各地地方台下发了一则“整改令”，禁止情感类节目低俗化。而此“整改令”也是继去年“叫停”深圳卫视《超级情感对对碰》后，对低俗情感类节目的又一次严打。</p> <p>China National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) implemented a rule that prohibits vulgar and nasty emotional TV programs countrywide.</p>
<p>June, 2010</p>	<p>国家广电总局正式下发了《广电总局关于进一步规范婚恋交友类电视节目的管理通知》及《广电总局办公厅关于加强情感故事类电视节目管理的通知》两份正式文件，文件中规定：“不得以婚恋的名义对参与者进行羞辱或人身攻击，甚至讨论低俗涉性内容，不得展示和炒作拜金主义等不健康、不正确的婚恋观。”、“情感故事类节目不得展示丑恶、迷信；不得展示因亲情矛盾、家庭纠纷导致的极端行为、过激言论、‘揭伤疤’或恶性案件；不得过分渲染悲情、阴暗、颓废心态……”</p> <p>China National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) implemented 2 additional rules about prohibiting</p>

	<p>emotional TV programs. According to those rules, emotional TV programs can not mention vulgar sex-related topics and demonstrate incorrect values of marriage and love, such as money-oriented thought etc.</p>
<p>October, 2011</p>	<p>广电总局发布文件,各电视上星综合频道还要开办一个弘扬中华民族传统美德和社会主义核心价值观的思想道德建设栏目。</p> <p>China National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) released a document that every channel has been ordered to create a program that promotes traditional virtues and socialist core values.</p>
<p>May, 2014</p>	<p>广电总局发禁令：不许出现我军色诱敌方、金钱方式获取情报以及红色刺杀类情节。</p> <p>China National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) released a rule that TV dramas should not contain those immoral plots such as that Chinese soldiers seduce</p>

	<p>enemy. Chinese officials use money to obtain information from enemies etc.</p>
<p>July, 2017</p>	<p>广电总局出台《网络视听节目内容审核通则》，其中第六节渲染淫秽色情和庸俗低级趣味一节中，其中包括禁止具体展现卖淫、嫖娼、淫乱、强奸、自慰等情节，禁止展示和宣扬不健康的婚恋观和婚恋状态，如婚外情、一夜情、性自由、换妻等，禁止较长时间或较多给人以感官刺激的床上镜头、接吻、爱抚、淋浴，及类似的与性行为有关的间接表现或暗示。同性恋行为也被禁止播放。</p> <p>China National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) implemented <i>General rules for content review of online audio-visual programs</i>. According to section 6<sup>th</sup>, The section on rendering obscene pornography and vulgar low-level plots includes prohibiting specific manifestations of prostitution, fornication, rape, masturbation, etc. And it is also forbidden to display and promote incorrect values of marriage and love, such as extramarital affairs, one-night</p>

	stand, sexual freedom, wife change, etc. It is forbidden to show indirect performance or suggestion related to sexual behaviors for a longer period of time, including kissing, caressing, showering etc. Homosexual behaviors are also banned.
April 3th, 2019	<p>广电总局出台《未成年人节目管理规定》，禁止肯定、赞许未成年人早恋，宣扬或者肯定不良的家庭观、婚恋观、利益观，除健康、科学的性教育之外的涉性话题、画面。</p> <p>China National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) published <i>Regulations on the administration of programs for minors</i> which prohibits affirm and appreciate the early love and promote the incorrect family values, values of marriage and love, and sex-related topics and pictures in addition to sex education.</p>

Table 3-1

Apparently, Chinese public discourses about sex in the period of social transformation is becoming increasingly open. At the sometime, the government is constantly revising the boundaries of public sexual discourse.

According to those rules, people should not talk about vulgar topics and should develop and expand the traditional virtues of China and the core value system of socialism in media. Discourses about sex and romantic relationships are firmly confined in these frameworks.

Vulgar sexual discourses	Incorrect values on relationships and marriage
One night stand, Affairs, Incest, prostitution, Rape etc.	Early love, Same-sex romantic relationships etc.

Table 3-2

## 2. From to suppression towards early love(早恋) to suppression over the modern intimacy

In order to maintain stability, some non-government organizations are forbidden from carrying out activities by governments, especially women's

rights-related organizations. So far, China still lacks a national feminist movement, and it is difficult for feminist groups to become legal organizations. According to current democratization process in China, the future of its democratization process is uncertain.

Giddens distinguishes between the traditional intimate relationships and the modern one. The modern relationship seeks to establish an equal, democratic and mutually shared relationship. The intimacy is achieved through the establishment of respect for equality and independence in the private sphere, by which gender equality is formed. (1992)<sup>29</sup> The ideal situation of modern intimacy is to break the unequal relationship based on democracy, which is linked to the democratization process of the whole society. In this social context, the women's liberation movement naturally raised the issue of gender equality.

From the above analysis, Chinese government is retarding democratization process in order to maintain the stability of the political power. Therefore, the government does not encourage or even intend to prevent the occurrence of modern intimacy related to the modern democracy, which is defined as

unstable romantic love. Before these four youth movies, China has been banning “early love” from the 1990s. Adolescent romance is considered a normal relationship in most countries, but it is viewed as an abnormal relationship in China for a long time. Teenage love in China has a special name, known as "zaolian". "Zaolian" can translated to "early love" or "love too early"(Evans, 1997)<sup>30</sup>. "Early love" refers to courtship or dating among young people in elementary and secondary school systems. In today’s China, it is regarded as a serious social problem related to minors/adolescents. To safeguard their moral, hygiene and promising future, it is believed that early love should be prevented and controlled by school regulations, family pressures.<sup>31</sup> (Shen 2015)

In China, parents usually prohibit children's "early love", because they think it can influence their children's academic achievements and future development. There are some regulations against zaolian in most secondary and primary schools. Students in those schools would get verbal and official warnings, and even might be expelled from school.

There were no official regulations to prevent and control "early love" till

2009. On 20 August 2009, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of Heilongjiang Province passed the Regulations on the Protection of Minors of Heilongjiang Province, with a section against minors' delinquency. According to Article 13 of that section:

It is the right and duty of parents and other guardians of minors to keep their minors away from the following deviant behaviors: zaolian (early love), illicit cohabitation, drug-taking, prostitution and whoring.

According to a recent news report, a 14-year-old girl was incautiously killed by her father because she was suspected of having "early love".<sup>32</sup> In Børge Bakken's essay, after analyzing the social control of "early love" in present-day China, he found out that there is still a double standard and inequality between the sexes. Traditionally, girls have been more strictly supervised than boys, so that when a girl breaks out of her social confinement, she becomes an easy target.<sup>33</sup> (Bakken, 2014) Under the influence of Chinese traditional culture, female chastity is valued by the society. Teenage girls who fall in "early love" are usually labeled "bad girls" or "wayward girls".<sup>34</sup> (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) And girls are more seriously controlled by parents, teachers and the whole societies than boys.

State power uses school education, family, policy, and media to create a social environment that limits “early love”. Chinese teenagers are limited to freely expressing their feelings during the adolescence that should learn how to have romantic relationships. The concept of romantic love is gradually stigmatized, especially Chinese females are bound by various rules in this process. According to Althusser's ideology state machine theory, Chinese femininities are further being shaped into a gender role that females should not pursuing romantic love since adolescence.

### **3. Sex politics dominated by males in China after 1949**

*Women in Politics: 2019* lists the proportion of women in legislative and executive branches in different countries on January 1, 2019 and this Political Participation Map is updated every two years. The map shows that the current proportion of female ministers worldwide is 20.7%. (812 out of 3,922 women), which is a record high, and increases 2.4 percentage points from 2017. China ranks 164th out of 188 countries, decreases 30 places from two years ago, with a female minister ratio of 6.5% (2 out of 32 were

women), compared with 10% of female ministers two years ago (3 out of 30 were women).<sup>35</sup> There is only one woman among the 25 members of the 19th Central Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, and no woman among the 8 members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee

In the book *Sex Politics*, Kate Millett reveals the sex politics practiced by men. She believes that shaping a typical femininity is a socialization process that stimulates the development of patriarchy.<sup>36</sup> (Millett, 1970) According to data above, it is obvious that Chinese politics are dominated by men, which are developing a patriarchal society.

After the reform and opening-up, China maintained a centralized political power while implementing a neoliberal market economy. In order to keep the normal operation of the market economy, the government gradually reduced the direct intervention of corporate management. Without the support of the state's public power, the equal opportunities for women to get employment as men in the market economy are gradually decreasing. In order to adapt to the market economy, the reform of state-owned

enterprises puts more emphasis on efficiency. Therefore, the recruitment decision of enterprises only focuses on economic efficiency and profitability, and ignores social and political issues.

State-owned companies are focused on minimizing costs and increasing profits, rather than helping to promote balanced development throughout society. The benefits of child-caring services, maternity leave, etc., which were originally provided to employees, began to be seen as a heavy burden of increasing the cost of employing people, which exacerbated employment discrimination against women. This was directly reflected in the group of people having a secure job called "Tie Fan Wan(iron rice bowls)" in China. The number of women who lost their secure jobs was higher than that of men, and they were more difficult to return to employment than the latter.

After the one-child policy implemented from 1980, in the process of the growth of the only daughter, the status of Chinese women is gradually decreasing. According to the World Bank, the labor participation rate of Chinese women has experienced a continuous decline from 1990 to 2016, from 73% to 63%, and the gap with the male labor participation rate was

also expanding. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report for 2018 shows that the gender gap in China has fallen from 61 in 2011 to 103 in 2018.<sup>37</sup>

According to the Chinese Time Utilization Survey Research Report, from 2008 to 2017, the total labor time ratio of women and men in China dropped from 1.10 to 1.05, and the paid labor time ratio decreased from 0.73 to 0.69, and the unpaid labor time ratio rose from 2.60 to 3.15. Chinese Women have a tendency to carry the “double burden” of caring for the family and earning money to support the family.<sup>38</sup> In conclusion, the status of women continues to decline in China.

## **VI. Risked premarital sex of females born after 1908s in China**

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the government controlled the socialist ideology of Chinese young people through the control of mainstream discourse. After the reform and opening-up, the government implemented the market economy system, the official

discourse power began to gradually liberalize, and the sexual discourse gradually diversified, and at the same time, people's sexual attitudes became increasingly open. The Chinese government has always emphasized a stable family-centered society, where sexual and gender relations are at the heart of the family. The standardization of sex provides a powerful means for adjusting the order of marriages, families and social relations.

With the implementation of the market economy, the convenience of transportation and communication, the intercommunication of global media, and the ideology of various countries flowing into China are impacting the mainstream consciousness of Chinese tradition, including sexual consciousness and sexuality.<sup>39</sup>(Cao, 2009) At the same time, the female sexual attitudes are becoming more open. Under this trend, this chapter analyzes the confrontation between national will intending to control females' sexual desires and women's body through studying these films and the related defiance of females, especially only daughters.

## **1. Sexual attitudes of Chinese females becoming increasingly open after 1978**

Pan Suiming points out that in ancient Chinese society, there was no concept of sexuality that could exist independently. Even the concept of sex in purely biological sense did not exist independently. Sex was submerged in bigger and integrated “primary life circle”, just like “people” is never meant to be an individual, but is always included in the “home”. (2004) In terms of sexual practice, the form of social existence in China before 1919 was framed by a set of rules, and the center was based on reproduction.

Before and after the May Fourth Movement, the concept of sexuality was introduced by some Chinese scholars who had studied in Japan, and the cultural tradition was gradually broken. In 1949-1979, sexual issues became sensitive due to political reasons, reaching a “sexless” state during the “Cultural Revolution”. In the early 1980s, sexual issues were re-expressed, with Western “sexual scientism” orientation, which promoted scientific knowledge of positivism and acknowledged the differences in sex between men and women (Pan&Huang,2008).<sup>40</sup> After the government implemented the market economy system in 1978, with part liberation of the public discourse, the civilian sexual discourse gradually diversified, and people's

sexual attitudes became more and more open.

In September 1999, the semi-autobiographical novel *Shanghai Baby* written by the female writer Wei Hui was published. Wei Hui's description shows the physiological reaction of women in terms of lust in the book, and treats sex in a healthy way as a complete person. More than 110,000 copies were sold within half a year (not including piracies), which ignited the controversy in the Chinese literary world, and became popular in younger generation in China, and attracted the coverage of international media. As China's Daily Liberation reported, Beijing's news media and culture management departments described *Shanghai Baby* as a decaying typical case poisoned by Western culture, because of women's masturbation, homosexuality, and drug use described in the book. The officials announced the rule in April 2000 and it was a national ban on sales of her books since mid-May that year.

Wei Hui's similarly autobiographical novel of a young woman's sexual awakening, *shanghai Baby*, provides more self-indulgent, explicit, and positive images of a young woman's sexual pleasure and a celebration of

Shanghai's consumer leisure culture.<sup>41</sup> (William & James, 2003) Wei Hui is not the only female writer who writes novels with contents about their own sex experiences. From June 19, 2003, female writer Muzimei began to publish her sex diary online. On August 1, Muzimei recorded her one-night stand with a famous rock musician in Guangzhou in her book *Love Letter*. The story reproduces a large number of details of her sex experiences with the musician by describing her skills and abilities directly. Muzimei became popular and quickly formed the phenomenon of "Muzimei" among young generations.

Despite of this, as the officials banned Wei Hui's books, Chinese sexual behavior, especially female sexual behavior, is still restricted by the government by the means of media、 schools、 laws etc. Therefore, Li Xiaojiang mentioned that China has no sexual liberation including female liberation (2016). James Farrer mentions the similar opinion that the popular fictions, represented in Wei Hui's writing, gives us a more ironic and playful sense of social transformation in which sexual choices are freer, but also more confusing and morally ambivalent. Females writers like Wei

Hui and Muzimei are not conservative stories, but neither are they revolutionary.<sup>42</sup> (William& James, 2003)

Many surveys about young people's sexual behaviors since the 1980s show that sexual attitudes and sexual behavior are undergoing great changes. According to the *Survey Report on Chinese Marriage and Love in 2015* conducted by the Center for Social Investigation and Research of Peking University, the average age of first sexual intercourse of people born before 80s is later than other age groups, which is 22.17 years old, while the average age of people born after 80s is 22.10 years. The average age of people born after 90s is 19.78 years, and people born after 1995 is 17.71 years old.<sup>IV</sup> Although the state has been controlling public discourse about sex, the average age when Chinese youngsters have their first sexual relationship keeps advancing.

## **2. Encouraging females to be “good girls” through punishing “bad girls” in films**

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<sup>IV</sup> *Survey Report on Chinese Marriage Status in 2015*. (2015). Social Research and Research Center of Peking University  
北京大学社会调查研究中心, 《2015年中国人婚恋状况调查报告》

Under the confrontation between the will of the state and the desires of women, the will of the state dominates the rules about women's premarital sex, leaving no place for women's desires. The desires for female characters presented in movies are either restricted or denied directly. The description of female sexuality in the film has completely become the embodiment of the national will, establishing the role models as “good girls” in the film while punishing the so-called “bad girls”.

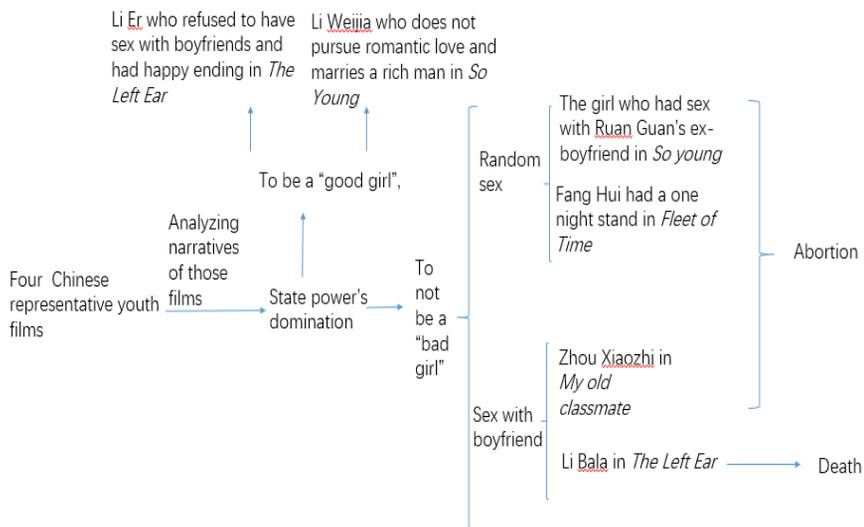


Table 4-1

## 2.1 Role models as “good girls”

Li Er in *The Left Ear* is the representative image of “good girls” in Chinese society. In the *Left Ear*, there are many lines to define what is a “good girl” like Li Er. In the beginning of *Left Ear*, Li Er's inner monologue said, "I swear to god, I am a good girl, my grades are good, I like helping people. I can handle hard work. I respect my elders. "These are the most basic requirements of typical “good girls” in Chinese society.

She spent a lot of time trying to pursue Xu Yi. After having a serious relationship or even a cohabitation with Xu, Li Er is not willing to have sex with Xu Yi. In the movie, Xu hugs Li and want to kiss and touch Li, and Li who seems love Xu very much pushed Xu away, looking very angry. The film does not explain why Li refuses to have sex with her boyfriend Xu. Illogically, she refuses her boyfriend's sexual request as if she is sexual apathy. Later in the movie, Li discovers that Xu has sex with a strange female when she sends Xu groceries to his apartment. The camera flashes past and does not give Li a chance to be angry. This plot proves that Li's choice was correct. She does not have sexual relations with a man of poor quality.

In movie *Left Ear*, Li Er said, "I have been having this weird idea. I suddenly want to be bad. I have to turn bad to get the freedom I want". She tries to learn to be a bad girl learning to smoke, make up and wear toenail polish, but in the end she does not break through the last level of changes, that she refuses to have sex with her boyfriend. This also shows that the essence of the concept of a good girl in Chinese society is related to sex and their bodies.

From the beginning to the end, she does not rip out the label of a "good girl". As a good girl, Li Er can pursue love, but can not have sex with her boyfriend. In the last part of the movie, Li Er's inner monologue reappeared. "I swear to god, I am still a good girl. After graduating from university in 2009, I got a job at a publisher in Shanghai. I don't have a high salary and I am very busy at work." Li is the representative of "good girls" group in China, who has a stable job, and receives a monthly salary and keeps the chastity. Those plots in the movie repeats the core requirement of Chinese society for good girls, who do not have sexual relations with anyone and keeps their chastity till marriage.

As the lines in *Left Ear*, Zhang Yang, who enters the clothing industry in

college, is the CEO of a little e-commerce site in Beijing now. Finally, Li, as a “good girl”, gets a stable job and becomes Zhang Yang’s future girlfriend, who has a successful career. The end of the movie implies that the “good girl” Li Er has a beautiful future.

Li Weijuan in *So Young* is a representative role of the traditional “good girl”. When Li was in college, she mentions, “I just want to study hard and be successful. You know how hard it was for a small-town girl like me to get in here. After working hard here, I won’t sell myself short.” Like Li Weijuan, good students should focus on learning and career, and good girls should not have romantic relationships without thinking about the future. In the movie, Li Weijuan even thinks that drinking is the sign of degeneration, which represents more details of the concept “good girls”. She tells Zheng Wei that falling love with Chen Xiaozheng, who was born in poverty, will cost her dearly. In conclusion, Li Weijuan uses the identity of a good girl as a bargaining chip for a good marriage.

Li Weijuan married a rich man in his 50s a few years after she graduated from college and becomes a stepmother of two kids. In the movie, She treats

Zheng Wei and Ruan Guan a fancy dinner in her husband's superior hotel. As a representative of a good girl, She fulfills her wishes and improves her social status.

Since 1949, the government has been proposing to promote examples from positive and negative sides. The good girls in the movies keep their own chastity before marriage, and finally they have a good future in the end. Bad girls are subject to certain punishments in the movies compared to good girls.

## **2.2 The analyses of faces of “good and bad girls”**

Regarding to the analysis of faces in films, as Mary Ann Doane’s thought, the faces produced and displayed in the visual space that film, TV, painting, advertising, video art, cartoons, and webtoons etc, which are functioning as special fields of expressing different meanings, can be considered as symbols and texts.<sup>43</sup> (Doane, 2003) Through analyzing the features of different faces of the heroine in a Korean famous webtoon titled *The World of Miji*, Sociologist Kim Hong Jung studies the contemporary phenomena

of misogyny among young Korean people from the consumer society perspective.<sup>44</sup>(2016) In this part, faces of good and bad girls in *Left Ear* are analyzed following related theoretical context. The differences between faces of original Li Er and Li Er who tried to be a bad girl are very obvious, which shows the typical stereotype towards good girls and bad girls in China.

After analyzing the facial features of Li Er at different stages in *Left Ear*, this shows the most basic impression of Chinese society on “good girls” and “bad girls”. The “good girl” above is not wearing makeup, keeping natural long hair, and her eyes are full of spirituality feeling full of expectation for the future.



Film still 1-1 in *Left Ear*

In the picture below, the “bad girl” in the *Left Ear*, gave Li Er a makeup and brought a wig. The bad girl is painting heavy makeup, ironing her hair, with exaggerated jewelry and cheesy clothes, whose eyes are glazed and vacant.



Film still 1-2 in *Left Ear*

The same person, one is a good girl and one wants to be a bad girl, dressing as a bad girl. There is such a big difference in facial expressions, which can visually see how simple and direct the Chinese society treats “good girls” and “bad girls” and make preference to “good girls” over “bad girls”.

### **2.3 Confined desire of “bad girls”**

In those movies, the role of the “bad girl” was shaped in the opposite way

to the “good girl”. The girl who had “early love” mentioned above is also classified as a “bad girl”. In Chinese society, the stigma of “bad girls” is very serious. Smoking, not learning, piercing ears, etc. are the beginnings of girls learning to be bad. As it is mentioned before, chastity is the core problem of the "bad girl". People are always worried that females lose their chastity and become a slutty woman. Li Bala in *the Left Ear* is the opposite of Li Er. Since Li Bala is a “bad girl”, everyone thinks that she will be very open in terms of sexual life. Xu Yi, when arguing with Libala, tells her, "They were right about you, you are nothing but a bus." Before the first sexual relationship between Li Bala and Zhang Yang, Zhang asked Li how many people she has slept with, and Li answered that, "so many people".

In order to make people aware of their prejudice, the film also deliberately made a close-up of the bloodstain on the sheets after she had sex with her boyfriend Zhang Yang, showing people that she was still a virgin before. Li Bala is the bottom line of “bad girls” that even a “bad girl” only has sex with her boyfriend and there will be no sexual promiscuity. The film emphasizes that they have sex after the college entrance examination.



Film still 1-3 in *Left Ear*

The concept of chastity is usually associated with the control of women's body in the context of China. Women are a complete person who keep their chastity before they are married, or they are destroyed and imperfect.<sup>45</sup> (Ke, 2011) In the films and television dramas with the background of ancient China, in order to highlight the fact that women keep their virginities, they always give a close-up of the bloodstain on the sheets after the wedding night. This shot appears in *Left Ears* in the modern context and can be interpreted as a return to traditional thinking. The chastity of modern women is also concerned, even if it is not sexual relations after marriage,

females need to have sex with their boyfriend. Women's sexual behavior is always controlled within a certain range, and even a "bad girls" can not have sexual promiscuity. In 2011, Bai Wanqing, a deputy in the People's Congress in Shanghai, warned all unmarried young women living in Shanghai on television to be self-respecting, not to overindulge, and emphasized that chastity is the most precious dowry for girls to their future families.<sup>v</sup>

The characters of bad girls created by the four films are all related with sexual behavior and ended with the abortion(or death). There are obvious distinctions between “good girls” and “bad girls” in these four movies. The ending of a “good girl” is always good and the ending of a “bad girl” is often very painful. These films have established rules for judging the quality of girls, which are closely linked to sexual behavior. Women who have sex at an incorrect time with incorrect men are finally punished.

In the *Left Ear*, before Li Bala and Zhang Yang have sex in the movie, Li

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<sup>v</sup> *Bai Wanqing, a deputy in the People's Congress in Shanghai : Chastity is the most precious dowry for girls to their future families.*(2011)

上海人大代表柏万青：贞操是女孩最好的嫁妆，新浪新闻，2011,03,04，

says “I finally can get laid with you”. Li actively expressed the desire of women. As a representative of “bad girl”, Li Bala did not have casual sexual relationships with other people before in the movie, but had it firstly with her official boyfriend. After Li had sex with her boyfriend, it did not take long for her to die in a car accident.

Li Bala is the most extreme example of all "bad girls", and she has received the most severe punishment, death. Excepting for Li Bala, there are female characters who have random sexes or have sexes with boyfriends received abortion as punishment in other three films.

In *So Young*, boyfriend of Ruan Guan cheated on her while he was drunk and the girl who had sex with Ruan Guan’s boyfriend became pregnant. Ruan Guan forgave her boyfriend and accompanied that girl to have an abortion. After discovering her boyfriend’s cheating, Fang Hui in the *Fleet of time* found a one-night stand with her classmate and then she became pregnant, accompanied by her boyfriend to have an abortion. Both of these cases are the consequences of casual sexual relationships, which are absolutely forbidden. If it is violated, it will be accidentally pregnant, and then girls have an abortion.

Not only the casual sexes are forbidden, but also sexual relationships with boyfriends are also not recommended in those films. Lin Yi in the *old class mates* has been performing the role of a “good girl” for years. Although her boyfriend has repeatedly asked for sexual relationships, she has been refusing to have sex with her boyfriend, until her boyfriend intends to break up with her. She lost her virginity with her boyfriend and successfully recovering their relationships. Although it was a sexual relationship with her boyfriend, Lin still became pregnant and had an abortion. Ruan Guan in *So Young* also gets pregnant with her boyfriend. She have the abortion without telling her boyfriend, because his boy friend has no intention to marry her.

The emphasis on premarital virginity is reflected by the punishment for premarital sex, which is pregnancy and abortion. Rather than directly stigmatizing women's premarital sex, the society is linking women's premarital sex with abortion and stigmatizing abortion, which reflects the changes in ideological propaganda brought about by the development of the times. This is no longer a straightforward moral warning, but a personalized

female body as a punishment for women to obey the rules. Although the methods of propaganda are different, the government is still convinced that protecting women's bodies, especially chastity, and not being harmed by destructive behavior is an important matter for maintaining morality and social integrity. (Goddard 1987, 190; Douglas 1989)

### **3. The defiance of “bad girls” and the introspection towards lives of “good girls”**

Those films reinforces traditional gender ideology by punishing bad girls. Women cannot have premarital sex or they will be punished. The "bad girl" images in those films show the desire of women born after 1980s, and it also shows the resistance of female filmmakers in the movies. After China's reform and opening up, the individualization of Chinese women has been strengthened. As Yan YunYang mentioned, the rising importance of emotions and desires in private life is one of the most important changes in the process of individualization(2003)<sup>46</sup>. Rofel also argued that desiring self is another important change in the subjective aspect of individualization(2007)<sup>47</sup>. Although “bad girls” ended badly in the films,

Chinese 80hou females' desires for sex are directly expressed, which become symbols of only daughters born after 1980s in China.

The resistance represented by female filmmakers is not only reflected in the film, but also formed by making a voice outside the film. Although the endings of the "good girls" in those movies are good in a secular sense, the deliberate plot arrangement in the movies allows the audience to hear the voice of female producers, that they are reminding the audiences if they want to have lives like "good girls" or not. For example, Li Er, the most typical good girl, in *Left Ear* sacrificed much in relationships with Xu Yi, but still broke up because of Xu's infidelity and Li Weijuan who is a traditional good girl in *So Young*, finally married a rich man in his 50s who had two children with his ex-wife. Female filmmakers intend to lead female audiences to reflect together, which forms a kind of resistance outside the film and will also appear in subsequent analysis.

The plots of female characters' abortion in movies are, on the one hand, the state's power to warn women not to have sex arbitrarily through cruel punishment, on the other hand, has also caused people to reflect on the

serious lack of sex education in China. After the release of films such as *So Young*, it has aroused widespread discussion in Chinese society, which has promoted the development of sex education in China to some extent, and has impacted the traditional gender ideology.

## **VII. Romanticization of heterosexual relationships of Chinese female youths**

After the reform and opening up, the strict control towards love in public discourse is gradually removed. Compared with situation before, young people have the relative freedom to pursue love. At the same time, as Chinese women gradually improve their status and education level, the more they want to follow the freedom of love and these desires as women are increasing. At the same time, the national public discourse about love is still limited to a certain extent, and discourses about love are usually associated with a stable marriage. Excessive romantic love in the wrong time with wrong people are not encouraged by the public discourse.

## **1. The public discourse of love in China from 5.4 movement to post-mao era**

Li Haiyan studied the development and changes of the Chinese emotional lineage in the first half of the 20th century by analyzing the emotional novels around the May Fourth Movement. From the late Qing Dynasty (1890-1900) to the May Fourth and the post-May 4th period (1920-1940), discussions on emotional and intimate relationships have always dominated the field of literature and popular culture. The May Fourth Movement and its claim that "love" is a symbol of freedom, independence, and equality. Driven by the anti-traditional spirit of the May Fourth Movement, the 1920s became the heyday of free love. A large number of works that criticize the autocratic family system and oppression over women and encourage individual freedom and autonomy continued to emerge. (Lee 2007)

Li Haiyan believes that the discussion of emotions is never simply about emotions, but involves many discourses such as identity, morality, gender, authority, power etc. At the end of the book *Revolution of the Heart*, Li Haiyan mentions the development of emotional discourse in China in the

late 20th century. In her view, after the country's 30 years of control over the people's minds, the emphasis on individual feelings and desires has sprung up and pursuits of self-desire and pleasure in business culture and consumerism are extremely inflated. After years of imprisonment when China entered the post-Mao era in the 1980s, the Chinese emotional world became rich and colorful with China's reform and opening up.<sup>48</sup> (Lee, 2007)

In 1988, Public TV of Shanxi(山西) Province broadcasted China's first dating program, "TV Matchmaker". This was the first time that discourse of marriage, love entered China's public life in the form of TV programs. Until now, TV programs about blind date bloom everywhere in China. The people who participated in the blind date program in 1988 had similar reasons, that they lived in a remote place and they were poor at home, or they were widowed early, and they were not able to find spouses because of their responsibilities for children. They were all squeezed into the marginal of marriage market. Now the people who participated in the blind date program do not bear the pressure of being stigmatized as they did 30 years ago. On the contrary, men and women expressed their desires and ambitions on the show, and violently explored their views on love, marriage.

Nearly ten years after the launch of "TV Matchmaker", China's blind date program ushered in a small climax. Several public TV stations broadcasted blind date programs in the late 1990s and early 21st century. Due to the increasing number of competing programs, the popularity of blind date programs have declined since 2005. Another revival was brought about by *If You Are the One*, which was broadcast on Jiangsu TV on January 15, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Anthropologist Lisa Rofel regard public culture as an important field driving force for understanding the formation of new subjects in the post-socialist period in *Desiring China*. According to her view, the discourse field provided by a blind date reality show like *If You Are the One*, together with the intense public discussion it triggered, provides an excellent window for presenting gender discourse in a broader social environment. (Rofel, 2007)

Scholar Jing Wu analyzed the gender stereotypes and gender ideology embodied in *If You Are the One*. Jing mentioned that on the stage of *If You Are the One*, women express their desires, cravings, and interests in male physical characteristics through direct expressions, such as "I want to see

the muscles under your shirt", "I like slim boys", "I like your body" etc.

More and more women are beginning to reveal their desires in China and their romantic love contains many excessive desires. The state intends to ban these romantic loves and try to redefine love, which can tame women and make women return to the family pursuing the redefined love.

## 2. Having marriages without romantic love in films or Becoming a “Modern Nora”

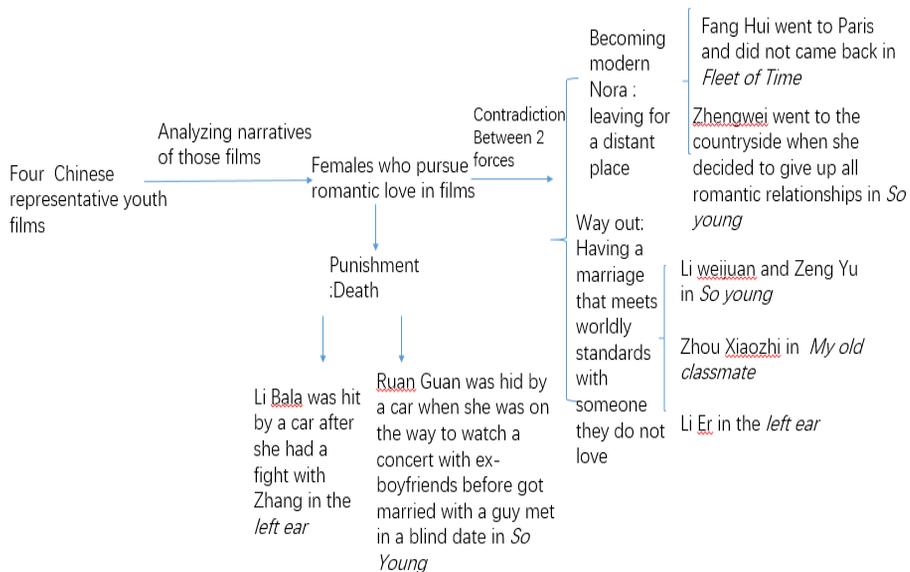


Table 5-1

In these four youth movies, there are some examples for Chinese women. The plots of these films give two different ways for women who want to pursue love. One is to punish these women to establish negative examples. Another one is establishing positive examples that females choose to get married with a good husband without thinking about romantic love. There is a special way out for females who do not give up love, leaving away for a distant space, like France.

## **2.1 The punishment towards females pursuing romantic love tenaciously**

The love between men and women in high school is forbidden, and no one has a relationship in high school in those films. These four films further stigmatize romantic love. Romantic love is not only bad in middle and high schools, but also harmful to women in later lives. Many of the female characters in these four films are pursuing romantic love, and the endings of female characters who have always been obsessed with love are often bad.

Li Bala in the *Left Ear* is a representative role. In the *Left Ear*, Li Er asked Li Bala a question, "You are not scared of getting hurt?" Li replied, "When love lasts, it's love. When it doesn't, it's being young. Why should I be scared? Life is tiring, and I won't live long anyway, so when I want something, I have to get it." The declaration of love here represents the pursuit of romantic love of a part of females living in new era China.

The pursuit of romantic love has become the way for women to find themselves, and Li has paid for it with her own life. After Li suspected that Zhang Yang did not love her, she felt very painful, and then she was crying on the road and was killed by a car. Li is obsessed with her own love, and ultimately she is not willing to give up, and finally becomes a victim of romantic love.

In *So Young*, because the ex-boyfriend's mother does agree to their marriage, Ruan Guan broke up with her ex-boyfriend. After breaking with her ex-boyfriend, Ruan Guan engages with a doctor who she met in a blind date. Before the wedding, Ruan received a call from her ex-boyfriend and he

invites her to go to Beijing to watch a concert of a band that they liked very much at college. Ruan Guan decided to watch the last concert with her ex-boyfriend and was hit by a truck on the way to the concert. Ruan guan explained that “I thought I was over him, but when I got his call the other day, I found my heart still skipped a beat. Maybe I need this meeting as a closure with my ex-boyfriend. It will let me put all behind me and get on with my life.” She also paid for not being able to let go of romantic love with her life. When she was about to enter a stable marriage relationship, she could not forget her previous romantic love, so she also get the biggest punishment——death.

Death is the end of human life, and the film warns women with such unrepeatable endings that it is dangerous to pursue romantic love. These deaths are symbolic. With the death of Li Bala and Ruan Guan, their romantic love and youth have ended at the same time, which links romantic love with youths together. As those stories suggested, after the end of puberty, females should give up the pursuit of romantic love, if not they will be punished. The state has expressed its disapproval of romantic love and intends to redefine the concept of love in the context of Chinese society,

which is about requirements that is only for females and related with stable marriages.

## **2.2 Choosing traditional values about marriages**

There is also a most stable choice for women in those films, which is not to pursue the so-called romantic love and to find a person who meets the secular requirements. Zhou Xiaozhi in *My Old Classmate* gave up her love and finally chose to marry a man who is successful and vulgar.

In the movie *My Old Classmate*, the arrangement of lines and plots highlights the meretricious part of Zhou Xiaozhi's husband, Feng Zhe. Feng is a successful person, doing high-level trade, and his company is on the way to take IPO soon. In Zhou Xiaozhi's wedding dinner, Zhou's husband, is very snobbish when he meets Zhou's classmates. Feng is very cold and rude when he talks with a researcher in Agricultural Research Center and an urban management officer. When he meets Lin Yi, who came back from the United States, he becomes very enthusiastic. He said "People who lived in USA have this special vibe in them."

In order to highlight Feng Zhe's secular part of his characteristic, and the secular customs of marriage, the film also describes a plot of Feng Zhe scolds the waiter who accidentally bumped into him. At the banquet held in the day before the wedding, Lin Yi asks Zhou Xiaozhi if she loves her husband. Zhou Xiaozhi does not answer this question, but asks Lin Yi the same question. Neither of them answer the question. The film tells all the audiences that the hero and heroine has entered the marriage without love but being secular.

At the end of the film, there is an imaginary scene in which the hero Lin Yi leads the heroine Zhou Xiaozhi flees the wedding ceremony. The narratives of the scene is not presented in another color when the imaginary scene is described in the general movie. The process of escaping from the marriage is particularly real. When the audience thinks that the escape is successful, the camera suddenly turns to the real wedding scene. These few minutes have become the imagination of all people and escaping from reality and secular marriage can only exist in the imagination. After madness, people can only return to the secular marriage. Escape has become an imaginary

symbol, and romantic love is illusory and unrealistic. Finally, Secular marriage is the most authentic destination.

In *So Young*, Li Weijuan had a romantic relationship with her classmate when she prepared the college entrance examinations at the second time. Later, Li succeeded in entering to college, but after three years of college entrance examination, her ex-boyfriend failed to get into any college, so Li broke up with her classmate. Li's ex-boyfriend comes to the campus to meet Li. Li did not want her friends to know her ex-boyfriend. She said to him, "I won't see you again. Don't we always want to better ourselves? Who'd want to be stuck in that small town forever? You can call me heartless all you want". In order to achieve her life goals, after graduating, Li Weijuan married a divorced man with a successful career and she made the stepmother of two children. In the end part of the movie, she is living a wealthy life, entertaining friends at her family's hotel. The movie only describes the happiness of her life and tells people that her choice is correct.

Ruan Guan, in *So Young*, after a breakup with her ex-boyfriend, she met a doctor through a blind date. After they have seen each other for six times,

they are engaged. Zheng Wei asks that Ruan Guan if she loves her s fiancé or not. Ruan Guan said, "I've met him for only six time, so how much love can there is? But he's good to me and likes me, also looking for someone to get married. We haven't spent much time together, but I think he'll make a good husband." Ruan Guan could have married a good husband and lived a happy life, but she still could not put down her ex-boyfriend before marriage. She still has a romantic feeling for her ex-boyfriend, and she can not let go of her love. Finally, she was killed by a truck on the way to meet her ex-boyfriends.

At the end of *So Young*, Zeng Yu, the daughter of the vice president of the department in the university and Xu Kaiyang, born with a silver-spoon, married and have a son. They fell in love with the hero and heroine in college, but they did not get the return of their romantic love. In the movie, they takes their children to participate in intellectual development training courses, showing the couple's happy life as partners in the struggle to raise their son.

### **3. Created romantic desire for females and female runaways**

Many female characters in those movies unflinchingly pursue romantic love, Which is also a way for females who were born after 1980s to express their desires. It is also the direct resistance of female filmmakers in those movies. Regarding whether women should pursue romantic love, the traditional gender ideology and the post-80s generation women's desire confronted in those movies. In the end, the traditional gender ideology prevailed by punishing female who pursue romantic love to warn women that they should not pursue romantic love and should only require love based on traditional family views.

There are many differences between the male and female characters related with love in the movies. These obvious differences are also to tell women that they do not necessarily have to pursue romantic love, and they can have other options like men.

Male characters in films give priority to their careers and academics. Chen Xiaozheng in *So Young* broke up with his girlfriend Zheng Wei in order to study abroad, and Lin Yi in *Old Classmates* also broke up with his girlfriend

Zhou Xiaozhen after studying in the United States. Zhang Yang in *Left Ear* did not break up with Jiang Jiao in order to obtain Jiang Jiao's financial support, which indirectly led to the death of Li Bala. As mentioned in last part, many females give up good opportunities for romantic love, such as the opportunity to go to a good university in China or study abroad.

In contrast to male roles, this allows all audiences to reflect that society creates desires of romantic love for women, and allows women to pursue love. Love as an encounter of egos, as a re-creation of reality in terms of you-me, as a trivialized Romanticism without any prohibitions attached, is becoming a mass phenomenon: a secular religion of love (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995)<sup>50</sup>. According to this concept, the desires of love could be created to let women go out of public space and return to private space in China, which corresponds to the fact that women are squeezed in public spaces and are forced to return to private sphere. This is also a reminder of female filmmakers to audiences, which is also the filmmaker's resistance outside the films.

### **Becoming modern Nora**

There is another option for women who want to pursue romantic love or even give up it, that they run to the distance like Nora, who is a character of Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*. Since the translation of the *A Doll's House* into China in 1918, it has brought great excitement to the May Fourth Youth. During the May Fourth period, the drama was used as a tool for boycotting patriarchal families for the progressive youth at that time. Nora, who fled the family, became a representative of women's oppression against patriarchal society. Lu Xun(鲁迅) questioned leaving the family cannot solve Nora's problem in the oppressed society over women in *What happened after Nora left* (1923). He thought Nora was also very difficult to live a happy life in that situation, which still is a problem for Modern Noras.

Until now, although the society has developed much, there are still many oppressions for women. The Chinese Nora in the May Fourth period and the modern Chinese Nora have been leading in a harsh life home. The difference is that the Chinese Nora in the May Fourth period was difficult to escape, and it was nowhere to go for them. Modern Chinese Nora, who are identified in the film, can choose to leave China's mainstream society,

such as France or a distant place in countryside in those films. Modern Nora, which seems to have the right to choose, actually has no choice in intimate relationships.

Fang Hui in *Fleet of Time* went to France and she broke any contact with all her friends and started her new life. In the movie, she is shaped into an immortal character, dressed in a red dress and strolling along the Seine. Fang becomes a modern woman studying abroad, breaking the bondage of Chinese society, being a symbol of freedom and beauty.





Film still 2-1 in *Fleet of Time*

As a cultural concept, France has always been a country that is constructed into a romantic representative in the minds of Chinese people, and it is also

a distant place that most people cannot go. The Eiffel Tower and the Seine River have appeared in the picture at the same time, which constitutes the Chinese people's main imagination of France. In the romantic country, Fang Hui's escape made her a new life.

Zheng Wei in *So Young* finally came out from last two romantic relationships. At the end of the movie, she took a car going to an unnamed place with picturesque scenery. She seems to have abandoned everything and see through the life, sitting on the tractor full of corn. Zheng Wei are the age of known as the “leftover woman” in China. She chooses to break away from all the feelings and the distant places become an image here.





Film still 2-2 in *So Young*

As Fang and Zheng, after Chinese females escape from the life track set by

society, they can actively choose to go to a distant place and become a modern Nora. Otherwise, they will be exiled to a spiritual swamp, labelled as leftover women who are stigmatized by media in China from 2007 (Fincher, 2014).<sup>51</sup>

### **VIII. Compromised Subjectivity of Chinese female youths in relationships**

After 30 years of implementation of the one-child policy, women born after the 1980s as a single-generation appear increasingly independent. With the marriage rate and fertility rate gradually decreasing and the divorce rate gradually rising, more women are advised to return to the family. In this situation, Chinese females are forming a new subjectivity in relationships and marriages.

Among the four films, the female characters of three films have obvious sacrifices during their relationships. Although these characters are somewhat stereotyped, they all show that under the influence of the state,

independent women gradually form the subjects that the country expects. The female subjectivity analyzed through the narratives of female characters in the film represents compromise between female desires and state's influence.

### **1. From “Sangcongside(三从四德)” to independence of “the only daughter”**

The conception of love was not promoted until the May Fourth Movement in China. Chinese women entered the marriage under the command of parents and the mediation of a go-between before. In the patriarchal society ruled by Confucian culture, women must abide by the “sancong(三从, Three Obediences)”. The conception of “Three Obediences” is from *Book of Rites, Sangfu, Zi Xia Zhuan*(《礼记·丧服·子夏传》). According the *Book of Rites*, the father should arrange daughter's marriage, and daughter has no choice of marriage freedom. The power of controlling women is transferred from the father to the husband after women entered the marriage. Females were their father's possessions before they married, and they are their husband's possessions after their marriages in ancient China. Until the early

20th century, many Chinese women did not even see their husbands before they got married. In a family, the wife was constantly devoting themselves as her husband's subordination that she should give birth to children, do housework and take care for the family.

After the May Fourth Movement, a small number of intellectual women gradually began to emerge from the patriarchal family and gained independent status. Most Chinese women still lived under the patriarchal society, which was the social system of male superiority. In the Mao era after the establishment of China, the socialist system allowed all women to gain the same social status as men in the public sphere. The government's propaganda slogan, such as "Women can hold up half the sky", deeply influenced the status of men and women within the family, and women gained a certain equal social status as men to an extent. During this period, the contradiction between men and women was replaced by class contradictions and the female revolution was replaced by the social revolution. Both men and women became members of the socialist revolution and dedicated their own strength to the development of the new China.

In the book *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, Li Haiyan also pointed out that in the socialist period (1950s-1970s), for the first time in the history of China, the private sector was directly regulated by the state. The collectivization of emotions is the theme of this period. Love is forced to fade away from the special and individualized value dimension, and is absolutely subordinate to the category of "classes". Love is more than just a heartbeat signal emanating between individuals, but a strict match between class attributes of socialist subjects. (Li, 2006)

The problems between men and women in China were not really solved, and the equality between them was only superficial. Especially in the private sector, except for some urban intellectual women, most Chinese women were still invisible victims in the family.

After the reform and opening up, in post-Mao era, the situation in China has become more complicated. In the transitional period of China, with the implementation of the relatively free market economy system, the government has less control over the public domain, resulting in the gradual disintegration of the gender-equal social system maintained by the

government during the Mao era. The control of the private sector has not decreased, but has gradually strengthened control with the implementation of the one-child policy. The differences in gender roles in public and private sectors have caused the younger generation in China to fall into contradictions. Especially for the only daughter who was born after 80s, the free market economy and the strict control of the national political machine made them grow up in the cracks.

After the implementation of the one-child policy, some studies have shown that the status of the only daughter has been improved to some extent. Ming-Hsuan Lee used the data from CHNS (China Health and Nutrition Survey) to find out young people born in single-child families in 1979-1985 are more educated than the peers born in non-independent families, after controlling variables such as parental education, family income, and whether they were agricultural hukou (户口) etc. And this phenomenon is particularly prominent in the comparison between the only female and non-only female families. The research of the Haoming Liu also used the data of CHNS, and uses “whether the family is restricted by the one-child policy” as a tool variable of “the number of children in the family”. It is

found that in families with more brothers and sisters, the girls are less educated.

From a career perspective, in a gender study published in 1987, Lawrence K. Hong proposed that the one-child policy would liberate women from their reproductive roles and enable women to engage in non-traditional occupations. From the perspective of career stability and promotion opportunities, women with fewer births have an advantage in the workplace and income. (1987) In Fong's fieldwork survey in Dalian in 1998-99, it was found that the situation of more men and less women made the women's bargaining power in the marriage market higher. (2000) In the case of gender imbalances, women's negotiating position in the marriage market is even higher.

Because of the one-child policy, the only daughters share the same educational resources and care from parents as same as males born in the same period. Whether in work environment or in the marriage market, the status of women has been improved to some extent. Women in the new era gradually get rid of the shackles of the thought of "Sangcongside(三从四

德)” outside the family field. The females still play a traditional role in the family/ relationships in a relatively weak position.

## **2. “Modern Lie Nv (烈女) ” image created by films**

The confrontation between Chinese women's desires and national will in shaping females' subjectivity are also represented in these films, and eventually the will of the state prevails. In these four youth movies, a group of “modern Lie Nv” has been created. They have become representatives of modern Chinese women, taking the initiative to give and tolerate in the name of love, and actively get disadvantaged positions in relationships. The rise of the status of Chinese women has left only initiatives in these films. Under the influence of the national will, these female characters have actively become “modern Lie Nv”.

Li Haiyan mentions that the modern subject is an emotional subject, which could help us understand the meaning that love replacing the kinship or the local ties as the basis of personal identity in the process of modernization in China (Li,2006) . As the post-80s females became more and more

individualized, and it is difficult to force them to obey the traditional gender role system and return to the family, the conception of love is redefined in those films which is used as an intermediary agent to make female characters believe that they choose to be in disadvantaged positions in relationships.

Liu Xiang in Western Han Dynasty recorded the first 100 famous women before the Han Dynasty. The book recorded 15 women with bad behaviors and the rest of the women were recorded because of their excellent moral characters. Liu Xiang mentioned that these women with virtue were Lie Nv. Wang Chuanman believes that under the record of Lie Nv, there are actually complicated motives containing main factors, such as guarding the ethics of the chastity, the responsibility of family responsibility, the escape from the embarrassing life, etc (Wang, 2008)<sup>52</sup>. Men set a series of behavioral norms for women with their right to speak and interpret, so that their every move is bound by ethics, and they are included in the social order with the specific social functions as mothers, wives and women.

These highlight the general intention of state power to influence femininity.

Comparing with the ancient “Lie Nv” who were forced to perform those roles, with the increase of age, the only daughters born after the 80s who gradually enter the relationships as "modern Lie Nv" in films, actively being in a disadvantaged position in relationships, which could be the reasons why the overall status of Chinese women has declined while the status of the only daughters born after the 80s has increased.

Analyzing those four films, female characters mainly perform the roles of “Modern Lie Nv” in three parts, including dedication, sacrifices and tolerance.

	Dedication	Sacrifice	Tolerance
So young	Zhengwei pursued Chen actively.	Zengyu gave the chance studying abroad to Chen Xiaozheng financially	Zhengwei retains Chen after she finds out Chen lied to her.

		supports Zhang Yang	Ruan Guan forgave her cheated boyfriend.
The left ear	Li Bala seduced Xu to be have relationship with Zhang.	Li er sacrificed herself to Xu.  Jiang Jiao	Li Bala forgives Zhang Yang after he beats her.  Jiang Jiao forgives Zhang when she finds out his affair.
My old classmate		Zhou Xiaozhi gave up a better university to study in the	Zhao Xiaozhi gave her virginity when her boyfriend

		same university with Lin Yi.	intends to break up with her
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Table 5-1

## 2.1 Dedication

In two of those four movies, females directly took the initiative to pursue men. In *So Young*, the heroine Zheng Wei expressed her love to Chen Xiaozheng without hesitation. She created various opportunities in the campus to directly express her own feelings to him. In the *Left Ear*, Li Bala is also this type. In high school, she acts as a "bad girl" and boldly pursues the boy she falls love with, expressing her love for him boldly. These two female characters are the representatives of the active and outward oriented females. On a certain level, they are the inheritance of gender equality in the Mao era. Women can express their emotions like men to pursue their own love.

In the film *So Young*, Zheng Wei actively pursued Chen Xiaozheng. She is a very active woman compared with Li Er. She took the initiative to talk to

Chen and express her love to Chen. Even though Chen has been rejecting her, she still approached him with a very low attitude and expressed love to him. She would stop him on the stage, and deliberately sit behind him while studying in the classroom, and even plan various scenes just to show her love. In this process, Chen's attitude was very passive. Although Zheng Wei felt very wronged, she still insisted on pursuing Chen.

After Zheng and Chen being together, they spent a happy time in a romantic relationship. In this process, Zheng's contribution was also more than Chen. In the end, Chen, who came from a poor family gained a chance to study in USA. He did not tell Zheng Wei till Zheng heard about it from other friends. After Zheng found out, she went to Chen and asked Chen why he did not tell her in advance and his plan did not include her in the future. She also said that she could bear the hardship with him. Chen said indifferently that people must first love themselves and he was used to poverty and he could not let the girl he loved endure poverty. Until the end, Zheng still wanted to save the relationship, but her efforts did not get the results she wanted.

Li Bala is the bad girl in the *Left Ear*. Her appearance makes people think

of the rebellious girls in the middle and high school schools who have poor academic performance. In school, bad girls are a typical stigma that are considered that they are sexually connected to others. The bad girl Li Bala likes Zhang Yang and she took the initiative to pursue him, even though Zhang had a girlfriend at the time, and at the first few times, Zhang refused her directly. She insisted on pursuing Zhang and wanted to use her insistence to touch Zhang. Later Zhang did not directly agree with Li and he wanted Li to seduce the good student Xu Yi before he accepted her love, because Zhang thought that Xu was his half-brother and their mothers divorced with Zhang's father and left home for good, so he wanted to retaliate against his mother by destroying Xu's life.

Li Bala went to seduce Xu, and made Xu a bad student who smoked, drank, and soaked in nightclubs. After completing the task, Li Bala began romantic relationship with Zhang, but at the same time, Zhang did not break up with his former girlfriend. Li did not hesitate to sell her feelings to seduce others, but also to pursue the so-called romantic love, to be with someone she liked.

In the *Left Ear*, Jiang Jiao, the rival of Li Bala, a girl from a rich family, in

the process of having relationships with Zhang Yang, has been dedicated herself for Zhang Wei economically and emotionally. When she was in high school, she would buy Zhang valuable gifts such as mobile phones and when she was in college, she even treats Zhang expensive western food.

## **2.2 Sacrifice**

Li Er in *Left Ear* is a representative of the introverted initiative, and she silently sacrifices herself for the people she likes. Li tries to learn to become a bad girl, expecting for drawing Xu Yi's attention. Li Er is hit by other people's fists and beer bottles to protect him and she works hard to help him pay the debt, and also volunteers to clean his apartment. Li Er keeps sacrificing herself and she never expresses her own thoughts directly, and finally moves Xu Xi.

Li Er represents traditional Chinese women who have been silently sacrificing themselves and intend to use their own sacrifices in exchange for a stable relationship with their husbands and children. The sacrifices of female are moral abduction, which is used by some Chinese female in

relationships, showing that Chinese traditional rules have not disappeared in Chinese society. Chinese traditional rules are developing with society, which are deeply rooted in the formation of femininity and related gender roles in China.

In the film *The Left Ear*, Li Er began to like Xu Yi quietly in high school. When she was in high school, she did not take any active actions to express her love as a so called “good girl”. After Xu Wei was in love with the "bad girl" Li Bala, Li Er took the initiative to make friends with Li Bala, and wanted to learn every move of Li. In this film, there is a scene that Li Er learns to smoke at home. She thinks that after learning to smoke and become a bad girl, Xu would like her. She did not learn to smoke at last and she thought that Xu might never like her, but she did not give up. In the bar, Xu Yi and Li Bala had a contradiction. Li's friend picked up the beer bottle and try to beat Xu. Li Er happened to be in the bar and went forward to protect Xu with her body. Later she was hit in the head by a beer bottle and then fainted.

After the college entrance examination, Li Er changed the university she

wanted to go to another one in the city where Xu was going to go. When Li Er was in college, Li Er and Xu met in this city and the scene of the encounter was somewhat similar to the previous one. Xu was beaten by others because of the debt he owed. Li Er once again served as the savior, standing up to stop the atrocities, and she saved her money for Xu. Li Er ran to Xu's home, and even though Xu's attitude was so bad that he let her go, she insisted on helping him clean the house. No matter how bad Xu's attitude was, Li Er went to Xu's home again and again to help him do the housework. Xu may have been touched and He accepted Li Er's love.

Their feelings ended after Li Er discovered that Xu had sexual relations with another woman at home. Li Er did not show any anger on the spot, but just walked out silently. Li Er is always devoted to selfless dedication. In a relationship, she always intend to gain others love through her sacrifices. Apparently, She does not seem to be asking for a return, but is actually asking for more emotional reward. She always plays the role of “modern Lie Nu(烈女)”. This is a portrayal of many contemporary Chinese female and is the object of imitation for young women.

In terms of sacrifice, these films also mention the special situation in China, female characters, change their applications for their lovers when they are applying for a university after the college entrance examination. In these movies, love is described as a more important object to females than dreams and futures. These are stereotypes of females and also reflect the real situation to a certain degree.

Zhou Xiaozhi and Lin Yi in *My Old Classmate* agreed before the college entrance examination that they would be couple if they were admitted to the same university. In order to enter the same university as Lin, Zhou gave up to the chance to study in Peking University, the best university in China. Zhou has always wanted to go to Stanford as graduate students since high school. If she went to Peking University, it would definitely make her dreams easier, but she sacrificed her chance for love and went to the same university with her future boyfriend. There is a similar plot in the *left ear* that Li Er went to study in the same city with Xu Yi, but did not go to the city where she planned to go.

## **2.3 Tolerance**

When men and women broke up in these youth films, men do not show any retention behavior, only women to retain others with a very low attitude. Chen Xiaozheng, the hero in *So Young*, gets a chance to study abroad when he is graduating from college. He decides to break up with his girlfriend Zheng Wei before going abroad, but he never mentions it to his girlfriend. After Zheng hears of it from her friend that Chen is going to study abroad, she does not believe that this is a fact at first, until Chen personally admits. Even though Chen Xiaozheng says that people have to love themselves firstly, Zheng still thinks that she is ready to put up poverty with Chen.

In the *Left Ear*, Li Bala is kicked by Zhang Xiao after threatening him with their secrets. Later, she takes the initiative to contact Zhang. In the absence of Zhang's apology, Li still forgives him, as if the violence have not happened. Zhang's official girlfriend, Jiang Yan, is very angry when she finds out the relationship between Zhang and Li. However, she chooses to forgive him and goes to Beijing with him. In these plots, there is no reason for women's tolerance, as if forgiveness is the nature of women.

In *My old classmate*, because Zhou Xiaozhi's father does not want her boyfriend Lin Yi influence her academic performance, Lin proposes to break up with Zhou. After Lin's proposal, Zhou, who is a very strong woman and she proposes various rules for her boyfriend and refuse to have sex with him, tries to retain her boyfriend putting up a gesture of begging him. When her boyfriend intends to break up with her, Zhou suddenly changes her attitudes and holds her boyfriend's hand. In the next act, Zhou's bare back sitting in a bed with her boyfriend is showed in the screen.

In *So Young*, as a popular girl of the school, there are many people in the university who have pursued Ruan Guan. Ruan refuses everyone because she is having a long-distance relationship. Suddenly one day, Ruan's boyfriend cried and called her, saying that he was drunk at a party and had a sexual relationship with one of his classmates. He hopes that Ruan can forgive him and can help him out of trouble because the female classmate is pregnant. Ruan suppresses angry and chooses to forgive her boyfriend. She even accompanies the pregnant girl to have abortion.

Ruan forgives the derailed boyfriend and save him from the predicament.

When Ruan and her boyfriend were separated at the train station, Ruan said to her boyfriend, “I will put this behind me, but there is no forgiveness next time” After getting on the train, Ruan cries out loudly. In extreme pain, she forgives her boyfriend. She is the bottom line of patience and sacrifice in all films and becomes the ultimate symbol of “modern Lie Nv”. In summary, Females’ disadvantaged position is presented in those plots and females’ active emotional expression has become part of the passiveness of attachment to men.

### **3. Choices to not be a Modern Lie Nv**

The characteristics of Modern Lie Nv created in those films are the most essential requirements of Chinese traditional gender ideology in terms of sexual relationships. With the revival of traditional culture, such a requirement makes every Chinese woman face contradictions, especially for the only daughters who were born after 1980s.

These films provides women with a great platform to stage their own stories.

As the *Kim Ji-Young Born, 1982* represents the facts that Korean women

are oppressed in daily lives, these four Chinese youth films depicts China female's actions in sexual relations facing traditional gender ideology. In those films, some people resisted it and were punished as consequences, and some people complied with the requirements of gender ideology, and eventually became Modern Lie Nvs, which represent the status of most Chinese females.

Although the females in those films are oppressed by the traditional gender ideology and actively become Modern Lie Ny, female filmmakers have not given up their resistance to inherent gender ideology, and they use the contrasting plot development in the film to create a dialogue with female audiences. After acting follow the traditional gender ideology, women in those films did not get a good ending. Some of them died, and some of them had abortions, and some were married to secular successful husbands. Presenting these plots, female filmmakers remind female audiences that they can reflect their own lives and can have other choices without being Modern Nvs, which is also a typical example of resistance outside the film.

## X. Conclusion

As the Teresa de Lauretis' theory, Technology of gender, gender is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and spectator's gendered subjectivity is not only implicated in the encounter with each film, but also constructed and displaced in each film-viewing process.(1987)<sup>53</sup> Femininities represented in those 4 films reflect the newly forming femininities in reality in China.

Through the analysis of related materials and 4 films, it is pointed out that the state intends to form femininities of good girls who do not have sexes and pursue romantic love at will, using ideological state apparatuses(Althusser,1970), such as policies, education and films etc. While the romantic love is punished in those films, the concept of love is redefined as an intermediary agent to stable marriages, by pursuing which females actively become “modern Lie Nv(烈女)” in relationships.

Under the influence of ideological state apparatuses, females can have reactions to resist it while perform the formed femininities, which includes

females desires (Butler, 1990). As the analysis of related materials, females can express their love and sexual desires, although they are not recommended to do it and have a great chance to be punished by their behaviors, and they can choose to escape to a distant place like Paris as modern Noras. Comparing with ancient Lie Nv who were disciplined by the society, females in those films are actively performing femininities as modern Lie Nv in relationships by pursuing redefined love, who are also disciplined by the society internally.

From the perspective of female filmmaker 's intention, while following the narrative of the state-approved gender ideology, those female filmmakers reminds women with the tragic endings in the film that women can escape the fate of becoming modern Lie Nv. According to Butler's theory, these are also women's resistance, and these need more research in the future. Female filmmakers of these films represent a part of females living in China who do not agree with the traditional gender ideology, expressing their own desires through the films, and call on more females to resist it.

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## 국문초록

중국은 1954년에 남성과 여성의 평등을 분명히 밝힌 헌법을 공포하였으며, 중국 정부는 사람들의 사생활에 대한 간섭을 감소하였으나 여전히 출산 문제를 통제하여 왔다. 중국 정부가 1978년부터 한 자녀 정책으로 신생아 출생에 대해 엄격히 통제했다. 그러나 2013년부터 중국은 일부 가정에 대해 두 자녀 정책을 시행하기 시작하였으며 중국의 일부 가정은 합법적으로 두 번째 자녀를 낳을 수 있게 되었다. 동시에 중국 정부는 전통적 중국 문화에 대한 홍보를 강화하여 여성들이 일을 포기하고 가족에게 돌아오라는 목소리가 커지고 있다. 같은 시기에 “socialism from afar”에 따라 1980년대 이후에 태어난 중국 외동 딸들이 이전 세대보다 더 많은 개성을 얻었다. 이러한 사회적 환경 하에서 이 연구는 2013년에서 2015년 사이에 개봉된 중국의 대표적인 청춘영화 4편을 분석하고 이를 통해 젠더 이데올로기와 여성의 욕망 사이의 대결에서 성관계에 관한 여성성이 형성되는 것에 대해 탐구하고, 1980년대 이후에 태어난 외동 딸들이 젠더 이데올로기에 대한 도전에 초점을 둔다.

**주요어** : 한 자녀 정책, 중국 전통 문화, 멀리서의 사회주의, 외동 딸, 젠더 이데올로기, 여성의 욕망, 도전

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