

# **The “Left-Over” Chicks: An Analysis of the Representation of Women in Chinese Chick Flicks and the “Left-Over Girl” Discourse in the People’s Republic of China**

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## Declaration of Original Work

This thesis does not contain any material previously published or written by another person unless where due reference is made in the text.

Signed :

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of three characters: '刘' (Liu), '舒' (Shu), and '颖' (Ying). The characters are written in a cursive, flowing style.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis discusses the relationship between the representation of women in Chinese chick flicks and the changing nature of gender relations in 21st century China. A film named *Sophie's Revenge* (Jin, 2009), which was released into Mainland Chinese cinemas, marked the beginning of the emergence of the Hollywood genre in this market. In the past decade, chick flicks have become a phenomenon in Mainland Chinese cinema; many of them achieved huge financial success. Meanwhile, a new phrase, "left-over girls," emerged into the media and social media, and even got collected into the official dictionary. The phrase is used to describe women who have not been married by a certain age, usually 25. It has become a common phrase to describe single women, used not only by the general public but also by some government reports. This thesis examines the correlation between the representation of women in Chinese chick flicks and the "left-over girl" discourse. It uses content analysis and textual analysis to identify the presentation of women in the chick flicks and read these films in relation to contemporary concerns about gender. I argue that the production of Chinese chick flicks contributes to a great extent to producing and reproducing the "left-over girl" discourse.

## **Chapter 1 Introduction: The Emergence of Chick Flicks and “Left-Over Girl” Discourse in Mainland China**

In 2009, a film called *Sophie's Revenge* (非常完美, Fei Chang Wan Mei) (Jin, 2009) was released into mainstream cinemas during the summer break movie season in Mainland China. At that time, no-one had heard of the name of the director, Eva Jin (金依萌, Jin Yimeng). However, not only was the film produced by one of the most famous actresses in Mainland China, Zhang Ziyi, but the cast was also full of A-list actors. It was marketed as a China-America collaborative project, a romantic comedy, a debut production of a young female director, and a film dedicated to young women working in urban white-collar jobs (Wu, 2009). It surprised the industry with box-office earnings of 100 million RMB (15 million USD), given the film's small budget of 48 million RMB (7 million USD). This film not only made Eva Jin the first female director to break the symbolic 100 million RMB mark but also convinced the Chinese film industry that romantic comedies could be a large-scale commercial success. The major difference between *Sophie's Revenge* (Jin, 2009) and the romantic comedies that came before was that it told the story from the point of view of the female protagonist, Sophie. The film is more about the character trajectory of Sophie rather than the development of the romance.

Film scholars and film industry have commentators referred to *Sophie's Revenge* (Jin, 2009) as the first "chick flick" produced in Mainland China (Li, 2012; Liu, 2009, p. 240; Xian, 2012, p. 48; Yang, 2012; Zhou, 2015). Since then, the term chick flick has been imported from Hollywood to describe this particular sub-genre of romantic comedy. Following the success of *Sophie's Revenge*, many chick flicks have had huge business success. Arguably, the success of these films was made possible by three factors: the dramatically changing political and economic landscape of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国, abbreviated as the PRC), the gradually growing middle-class population, and the changing power relations between men and women within PRC society. The emergence of independent, educated, middle-class women in an urban context is especially significant. This is not to undermine the fact that Mainland Chinese cinema experienced an explosive expansion in the past few decades due to the changing economic landscape. Nonetheless, the success of the chick flick genre has still been outstanding in comparison to all other genres in the past 10 years. The production upsurge of Chinese chick flicks has coincided with the popularisation of the "left-over girl" discourse in mainstream media.

Growing up watching Chinese chick flicks, I was once encouraged into dreaming about the lifestyle that was represented in the films. By watching these films, I had also worried about becoming a "left-over girl." These fantasies and concerns have faded away in my life because of my interests in feminism and gender politics. However, it sparks an interest in me to study how these films tie into the "left-over girls" discourse and how they offer certain strands of feminism that audiences might take up in self-policing ways. It is essential to research how popular culture produces and reproduces the

patriarchal, heteronormative hegemony in order to change the discourse in favour of empowering women in the Chinese socio-cultural context.

This thesis discusses the representation of women in Chinese chick flicks in light of the changing nature of gender relations in 21st century China. It uses content analysis and textual analysis to identify the presentation of women in chick flicks and read these films in relation to contemporary concerns about gender. I argue that the production of Chinese chick flicks contributes to a great extent to producing and reproducing the "left-over girl" discourse.

## **The Film Industry in the Changing Political and Economic Landscape in the PRC**

After the Chinese Civil War between the capitalist Chinese Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party, the PRC was established on 1 October 1949. The post-war political environment determined that the film industry could only produce political propaganda in the first 17 years of the PRC. The content served the ruling legitimacy of the Communist Party, and especially the rule of Mao Zedong (毛泽东, abbreviated as Mao). One of the most referenced film scholars in China, Dai Jinghua (戴锦华), stated that the film industry in these first 17 years invented and matured a film language to produce and reproduce a dominant template for classical films about the great revolution (Dai, 1994). The story trajectory was always about how the Communist Party troops saved working-class people from feudal Chinese society where they were exploited by the landlords, warlords, and the Chinese Nationalist Party. Under Mao's leadership, the party started the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" in 1966 (无产阶级文化大革命, Wu Chan Jie Ji Wen Hua Da Ge Ming). The professed goals were to reunite people under the ideology of Mao and to eliminate elements of the bourgeoisie. However, it was arguably a cruel political move made by Mao's supporters and those who wished to step into power when Mao died (Xi, Jin, 2006). The Cultural Revolution completely paralysed the film industry. Many classical films were criticised for injecting toxic bourgeois thoughts, including for having romantic scenes (Jiang, 1967). Many filmmakers were physically and mentally tormented to death. During this period, only six films were allowed to play in the entire country. They were all political propaganda films that projected a unique extreme aesthetic (Jin, 2006).

Followed Mao's death in 1976, the Cultural Revolution ended with a national trial of the leaders of the movement. The party formed the second generation of leadership, centring on Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) as the leadership core. Deng initiated the Chinese economic reform (改革开放, Gai Ge Kai Fang, abbreviated as the CER) on 18 December 1978. The Communist Party introduced market principles into China, and gradually released many industries from state control to private ownership. These tactics revived the Chinese economy, which expanded and became the world's second-largest economy. Since Deng Xiaoping initiated the CER, the film industry in PRC has also

gone through rapid marketisation and globalisation. In 2002, the government issued a policy that facilitated the first commercial theatre chain in the PRC. Content in cinemas was no longer produced and distributed only by government-owned production companies (Interim Provisions on Operation Qualification Access for Movie Enterprises, 2004). Private-sector funding and production companies started to enter the film industry and have created constant growth in production and the net growth of the box office. The expansion in the film industry has been very rapid. In 2000, the overall box office of Mainland Chinese cinema was around 800 million RMB. In comparison to 2000, in 2007 the overall box office of Mainland Chinese cinema rapidly increased to around 4.34 billion. The growth rate is over 30% during these eight years (Cui, 2008). From 1994, Hollywood films began to be imported into Chinese cinema as entertainment products. The imported films dominated the film market for an extended period at the beginning of the 21st century because of their high budget visual effects and their mature narrative formula (Cui, 2008). Therefore, many Chinese filmmakers start to imitate the style and formula of Hollywood films. The chick flick, as one of those imported film genres which originated in Hollywood, was successfully localised by Chinese filmmakers, and became a huge commercial success in the market.

### **The Film Industry and the Growing Middle Class**

The middle class of China is growing at a rate that is unprecedented in the world. From 1979 to the 1990s, the first stage of the CER produced a positive effect on the Chinese economy. Small- to medium-sized businesses started to be established all over the country, foreign companies started to invest in China and created thousands and millions of jobs, and privatised companies started to compete with state-controlled entities and revived the market. While these things were happening in the urban areas, the migration of farmers and intensified urbanisation were also taking place. Fast economic growth led to a dramatic increase in livings standards in urban areas. A new group of people with a similar social and economic identity emerged into the urban areas of the PRC – the middle incomers (Rocca, 2017, p. 6). It is a common problem for scholars, from the West and from the PRC, to establish a standard definition and set of criteria for what constitutes the Chinese middle class. Census data is not entirely reliable because of the low participation rate of the census and the fact that people do not tell the truth when they fill out the forms. Subjective criteria, such as lifestyle, manners, political ideas, and identifications (Rocca, 2017, p. 3) are hard to measure in such a large and diverse population as that of the PRC. Despite the disagreement on the boundary of this social group, scholars, business people, and the elite leadership of the PRC agree that the middle incomers/middle class are the most significant influence on all aspects of society.

Prominent sociologist Sun Liping wrote that the Chinese middle class “must both be considered as the basis of social stability in the political realm, as the main factor of stimulation of domestic demand and consumption, and as the major agent of the cultural modernization” (Sun, 2009, p39). In recent years, the Chinese Communist Party leadership core centred around Xi Jinping has been pushing the



ideology of achieving the Chinese Dream (中国梦, Zhong Guo Meng) as their critical political agenda. This refers to the idea of a collective goal for restoring the national greatness in culture and economy that China once had (Mitchell, 2015). The image of the middle-income heterosexual family was promoted as the ideal living situation. Not only does the PRC have a rapidly growing middle-income population that is proud and stable, but also it has a tremendously large number of people who want to become middle incomers/middle class.

It is not hard to infer that middle incomers are the key to the commercial success of genre films. In *Sophie's Revenge* (Jin, 2009), the main character Sophie is a single, young, economically independent woman living in Shang Hai, one of the megacities in China. The lifestyle illustrated in the film is centred in consumption and promotes self-care, which fits perfectly into the neoliberalistic ideology that quickly spread through middle-incomers in PRC after the CER (Yuan, 2019). Another film, *Jump Up* (跳出去, Tiao Chu Qu) (Feng, 2009), was released in the same year. It was an inspirational story about a village girl named Cai Feng, who had a dream to become a dancer. In the end, she won a very important dance competition and was involved in a romantic relationship with her dance teacher. Both films were romantic comedies that were narrated from the female protagonist's point of view. Both of the films were cast with A-list actors and had a similar budget. Nevertheless, *Sophie's Revenge* earned over 100 times the box office of *Jump Up*, which earned 144,100 USD. Arguably, the middle-class cinema audiences preferred a film that tried to portray the urban life that they were more familiar with.

In its first week of screening in the cinema, *Sophie's Revenge* (Jin, 2009) created a new box office record for the romantic comedy genre with thirty million RMB (4.3 million USD) net growth. Subsequently, many chick flicks emerged into the cinema, the genre quickly becoming a huge financial success. The success of this newly imported genre from the West attracted the attention of a lot of producers for its economic potential. Thus, a considerable number of chick flicks have been produced in the past 10 years, with variations in production value, quality and profit. As early as 2011, scholar Hong Fan raised the concern that the quality of chick flicks varies from one to another due to the fact that a lot of the filmmakers were just opportunistic investors who wanted to make money out of a below-average production (Hong, 2011, p. 90). The genre chick flick has been popular in mainstream theatres for the past decade to the extent that it changed the gender ratio of film-goers in China. Young, educated, middle-class women who live in an urban area became the most valued customer demographic for the film industry in the PRC (Zhou, 2015, p. 62). In 2009, the gender ratio of male to female film-goers was estimated at 60.9% to 39.1%. There is no up-to-date data on the current gender ratio, but we can see a significant change in the estimation in 2014, where the gender ratio of males to females in the film audience was 54.09% to 45.91%.

The production of chick flicks in Mainland China is not only an economic outcome, but it is also a cultural product response to a new cultural phenomenon: the "left-over girls".

## **The Changing Power Relation Between Genders**

The root of the situation of women in China comes from the Confucianist ideology, which has been admired as the moral bible and highest level of Chinese wisdom until today. The ideal society under Confucianism is one in which no person is left alone without family. Confucius believed a successful man should finish the important life tasks in the order of: study to improve himself, get married and manage his family, work hard and govern his state, and bring justice and virtue to the world (Confucius, 505–434BC). This ideology established a society that runs on the foundation of family units. While men were busy bringing justice and virtue to the world, women had to stay at home and take care of the family. Women were strictly controlled by a set of moral rules. Not only were they bound to the private sphere, but women were also seen as inferior to men. Women in feudal China were mostly uneducated, unequally treated, and unsocialised with the wider society. The attitude towards Confucianism was ambiguous throughout the first 17 years of the PRC. During the Cultural Revolution, a lot of Confucianist institutes were destroyed, and the ideology was seen as feudal and backward. However, Confucianism was put back into the primary education material, and the ideology was praised as a Chinese tradition again after the Cultural Revolution. The Confucianist gender values were reintroduced into the society in its new forms. One of the social phenomena that illustrates the reinforcement and reinscribing of the Confucianist gender value is the “left-over girls.”

Around the same time as the production upsurge of Chinese chick flicks, the phrase "left-over girl" became one of the most significant topics in social media and later spread into mainstream media. The news and online discussion about the "left-over girl" highlighted the social phenomenon of women are getting married at an older age and hinted that it is hard for women who have a high level of education and a middle-class income to find a fitting marital partner. The phrase "left-over girl" was introduced into the official dictionary in 2006. The definition of "left-over girls" is often cited with reference to *The Language Situation and Situational Language: On the Annual Report of the Language Condition in China 2006*. The report stated that "left-over girls" refers to women in their late 20s who have a higher education background and a high level of income but cannot find a suitable male as a husband. In the daily application of this phrase, it is broadly referring to single women who are over 27 years old. The “left-over girls” discourse started online in 2004 when mainstream media suddenly focused on reporting the "phenomenon" that more and more women were not married by the age of 27 (Luo, Wang & Jiang, 2014, p. 10).

Coming into the 21st century, it is true that the marriage rate has decreased, and the age of first marriage in an urban context is increasing in China. In 2013, sociologist Zhang Yi from the Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, did a reading of the data collected in the most recent census conducted in 2010 by the PRC Government (Zhang, 2013). The data collected in the 2010 census showed that 36.29% of men in the 25–29 age group were never married, 12.62% in the 30–34 age group, and 6.44% in the 35–39 age group. In comparison, 21.62% of women in the 25–29

age group were never married, 5.35% in the 30–34 age group, and 1.76% in the 35-39 age group. The severely imbalanced gender ratio in the PRC will make the task of finding a heterosexual partner hard for men. The set of data showed that a lot more men than women were “left over” outside marriage. Despite the social reality of the imbalanced population of men and women in China in recent years, the mainstream media focused on pressuring young women into marriage instead of young men. Therefore, it is safe to speculate the “left-over girls” discourse ties into the patriarchal, heteronormative hegemony.

Social scientists and media analysts Luo Aiping, Wang Feng, and Jiang Yu published a book in 2014 which considered the public discussion on "left-over girls." This book is the first piece of scholarship on the topic of unmarried women and their living conditions in modern China. They did a comprehensive content analysis of the online media related to "left-over girls" from 2004 to 2011. They looked at 3,341 items of online news that included the theme and phrase "left-over girls" and studied the topic, expression, and representation of unmarried women in these news items (Luo, Wang & Jiang, 2014, p. 13). They argued that public media is generating an inaccurate representation of unmarried women in terms of their age, education, and career demographics. Therefore, rather than being a pressing social issue, as claimed by many mainstream media, the "left-over girl" is a socially constructed discourse that was produced and reproduced by the popular mainstream media, ostensibly to urge women into a heterosexual marriage at a young age (Luo, Wang & Jiang, 2014, p. 25). However, their work has not included analysis of cinema, which I am interested to expand on in this thesis.

Yang Yuanyin, a prominent Chinese feminist film studies scholar, has written: “There is no real feminist movement, nor true feminist ideology in the PRC” (Yang, 1990). It is true that organised and large-scale feminist movements initiated by women were nowhere to be found in the modern history of China. However, on many scales, Chinese women in the PRC have achieved liberation and independence. After the establishment of PRC, there were 69 women representatives in the first Common Program of The Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in Beijing, and women made up 11.9% (147 out of 1,226 representatives) of the congress (Zhao, 2004). This ratio of female representation in the political system was considerably more than many other countries at the time. The first law issued in the PRC was the Marriage Law of the PRC, which, to a large extent, provided better protection for women in the institution of marriage. The party leader Mao also encouraged women to leave the private sphere and contribute to the public sphere. His famous saying, “Women can hold up half of the sky” was used to manifest the empowerment of women for a long period in the PRC. However, none of these movements were organised by female leadership, and the female liberation process was a passive process.

As an unexpected effect of the CER and China’s One Child Policy (计划生育国策, Ji Hua Sheng Yu Guo Ce), women born after the later 1970s are very well educated and therefore very capable of independence. The One Child Policy limited families to having more than one child. An amendment to

the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women came out in 1992, and stated in the 13th entry that "Sex identification of the foetus by technical means shall be strictly forbidden, except that it is positively necessitated on medical grounds" (Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women, 1992). This has surprisingly changed the life of many women born since the later 1970s in China: not only are the parents unable to choose the gender of their new-born, but also the parents have to treat and raise their daughter as well as they would if they had a son. Especially amongst the growing middle class in first-tier cities, their daughters received decent care and a high level of education. The idea that women are inferior to men is gradually disappearing in first-tier cities. Journalist Letao Sun wrote that in 1957, women were only 23.2% of the students admitted into universities. In 1980, three years after the college entrance examination was reinstated after the Cultural Revolution, the percentage of female college students remained similar to what it was at the beginning of the PRC at 23.4%. In the decade between 1995 and 2004, the female student ratio increased from 35.4% to 45.7%. 2007 is the turning point, when the number of female students admitted into college for the first time overtook the number of male students at 52.9%, and since then, the percentage of women has been growing larger (Sun, 2013).

However, the implementation of the state family planning policies became extremely hard in some provinces, and in second-tier and third-tier cities, where Confucianism and traditional gendered values are still prevailing. Social scientists Shuzhuo Li, Quanbao Jiang, and Marcus W. Feldman wrote about the sex ratio at birth in the PRC from the 1980s, stating that:

*In the 1982 census, the sex ratio at birth at the national level was still almost normal, at around 107 boys per 100 girls, but it was already deviating from the norm of 105–106 in some provinces. In Anhui, Guangdong, Guangxi, Shandong (Confucius's hometown), and Henan, it had already reached or even exceeded 110 in 1982.*

Until today, the PRC is still one of the most gender-imbalanced countries in the world. In the census 2011, the sex ratio at birth is 117.7 boys to 100 girls (Li, 2013), and the sex ratio of the entire population is 51.84% men to 48.16% women.

The patriarchal ideology is still the dominating discourse in organising gender roles. In recent years, the government centred on Xi is referencing Confucianism to support the Chinese Dream ideology. However, it is not economically viable to restore the patriarchal society where women were not involved in productive public society. Therefore, the double burden of paid work and unpaid housework has landed on Chinese women's shoulders.

## **Chinese Chick Flicks**

It is important to have a definition of Chinese chick flicks to be able to conduct meaningful research on films within this genre. The most cited definition in this field of study was given in 2012, when Xian wrote an article on the definition of the genre movie based on her detailed study of Hollywood chick flicks. She stated that the chick flick is a sub-genre setting between comedy and romance, specifically depicting the life of young professional women's lives in urban settings. She used the traditional genre study framework to define the genre with six characteristics. Firstly, the narrative structure of chick flicks is based on the genre story trajectory of romance formulated in Hollywood. At the beginning, the protagonist enters and introduces themselves to the audience with a few events. Then the story goes on to the first turning point where the protagonist meets the other protagonist and they start to face several issues and tackle them together. At the end, they overcome all the hardships and obstacles and commit to a romantic relationship. Secondly, the character structure is simple, where normally it is formed by an antagonist (vicious boss or colleague, cheating ex-boyfriend, etc.); some helpers (friends, families, etc.) and a clown (a character that is deliberately put in to create jokes). Thirdly, the protagonists in these films are usually young professional women who lives in big cities. Their occupation usually a white-collar status job in the field of fashion or media. Fourthly, under the influence of the neoliberal feminist ideology, the core desire for the protagonist is to find their true self. It has strong emphasis on displaying the difference between males and females through representing the conventional characteristics of femininity and masculinity. Moreover, the story is always centred around the development of a heterosexual relationship. They discuss issues that troubles urban young women, such as how to find the right balance between career and family. Last, but not least, this genre adheres to the "dream factory" nature of Hollywood productions. They manufacture romantic scenes and dialogue that also are quite common in melodramas (Xian, 2012, pp. 46-47). This definition is widely used by Chinese scholars when analysing chick flicks (Qian, 2014; Song, 2015; Xian, 2012; Yang, 2012). It is mixing romantic comedy and the chick flick into the same genre category.

The relationship between romantic comedy and the chick flick should be that the latter is a subgenre of the former. I argue that the biggest difference between the chick flick and the romantic comedy is the perspective that the director and screenwriter use to unpack the plot. The chick flick as post-feminist film product should have clear female perspective and agency throughout the film. It should be mainly representing the struggle and the achievement in the protagonist's life through her own perspective. In contrast, romantic comedy usually unpacks the story from an omniscient perspective or from the male perspective. I think this distinction between the two genres is important to the study of chick flicks, because the distinctive female perspective determines the nature of female expression in the chick flick. The following thesis only discusses films that fit Xian's (2012) definition and unpacks them from the perspective of the female protagonists.

By my count, using the definition given above, there were 157 chick flicks produced and released between 2009 and 2018 in China. The trend started off in 2009 and 2010 with eight productions released in total. Then, inspired by the success of the first few attempts, the numbers of productions start to increase rapidly. In 2011 and 2012, there were 12 and 11 chick flicks released respectively. Inspired by the commercial success of *Love is not Blind* (失恋33天, Shi Lian 33 Tian) (Teng 2011) in 2011, the number of productions released peaked in 2013 with 32 films released into the Chinese cinema and this was followed steadily by 20 films in 2014, 23 films in 2015 and 22 films in 2016. Despite the huge volume of productions placed in the film market, the variation in the box-office performance during those three years showed the possible loss of interests of the audience. Thus, in 2017, the number of productions slumped to 13 films followed by only 12 films released in 2018. Overall, the trend of recent chick flick production has shown a fading momentum.

## **The Research Question & Methodology**

How did the representation of women in Chinese chick flicks relate to the “left-over girl” discourse in the mainstream media since 2008? If the Chinese chick flick and the “left-over girl” discourse are correlated, how did the chick flicks produced in the past decade produce and reproduce the discourse? What is the gender order that Chinese chick flicks are producing? This thesis examines the relationship between Chinese chick flicks and the “left-over girls” discourse. The thesis proceeds with two literature review chapters. In Chapter 2, I review the existing literature on the representation of women in Chinese films produced by Western and Chinese academics. In Chapter 3, I closely review the existing literature on the representation of women in Chinese chick flicks. The interest of academics in studying the representation of women in Chinese chick flicks is very limited. Therefore, I believe it was necessary to start the research by understanding the general picture of the representation of women in Chinese cinema and then narrowing it down to the specific chick flick genre. After the literature reviews, the thesis includes two chapters of original analysis.

In Chapter 4, I employ the method of content analysis to outline the education background, career, age and relationship status of women represented in the Chinese chick flicks in the top 21 at the box office. I explore the correlation between the image of the “left-over girl” and the protagonists. The correlation between the “left-over girl” discourse and the chick flicks was always made by mainstream media, film critics and some film theorists. However, no researchers have tried to consolidate the correlation. This chapter is dedicated to finding out whether there is a strong reflection of the “left-over girl” discourse in the chick flicks. This chapter is inspired by the content analysis done by the media researchers and social studies researchers Aiping Luo, Feng Wang and Yu Jiang, published in 2014. The book *The Report on “Left-Over Girls” of China* was the first academic research on the social media and media discourse of “left-over girls”. The second chapter was a detailed content analysis of the representation of unmarried women in print and online news media. Followed up their research, I started the chapter by doing a content analysis of all chick flicks produced and released in Mainland

China from 2009 to 2019. “Content analysis offers a systematic and quantitative means of analyzing messages’ characteristics” (Neuendorf, 2002, 31). In this case, it enables this research to explore the representation of female characters rather than the narrative. I selected 20 films based the fact that they are the top 20 films in terms of the box-office net growth. By comparing the objective factors with the single female portrait constructed by the “left-over girls” discourse, I highlighted the high level of coincidence between the two.

In Chapter 5, I employ the method of textual analysis to study four of the Chinese chick flicks in the top 21 at the box office and depict the rigid gender rules these films try to prescribe to and inscribe in young women. In this chapter, I present three case studies to highlight the strategies these films deployed to reinforce the gender order, the gender binary and the importance of heterosexual marriage that was stressed in the “left-over girl” discourse. This chapter aims to find out how, if there is a strong correlation between the “left-over girls” discourse and chick flicks, did the representation of women and their relationships with the rest of their world in these films add to the existing discourse?

As the phenomenon of Chinese chick flick production is coming to an end, as is evident in the reduced financial success of recent releases, now is the right time to study chick flicks as a special collection of work. I argue that the Chinese chick flick production under the influence of the “left-over girls” discourse and throughout the period 2009 to 2018 has added volume to and expanded the depth of the discourse.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review: Literature on the Representation of Women in Contemporary Chinese Cinema**

### **Introduction**

Unlike the studies of gender conducted on Hollywood films, studies on the representation of gender in Chinese films are not extensive. On the one hand, cinematic representation has attracted little attention in English-language academic research on Chinese film until relatively recently. On the other hand, issues related to sexuality and gender have not been specifically researched in Chinese-language academic work. The body of literature reviewed here consists of Chinese scholarship and English-language scholarship written by two groups of academics. The groups were categorised by looking at the research background and the set of theoretical knowledge that the scholars have drawn from. The first group of studies reviewed below was written by scholars from a Chinese theoretical and cultural background. These scholars gained their education in a Chinese academic environment and had been working in Chinese language based academia since graduation. This body of scholarship was written in Chinese, which then was translated by me for the purpose of this thesis. The second group comprises cross-cultural readings of cinematic texts and demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of both Western and Chinese theoretical frameworks and socio-cultural contexts. This set of scholarship was written in English by scholars who work in universities in the West. The two sets of literature show strong characteristics as two separate bodies of work, and show many differences in contrast with each other. In this chapter, I firstly introduce and summarise the literature produced by the Chinese-language based scholars and then move on to analyse works by the English-language based scholars. The literature on the representation of women is reviewed in the chapter which follows this one because that body of work is mainly focused on the commercial success of the genre. The limited amount of research on the representation of gender in Chinese chick flicks is the body of research that this thesis expanding on.

Scholars from across both groupings agree that the representation of women in Mainland Chinese cinematic texts is shaped by a very complex interplay between discourses of nation, politics, class, and gender (Berry, 1989, 2006; Callahan, 1993; Dai, 1994; Donald, 2008; Kaplan, 1997; Li, 2016; Lu, 1997; Rayns, 1987; Wu, 2014; Zhou, 2009). Generally, most of the scholarship reviewed below attributes changes in the representation of women in Mainland Chinese cinema over the last 70 years to the enormous and frequent changes in the socio-political environment in the PRC since its establishment in 1949 (Berry, 1989; Berry & Farquhar, 2006; Dai, 1994, p. 39; Li, 2016; Wu, 2014). Dai Jinhua defined the year 1949 as the start of contemporary Chinese cinema (Dai, 1994, p. 39), and scholars in China and the West recognise this date. It is also commonly recognised in most of this scholarship that the representation of female characters in Chinese cinema can be chronologically



divided into three periods. The first period is between 1949 and 1977, which is the first 17 years of the establishment of the PRC, followed by the 10 years of cultural revolution (Dai, 1994; Chi, 2008; Guo, 1995; Liu, 2012; Wu, 2014; Zhou, 2009). Many Western scholars call this the period of socialist China, but this is inaccurate because China has continued to identify itself as a socialist country since 1977. The second period is the 1980s and 1990s, which is called the New Wave or New Era of Chinese cinema. During these years, Chinese society was undergoing a drastic change socially, economically, and culturally (Dai, 1994; Donald, 2008; Guo, 1995; Liu, 2012; Wu, 2014; Zhou, 2009). With the Opening-Up and Reform policy of Deng Xiaoping, China was fully and intensively embracing Western influences of all kinds. The third period is the new century up until the present day, a period in which China has gradually stabilised and settled with new social classes and a new cultural identity. Neoliberalism and consumerism became the dominant ideas that shaped cultural and social practice in this period. (Huang, 2015; Liebler et al., 2015, p. 584; Li, 2016; Wen, 2009; Xu, 2015; Zhou, 2006).

### **Chinese-language Literature on the Representation of Women in PRC Cinema**

Many Chinese scholars have been critical of the female consciousness and subjectivity of Chinese women. A lot of them have argued that, compared to their Western counterparts, Chinese women have been lacking the agency and subjectivity in the liberation movement of women. Scholars have pointed out that female liberation could be described as taking place in two stages: the male feminist movement from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1949, and the state feminist movement from 1949 to the 1990s (Wang, 2005). The state feminist movement was generally attached to the overall communist revolution and the idea of gender equality was raised by male leaders (Dai, 1994; Guo, 1995; Liu, 2012; Y. Yang, 1990, 2013). In relation to filmmaking, scholars also generally agreed that, despite the changing political, social and cultural environment during and after the era of revolutionary China, female directors had been consciously or subconsciously using male directors as a standard against which to match their creativity and ideology, in order to be recognised and accepted in the film industry and the market (Dai 1994; Guo, 1995; Hu, 2014; Huang, 2016; Jin & Cao, 2007; Liu, 2007, 2012; Wen, 2009; Wu, 2004, 2014; Xu, 2015; Yang, 1990).

Yang Yuanyin wrote an article in 1990 that outlined the development of feminist film theory in the West, the historical development of female consciousness in China, and its relation to the nature of female liberation in the China-specific socio-political context. Yang Yuanyin is a pivotal scholar in the field of Chinese cinema and is one of the earliest contributors to the feminist film criticism that is native to the Chinese socio-cultural context. In 1990, she argued that, compared to the Western academic context, feminism and feminist film theory in China are not yet developed: no socio-political movement nor theoretical ideologies existed at that time (Yang, 1990, p. 49). The process of women's liberation, unlike in the West, resulted neither from the awakening of a collective female consciousness nor from the initiative of Chinese women (Yang, 1990, p. 50). Instead, the liberation of women is an effect of the

national revolution and liberation movement. However, Yang Yuanyin directly challenged the idea put forward by many Western scholars that feminist theories or female consciousness did not exist in the PRC, simply because women in China did not initiate a liberation movement specifically for women. She argued that even without the formal liberation movement, the discourses of female consciousness and female subjectivity were hidden in the films, literature, and scholarship produced by Chinese women (Yang, 1990, p. 48).

The dominant account of gender representation in the first period of contemporary Chinese cinema in the Chinese-language scholarship was raised by Dai (1994). She pointed out that the representation of women in Chinese films since 1949 had a three-stage development. The first stage is representing women on a journey from victim to genderless hero in classical revolutionary films (1949-1966). She pointed out that, in this stage, female characters had two prototypes, Qing Xianglian and Mulan (Dai, 1994, p. 38). Qing Xianglian is a fictional female character in Chinese opera. Her landlord and master abused her before the establishment of the PRC. Then when the Communist Party came, she was saved by the male leader in the troupe and became a communist soldier herself. In this case, it seemed that the female characters were liberated from their oppression but, in fact, they fall into the protection of men in the new political environment. Their sexuality and gender consciousness were not expressed and not regarded as important in this process of liberation. Mulan, on the other hand, is a historical figure. She was a girl who disguised herself as a man to take her father's place in the conscripted army back in 412-502 AC in order to help her old, sick father (Dai, 1994, p. 38). This prototype of female representation hides her sexuality and subjectivity underneath the mask of a man, representing women as "the other" sex in opposition to men (Dai, 1994, p. 39).

In the second stage, from 1966 to the 1980s, women were represented as hero mothers. Glorifying motherhood is a classic tactic to reproduce Confucian moral regulation towards women. The return from the drastic denial to adhering to the Confucian ideology was reflected and reproduced in these mother figures in Chinese films during that period (Dai, 1994, p. 40). The third stage is 1982 to 1994, where the representation of women in Chinese film directed by the Fifth-Generation directors was praised and loved by arthouse cinema-goers around the world. The Fifth-Generation directors are directors who graduated from Beijing Film Academy in 1982, including famous directors such as Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, and Tian Zhuangzhuang. The works by these directors were critically acclaimed in the West, winning multiple awards at film festivals such as the Cannes Film Festival and the Berlin Film Festival. They used the female character's fate in their films to represent political and cultural change in China. The tragedy of these women's lives illustrated the changing social, political and cultural landscape of China over the past ten decades. Dai criticised these representations, saying that the male gaze was reintroduced in these works. These films also position Western audiences as spectators and position China as a spectacle to be consumed (Dai, 1994, p. 42). Dai also pointed out that even though there was a huge number of female directors working during this stage in Chinese cinema, films that reflect female consciousness and liberation were close to non-existent (Dai, 1994, p. 42).

Dai (1994) briefly introduced the fourth stage in the representation of women at the end of her article, stating that she can see a tragic backlash against the liberation of women in the new films produced after the 1990s. These films are catering to the audience and led by the market (Dai, 1994, 45). Dai also briefly discussed the categories of female directors in China at that time. She concluded that section by stating that contemporary female Chinese filmmakers were facing a huge challenge. There was only one feminist film produced in contemporary Chinese cinema, named *Woman, Human, Demon*, by female director Huang Cuqing in 1987. Dai's historical account was the dominant way of looking at female representation during the 1949-1976 period among Chinese academics. Many scholars referenced and expanded on her account (Guo, 1995; Jin & Cao, 2007; Liu, 2012; Wu, 2004).

In 2004, Wu argued that the representation of women in the work of Chinese female directors in the new century was influenced by both mainstream ideology and the marketisation of the film industry in China. The mainstream ideology was dominated by the consumerism imported from the West under the CER. Under these influences, the archetypes of female characters became more diverse compared to the previous century. However, the female consciousness and subjectivity in these films showed signs of a backlash compared to films directed by Chinese female directors in the 1990s.

Following Wu's (2004) argument, in 2006, Zhou Xia wrote an article discussing the commercialisation of art films in Chinese cinema, in which she argued that the female characters in films produced thus far in the 21st century showed high diversity in their class, relationship status, and career status. However, most of the women in these films were still represented as repressed and submissive characters. She argued that the females represented in the film were far less independent and robust than the women participating in the Chinese society in the 21st century (Zhou, 2006, p. 115).

In 2007, Jin and Cao pointed out that female subjectivity is becoming more and more evident in the representation of women in Chinese female directors' work. The female characters show a strong initiative in searching for their gender identity and sexuality in these films. They were given agency and a certain level of control over many vital decisions of their life. Also, they were more financially independent, as many of them had successful careers (Jin & Cao, 2007, p. 178). However, many of these films made in the first decade of the 21st century deliberately omitted male characters. They argued that this was because female directors found the subject of gender relations very hard to tackle (Jin & Cao, 2007, p. 180).

Two articles published in 2007, written by Meng and Liu respectively, critiqued the representation of women in the films directed by the Fifth-Generation Chinese male directors. Both of these articles argued that the representation of women in the Chinese male directors' work created a binary of "virgin versus banshee" (Liu, 2007; Meng, 2007). This theory was also mentioned and developed in later scholarship by other authors (Liu, 2012; Wen, 2009) The "virgin" was usually a mother or

daughter character who upheld the traditional standard of a good woman in Confucian culture. They cherished their charity and illustrated their femininity through their care of others (usually males). The banshee was usually sexualised and subject to the male gaze. While these female characters liberated their bodies and took agency in their lives to pursue emotional and sexual relationships, they were consciously or subconsciously constructed as bad examples of how a contemporary Chinese young woman should behave. This was illustrated in the narrative, where most of these women ended in tragedy or in being 'fixed' by accepting marriage or committing themselves to a more stable romantic relationship (Meng, 2007, p. 55).

In 2009, Wen pointed out that, in the new century, the number of Chinese female directors has dropped and the market is marginalising the work they produce (Wen, 2009, p. 120). She also pointed out that both male and female directors started to deliberately use female bodies in a way that tried to please the male gaze. She summarised her view by saying that, with the renewed interest in representing female sexuality on screen, the representation of females in Chinese cinema took a big step backward to the stage where the female characters submitted their bodies to the male gaze and became less subjective (Wen, 2009, p. 123). Liu also argued this point in her article in 2012, stating that this was occurring because of the commercialisation of Chinese cinema in the new century (Liu, 2012, p. 5). The male gaze theory is constantly mentioned in the literature written in the 21st century.

In 2014, Hu established the characteristics of the "new women" on screen. She argued that the "new women" have independence through having a promising career and agency in a romantic or sexual relationship. These women are more open to sexual relations before marriage, and they are also more open to new ideas, generally a reference to "liberal feminist ideas". She particularly commented on the new phenomenon of representing urban young females in the workforce. She argued that these representations illustrate the dilemma of choosing between work or family life (Hu, 2014, p. 177).

Wu wrote another article in 2014 in which she argued that the development of the representation of women in Chinese cinema from 1949 to 2012 could be described in three stages. The female characters in the first stage were matching themselves to male standards. In the second stage, they were acting as female bodies that were sexualised to submit to the male gaze. In the third stage, the female characters finally start to search for their real identity and start to show discourses around the more complicated issues that women in China face in their daily lives (Wu, 2014, p. 188).

Overall, this body of literature written in Chinese does not show too much contradiction or conflict in ideas. Instead, the later texts accepted and utilised the theories developed in the earlier ones. Compared with scholarships coming from the West, where most articles used case studies of one or two films, the scholars in China focused on describing and summarising the trend in the representation of women and its relationship with the socio-cultural environment in the PRC.

## **English-Language Literature on the Representation of Women in PRC Cinema**

Discussion among Western academics about the representation of gender in film has focused on the cultural meaning and cultural construction of male and female identities. Nichols (2013, p. 287) has argued that two articles started the history of feminist film theory. In 1973, Johnston published an article titled "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema." It was considered to be the first article of feminist film theory which identified and criticised the narrow stereotypes of women in Hollywood films (Johnston, 1973). In 1975, Laura Mulvey published "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." She used psychoanalysis to discover the relationship between the visual representation of female characters in film and the audience (Mulvey, 1975, p. 833). She argued that in the classical Hollywood cinema of the studio era, women were constructed as sexual objects that were submitted to a male gaze (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, p. 111). This theory has been cited, developed and contested since its appearance and many Western scholars have based their analysis of female cinematic representation on this theory. The analysis and criticism of the representation of gender in contemporary Mainland Chinese films has utilised this theory.

In 1987, Tony Rayns wrote the first English article on the representation of women in contemporary Chinese film. In "The Position of Women in New Chinese Cinema," he analysed three films from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China respectively. Rayns travelled to Mainland China in the 70s as a film critic writing for *Sight & Sound* and had been introducing Asian cinema to the West for many years (Jia, 2013). In the 1987 article, he identified the Fifth-Generation directors and the New Wave in Mainland China's cinema. Most of their works produced in the early year of their careers, in the 80s and 90s, were highly political, and Rayns noted that "they are not afraid to broach issues that the older generation would prefer to leave untouched." (Rayns, 1987, 34). The Fifth Generation are the key group of directors on whom most of Western scholars have focused their analysis. Rayns made the observation that "there was no feminist movement in China, but the filmmakers were generally informed about the contemporary Western interest in feminist issues, including the debates surrounding the representation of women in films" (Rayns, 1987, p. 35). Rayns (1987, p. 32) stated that despite Chinese cinema broadly producing sexist stereotypes of women, as in any other national cinema, it produced a fair share of independent and strong female roles, because the Chinese culture was less patriarchal than neighbouring cultures. The case study in Rayns' work was the film *Yellow Earth* (Chen, 1984) by Cheng Kaige. Rayns (1987) argued that the director was "acknowledging the particular oppression of women in feudal society and implicitly criticizing the idealized depiction of women as feudal victims in the earlier Chinese films" (p. 39). Many other writers have similarly argued that films directed by the Fifth Generation produced critical views on how the Communist Party did not improve the position of Chinese women in the rural area (Berry, 1988; Berry & Farquhar, 2006; Callahan, 1993; Farquhar, 1992; Rayns, 1987).

A year after Rayns' article, Chris Berry, an Australian film studies academic who specialised in Chinese cinema and screen-based media, wrote a series of reports and an introduction article on the topic of

Chinese “women’s cinema” (Berry, 1988). In the 1980s, Berry worked for China Film Import and Export Corporation in Beijing and this grounded his research in Chinese cinema. A large part of his research has dealt with the representation of women in Chinese cinema, and he is the most cited scholar on this topic of research both in the West and in China. He defined “women’s cinema” as films produced by female content creators in early 1980s (Berry, 1988, pp. 5-6). He elaborated this definition further in his later article in 1989. He stated that the term “women’s cinema” was first used at a symposium in China, organised by the China Film Art Research Centre on 5–7 May 1986 (Berry, 1989, p. 8). He pointed out that in some of the “women’s films” the women’s struggle was not about equality in the social sphere in China; instead, it was about “reassertion of difference and the valuation of the personal” (Berry, 1988, p. 6). He specifically pointed out that the female directors he interviewed were all “urban intellectuals, members of a social group representing only a very small proportion of the Chinese population as a whole” (Berry, 1988, p. 6).

In 1988 Berry wrote another article on the same subject. He pointed out that scholars in the West were noting the sudden growth in the numbers and prominence of Chinese female directors (Berry, 1988, p. 8). He adapted the feminist film theory developed in Mulvey’s article to analyse the representation of gender in Chinese films. He pointed out that most of the “classical Chinese films” (referring to the films produced between 1949-1970s) used a third-person perspective that did not position the viewer in a neutral state. Instead, it “positions the viewers so that their understanding and attitude to what they see is congruent with the approved political line of the time” (Berry, 1989, p. 15). He argued that the traditional films were used to publicise the political attitudes considered to be correct in the PRC (Berry, 1989, p. 15). By way of contrast, he made the observation that many of the “women’s films” in the 1980s used the techniques of first-person narration to insist on the subjective experience of the protagonist (Berry, 1989, p. 14). He made the link between the changes in social and cultural environment in the PRC and the change of the representation of perspective in these “women’s films.” On the one hand, female directors had an increasing interest in psychology after the translation of the works of Freud, which were first translated in the Chinese in 1996. On the other hand, the PRC Government was making an effort in constructing and valorising the individual subject in response to the Economic Reform policies in the 70s and 80s (Berry, 1989, p. 15) However, these female characters illustrated a major contradiction when they performed their subjectivity within the consensus ideology of China at the time, which did not encourage female subjectivity. Berry (1989, p. 17), and later Zhou (2009), pointed out that in most of these films the protagonist has the goal of achieving a stereotypical happy life for a woman, understood as finding a man and getting married.

In 1993, Callahan did a close reading of the film *Ju Dou* (Zhang, 1991) by Zhang Yimou. Internationally, Zhang Yimou is one of the most well-known Chinese directors of the Fifth Generation. He directed a series of films based in the rural area of China, most of them with a female protagonist, and most discussing a lot of social and political issues under repressive pre-socialist China and socialist China. The eponymous *Ju Dou* is sold to a 50-year old silk-dyeing business owner in her teenage years. She fights for her survival under the brutal sexual violence from him and cheated on

him with his apprentice. After Ju Dou got pregnant with the apprentice's child, they plotted against the business owner and crippled him. At the end, the child killed both Ju Dou and the apprentice for being unfaithful to their master. Callahan argued that the film is a "political allegory invoking both Communism and Confucianism" (Callahan, 1993, p. 60). He said that "In Chinese contexts both Communism and Confucianism are patriarchal systems of domination" (Callahan, 1993, p. 53) and in both of these systems, there is a hierarchy in which "(old) age and (male) gender are valued" (Callahan, 1993, p. 61). He argued that despite the momentary liberation that the female protagonist had in the film, the overarching story was still a patriarchal tragedy, which resulted from the disruption of the hierarchical relations within the Confucian patriarchal system (Callahan, 1993, p. 61). He also claimed that the complex image of Chinese women represented in *Ju Dou* (Zhang, 1991) can be unpacked by looking at the representation of the female body, arguing that the representation of female body in this film revealed the gender politics of China in three ways. Firstly, the female body of Ju Dou was abused and oppressed by the master Jinshan, and the body was also dominated by the male gaze of apprentice Tianqing (Callahan, 1993, p. 57). However, in the scene when she deliberately undresses herself, Callahan suggested that she "took control of the representation (to Tianqing) of her body" (Callahan, 1993, p. 53). Callahan pointed out that the Chinese authorities censored the nude scene in *Ju Dou* (Zhang, 1991), and he argued that this censorship showed their conservative attitude towards the representation of female sexuality on screen (Callahan, 1993, pp. 58-60). This argument was developed in other scholarship, such as in Zhou's (2009) article, in which he observed that even though the female body was not a forbidden topic as it was before, "it was still far from fully exposed to the light of the day" (p. 3). Later on, in 1997, Cui did another close reading of this film. Overall, she argued that the three male characters in the film represented the past, the present and the future of the PRC. Therefore, the relationship of these men with Ju Dou in the film was a rhetorical illustration of how "all men's burdens, desires and losses are laid on a single woman's shoulder" (Cui, 1997, p. 328).

In 2006, Berry and Farquhar wrote a chapter in the book *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* asking "How Should Women Look?" They closely analysed Xie Fang, a Chinese actress best known for her involvement in the pre-Cultural Revolution cinema and the characters she played as an example of the work from the first period of gender cinematic representation in China. This article was a very early discussion of the representation of women in Chinese films other than those made by the Fifth-Generation directors. This added diversity to the body of filmic texts that were introduced to the West. This case study elaborated the look in these "classical Chinese films". They theorised that during the first period, female characters were frequently presented as the "good daughter of the nation and communist party" (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, p. 113). The narrative model of the daughter myth was achieved by using lower angle shots to show the leading character from the Communist Party (mostly a man), to create a didactic relationship between the male and female character on screen, and between the screen and the audience. They noted that "the viewing subject is not engaged libidinally but epistemophilically in a position of heightened knowledge that is not necessarily gendered" (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, p. 111). Compared to these classical cinematic texts, the films produced in the 1980s

and 1990s, which used monologue and narration, “position the viewer firmly with the main character, insisting on a subjective experience” (Berry, 1989, p. 14) Later in the same chapter, Berry and Farquhar analysed the work of director Zhang Yimou and the characters in those films that were played by Gong Li, the most well-known Chinese actress in the West, famous for her work in Zhang Yimou’s films as examples of the New Era. Berry and Farquhar (2006, pp. 126-127) argued that the female characters were subjected to not only the male gaze but also an imperialistic and neo-colonialist gaze from the West. Sexuality and the female body were explicitly displayed in Zhang Yimou’s films more than ever before, thus triggering criticism regarding the submission of female sexuality to the male gaze. However, Berry and Farquhar (2006) contended that by deliberately showing the bruises on the female character resulting from the sexual violence of her husband, the director structured the look of the audience to “privilege empathy over libidinal objectification” (p. 125). They argued that Gong Li’s characters gaze back at the audience in several instances, and that these scenes could be metaphorically read as a protest against “the commodifying gaze of the West of China and therefore as a kind of resistance to neo-colonialism” (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, p. 128).

In 2009, Zhou wrote an article that summarised the difference in the representation of women in Chinese cinema according to the “three stages” mentioned earlier in this chapter. He argued that in the first 17 years of the establishment of the PRC, women lived in a paradoxical position, where they were “being squeezed between the Communist’s constant efforts to uplift women’s position in society and the Party’s persistence in regarding to women as their docile and dutiful daughters to be saved and enlightened” (Zhou, 2009, p. 6). The lack of female subjectivity in the movement of female liberation in China was fully reflected in the female characters in the early Chinese films, where they were mostly represented as the victims of the feudal tradition who were saved by the Communist Party. Later on, during the Great Cultural Revolution, in order to achieve “neutrality” and class solidarity, all bodily beauty and femininity were wiped away without a trace remaining in the films produced in that decade. The female characters were genderless and asexual. They never presented their sexuality, and they were never involved in a sexual or emotional relationship with anyone (Zhou, 2009, pp. 7-8). Zhou (2009) argued that the “gender equality” seen on the big screen in China between 1950 and the 1970s existed only on the surface. However, this created a contradiction in the terms of the position taken by Western feminist critics. On the one hand, the genderless representation minimises the male gaze; on the other hand, the asexual and genderless women became empty signifiers (Zhou, 2009, p. 9) Both Berry and Zhou agreed that the female characters became empty, meaning that femininity and female sexuality vanished from the female character (Berry, 1989; Zhou, 2009). After the introduction of the economic policies of Deng Xiaoping, Western concepts and conduct flooded into Chinese society. Films made during the 1990s and the early 21st century showed a greater tolerance of premarital sex and a rebellion against Confucian ideologies (Zhou, 2009, pp. 10-11). However, many contradictions were buried in these filmic representations. Despite many female characters in these films making liberated sexual choices in their life, their representation indicated that “the female body in today’s China is still the site of both a literal and an ideological struggle for possession” (Zhou, 2009, p. 15).



In an article published in 2015, sociologists Liebler, Wei and Li introduced a new approach to the analysis of Chinese film. They pointed out that there had been very little quantitative research that had explored the pattern of the representation of women in Chinese cinema (Liebler et al., 2015, p. 584). They utilised the sociological method of content analysis to summarise the pattern of representation in feature films produced between 2002 and 2011 and argued that the beauty economy drove the representation of women in Chinese cinema during the period 2002 to 2011:

*Women were less visible than men, and more likely to be young, sexualized, and fit a cultural ideal image. Men were more likely to hold traditional gender roles than were women, were allowed to age on the big screen and hold an ambiguous relationship status. (Liebler et al., 2015, p. 595)*

They also pointed out the difference between Chinese cinema and Hollywood: the female characters in Hollywood were more likely to be single and driven by career, and allowed to have sexual relationships with men, whereas the female characters in Chinese cinema were more rigid in their relationships and marriage status. They argued that marriage status “is a part of a representational system that serves to suppress women’s subjectivity and maintain a hegemonic gender hierarchy” (Liebler et al., 2015, p. 595).

After the turn of the century, Western scholars seemed have lost their interest in reading Chinese films once again. The Western literature related to the representation of gender in Mainland Chinese films has mainly focused on the works produced in the New Era of Chinese cinema. Many of them were, by definition, Western readings of the films made by the Fifth-Generation directors and utilised the classical feminist film critic theories such as the male gaze. Some of them also commented on the representation of masculinity in Chinese films (Berry, 2004; Louie, 2003), which was also a central topic of feminist critique of films in the Western academy. Some of these scholars demonstrated, consciously or subconsciously, a level of neo-colonialism in their work, especially those writing in the earlier stage. They used the feminist theory frameworks developed in the West as a reference point. They ignored the possibility that Chinese scholars have developed some feminist film theories that are native to the Chinese socio-cultural context.

## Chapter 3 Literature Review

### Literature on the Representation of Women in Chinese Chick Flicks

#### Introduction

As established in the introduction chapter, in the past decade, Chinese filmmakers have been trying different tactics to localise the chick flick into the Chinese socio-cultural environment. This pop-cultural phenomenon has attracted some attention from Chinese scholars who have studied it from a commercial perspective. In response to the rapidly growing Chinese film industry, a small number of Western film scholars and critics have also been interested in analysing these films as case studies of post-modernist trend in China. However, there is a limited amount of literature on the representation of gender in these chick flicks, which is surprising given the female protagonist and the impact of chick flicks on film audiences in China. Studying the representation of gender in chick flicks could provide us with a new approach to understanding the association between gender relations and popular culture in China. The box office success of Chinese chick flicks poses the question of how the filmmakers localised the genre by transforming white, middle-class gendered issues into relatable Chinese gendered issues while preserving the original generic characteristics. The answer to this question indicates the fast-changing taste, desires and issues in focus amongst Chinese women in the past decade. Despite being a very intriguing research field, the literature related to this representation of gender in Chinese chick flicks is very limited in quantity and quality. This chapter discusses the scope of the existing literature on the representation of gender in Chinese chick flicks written in both Chinese and English language, in order to make a meaningful expansion of this body of work in this thesis. In the first section, I review the existing Chinese literature on the representation of gender in chick flicks. In particular, I look at how scholars analyse the linkage from the production of chick flicks to the “left-over girl” discourse, or to the socio-cultural environment of China. In the second section, I review the existing English-language literature and the film critics.

The history of chick flicks began within the genre of “women’s film,” which was created during the great depression in the US in last century (Wang & Wang, 2018, p. 94; Xian, 2012, p. 46; Yang, 2012). Molly Haskell argued that the production of women’s film made up for the omission of women in traditional Hollywood film genres (Etherington-Wright & Doughty, 2016, p. 225). Retrospectively, *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (Edward, 1961) is widely recognised as the first chick flick produced in Hollywood history (Xian, 2012, p. 46). This film broke with the traditional depressed and sad undertone of melodrama, and promoted a young, fashionable and independent female image (Hong, 2011, p. 91). The phrase “chick flick” was first used in the early 1990s to describe films that represent the romantic relationships of women who live in an urban context. Wang and Wang (2018, p. 94) pointed out that the phrase “chick flick” was first used by the Chicago Tribune in 1991 to describe the comedy film *Fried Green Tomatoes*. These movies are made specifically targeting a female audience (Hong, 2011, p. 91; Li, 2012, p. 52; Liu, 2009, p. 240; Xian, 2012, p. 47). Two other Chinese

academics also attempted to give a definition of the chick flick in their articles (Hong, 2011; Liu, 2009).

### **Chinese Literature on the Representation of Women in Chinese Chick Flicks**

Just after the release of *Sophie's Revenge* (Jin, 2009), Liu Xiaojing wrote the first article on the representation of gender in Chinese chick flicks. She argued that *Sophie's Revenge* coats the traditional heteronormative ideology with the neoliberal feminist representation of female empowerment (Liu, 2009, p. 240). She elaborated on this by noting that, despite the fact that Sophie has a clear agency in pursuing her romantic relationship, all of the changes that happened to her in the film were centred on becoming a version of herself that would be more suitable for her desired partner (Liu, 2009, p. 241). It is an attempt at female expression, but it failed to address or criticise the real issues that are faced by Chinese women day to day. Liu (2009) concluded her article by stating that *Sophie's Revenge* is a very shallow attempt at a feminist representation of women in Chinese cinema, and it did not illustrate or discuss the substantial source of female oppression in the society. Therefore, she believed this film was an attempt to engage young urban women, who have consumer power, in the cinema. She argued this was a sign of a shift in the focus of the Chinese film industry from critical and academic acclamation to commercialisation and entertainment-oriented mass appreciation, and so the Chinese chick flick genre is set out to capitalise on the growing female consumer power (Liu, 2009, p. 242).

In 2011, Hong Fan, a lecturer at Beijing Film Academy, wrote an article on the phenomenon of the number of films targeted at a female audience rapidly increasing during the three years from 2009 to 2011 (Hong, 2011; Li, 2012; Xian, 2012). He made the observation that after the impressive box office of *Sophie's Revenge* (Jin, 2009), many producers and investors started to blindly invest their money into the production of chick flicks in China (Hong, 2011, p. 90). He noted that chick flick as a film genre had existed in the American film industry for nearly 50 years, and that it is a sub-genre of melodrama. However, different from some scholars researching in this area, he defined the difference between a chick flick and a melodrama or women's film as the target audience. He stated that instead of targeting middle-age women who have nuclear families of their own, the chick flick targets women at a younger age who are interested in fashion and female independence. He also argued that the female protagonists in chick flicks had more agency and subjectivity compared with women in melodramas (Hong, 2011, p. 91; Ma, 2014). He argued that, according to the production quality and plot lines of the chick flicks produced in America and in China, the target audience of these films was shifting to women in a younger age group who had received a lower level of education. He also made an observation that the exponential growth of the Chinese film industry is based on the rise of blockbusters created by well-established directors. Therefore, at the end of his article, he forecast a negative future of low-budget chick flicks in Chinese cinema (Hong, 2011, p. 92).

In 2012, Xian pointed out that chick flicks produced in China could be categorised into seven main themes: single lady, teenage and coming-of age, motherhood, fashion, women in the workplace, brides, and female friendship (Wang & Wang, 2018, p. 95; Xian, 2012). This categorisation is based on the study of the Hollywood chick flicks. The author did not mention the production of chick flicks in China until the very end of the article where she commented that a lot of the Chinese chick flicks produced from 2009 to 2012 were copycat versions of existing western films (Xian, 2012, p. 51). Similarly, Yang compared Western and Chinese chick flicks in his article published in 2012. He argued that the key to success for the Western chick flick in the competitive film market is its neoliberalist feminist representation of women fitting well with the current desire and taste of female audience. He believed that, for Chinese chick flicks to succeed in the Chinese market, the filmmakers needed to understand the essence of neoliberal feminism (Yang, 2012, p. 34).

In 2012, film scholar Li wrote an article analysing the developing trend of Chinese chick flicks. She pointed out that from *Sophie's Revenge* (Jin, 2009) to *Go Lala Go!* (Xu, 2010) and *Love is not Blind* (Teng, 2011), the localisation of this imported genre had been gradually realised (Li, 2012, p. 53). She pointed out that *Sophie's Revenge* was a perfect copy of the Western chick flick. This resulted in the fact that a lot of the scenes in the film are not very relatable to Chinese audiences, such as the luxurious new year party and the private hospital (Li, 2012, p. 53). Compared to the former, *Go Lala Go!* was clearly set in modern Beijing, and the issues that the protagonist encountered are more relatable. However, the emphasis on buying power, the aspiration of owning overpriced luxuries and the financial independence of a woman was taken to an extreme point where it was not realistic anymore (Li, 2012, p. 53). By contrast, in *Love is Not Blind*, the main character is a relatable Beijing girl with a taste true to the fashion trend and her social class. Li (2012, p. 54) speculated that not only did the production design fit the trend, the ideology that guided the protagonist in choosing romance over money also won over a lot of the ordinary female audience.

In 2014, Ma Ting defined the targeted audience of Chinese chick flicks as young women aged 18 to 35. And she also pointed out that this demographic was the major consumer of film. Followed on from that observation, she argued that the appearance and success of chick flicks in China signified the changing gender culture in the fast-developing society in China, where financially independent women had achieved significant buying power. She argued that the Chinese chick flick should not be seen as feminist expression or a critique of society. It should be seen as a product generated to fit mainstream ideologies and taste, and thus gain commercial success (Ma, 2014, p. 197).

Zhou (2014) wrote the first article that systematically analysed the representation of women in Chinese chick flicks. He argued that there are three female character archetypes: Cinderella, Pandora and Mulan (Zhou, 2014, p. 48). He explained that the "Cinderella" in modern chick flicks is kind and naïve, and her personality does not change throughout the film. In the story development, Cinderellas constantly run into dilemmas that help them to discover true love. At the end of the films, they usually find their "one true love". And usually the partner they end up with has a better appearance or better

status than the protagonist themselves. This fulfils the female audience's fantasy of becoming rich overnight (Zhou, 2014, p. 48). The second archetype is Pandora, a protagonist who has outstanding appearance or an effortless well-off financial status. These female protagonists are usually punished by losing their loved ones or losing their money. In the end, they are always guided by another male character and become a better version of themselves (Zhou, 2014, pp. 48-49). The third archetypal female character is Mulan. These professionally successful women display certain characters traits that are considered to be masculine in conventional gendered perceptions. They usually discover that they are torn by the hard choice between having a successful career and a steady family or romantic relationship. This dilemma generates a lot of anxiety for the female character (Zhou, 2014, p. 49). Zhou (2014) also pointed out that the archetypes are not entirely isolated from each other. The filmmakers usually combine two or even three of them to enrich their character development or fulfil the consumer pleasure of their targeted audience (Zhou, 2014, p. 49). Song (2015) made similar observations in his master's thesis published in 2015.

In his article published in 2015, Zhou stated that the chick flick has been developed so quickly that it has dramatically shifted the sex ratio of Chinese moviegoers. He elaborated on the reason why the chick flick is so widely embraced by independent urban women, suggesting that, unlike the male gaze provided by traditional movies, the chick flick offers plenty of opportunities for female gaze, which is a recent phenomenon in Chinese popular culture. He defined the concept of the "her economy," which refers to the rising consumer power of females and the market response to this new trend. From the perspective of the "her economy", Zhou (2015) pointed out that the female gaze is realized based on the female audience's power within the culture of "left-over girl." He argued that chick flicks glorify consumerism and continue to present a sexist ideology to society.

### **English-Language Literature on the Representation of Women in Chinese Chick Flicks**

Scholars working in the West are more interested in chick flick production as a signifier of the changing political environment in Mainland China, which is dominated by consumerism and neoliberalism. Li Jinhua wrote an article in 2014 in which she analysed the film *Go Lala Go!* (Xu, 2010) and arrived at a conclusion that the film "presented a postfeminist re-configuration of female gender identity" (Li, 2014, p. 564). She argued that the film was set in front of the backdrop of the changing cultural policy in China from socialist political propaganda to consumerism. Its market success resulted from the combination of its fast response to the market vacuum and its unpretentious celebration of consumerism (Li, 2014, p. 565). Similarly, in 2015, Leung Wing-Fai wrote an article which commented on the practice of product placement in *Go Lala Go!* She argued that the film utilised the idol effect of the female director Xu Jinlei, who was also the female protagonist of this film. Her image in the film was deliberately created to be "a model consumer" to encourage its target audience to desire a modern and financially independent lifestyle (Leung, 2015, p. 133). Leung (2015, p. 133) draws on some Chinese and Western writers' arguments and concludes that the conscious

consumption of the characters in the film was an unrealistic representation of the white-collar worker in post-socialist China.

In conclusion, the general lack of interest in analysing the representation of women in Chinese chick flicks both in the PRC and the West is evident in the limited number of works release in the past decade. Most of these researchers are junior researchers finishing their master's or PhD degree. Compared to the high-profile academic analysis reviewed in the previous chapter, the discussion of the representation of women in Chinese chick flicks is a niche topic. However, the commercial hype of this genre in the past 10 years is unprecedented, even comparable to the Hollywood production of chick flicks. In particular, none of the scholarship has drawn attention to the interesting parallel development of the "left-over girl" discourse and Chinese chick flick production. Therefore, I think some further research needs to be done in this area.

## **Chapter 4 The Stereotypes of Characters**

### **A Content Analysis of the Representation of Gender in Chinese Chick Flicks since 2008**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I summarized the theoretical framework that previous researches deployed to analyze chick flicks produced in mainland China. The previous researches mentioned “left-over girls” in their writing, but the correlation was simply assumed. In this chapter, I aim to understand the correlation between the chick flick productions and the “left-over girls” discourse in the mainstream media and social media in the past decade.

As mentioned in the introduction, this chapter was inspired by the work of Luo, Wang and Jiang in 2014. In chapter two of their book, they introduced a content analysis on mainstream media news reports on “left-over girls”. They pointed out that the first news article using the word “left-over girls” was published by Sina in 2004. Therefore, they studied 592 viable entries of news stories between 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2004 and 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2011. (Luo, Wang & Jiang, 2014, 238-240) They isolated each individual woman mentioned in these entries, resulted in 678 study samples. When it comes to analyzing the representation of unmarried women in China, they used three sets of key objective factors: age, education level, income & career. In discussion, they compared the representation construct with the unmarried female demographic in China outlined in the census data collected in 2012 by the central government. They concluded their finding by pointing out that the “left-over girl” was a socially constructed discourse to police young women into a marital relationship as soon as possible. They followed up on analyzing who, how and why this discourse was initiated in China, and who has benefited from this discourse.

By doing a similar content analysis, I wanted to compare and contrast the result of this content analysis against Luo Wang and Jiang’s result to see whether if the Chinese chick flicks were correlated to the “left-over-girls” discourse identified by the previous research.

#### **Methods**

Inspired by their research, the content analysis beneath focused on outlining the representation of women in the chick flicks produced in Mainland China. I chose the top 20 box-office chick flicks (listed in Appendix 1) to be the sample of the content analysis. Box-office is a good indicator of how successful the film was in the market. I acknowledge that the value of the box-office were to be determined by many factors including budget and casts. While one could not say a film with high value of box-office is a great film in respect to its artistic attributes, it is definitely arguable that the film

with high value of box-office is very popular amongst audience. The top 20 box-office had similar cast level, budget and audience reception. This group is an adequate representation of the chick flick genre in Chinese cinema. In these 20 films, there were 26 female protagonists. (Appendix 1) A protagonist is the main character that is driving the story development in a film or that the story evolves around her/him. I used the same key objectives as Luo, Wang and Jiang: age, education level and income/career, attitude towards marriage. In addition, I also looked at whether if the protagonist is unmarried, because in context of Luo Wang and Jiang's research, the women featured in the news stories were all clearly single due to the topic is set on "left-over girls." However, it is not a fair assumption to make about the protagonist of the protagonists in Chinese chick flicks being single or unmarried. In the discussion, I compared the data acquired from the content analysis with the data presented by Luo Wang & Jiang. I argue that the Chick flicks produced in PRC during 2008-2018 were in aid of producing and reproducing the "left-over girls" discourse.

## Outcome

### Age

Many of these films started with a personal introduction of the protagonist, either from first person point of view of the protagonist or a third person point of view narrator. Age is usually included in these introductions. If the age of the key characters is not explicitly stated in the film, it is usually easy to estimate their age through other time related facts, such as the date of graduation, the years of work experience and the cultural reference from childhood that the character's mention, etc. The age brackets used in this analysis was the same as the one in Luo Wang & Jiang's chapter.

Age of Protagonists in Chinese Chick Flicks

	Under 25	25-27	28-31	32-36	36 Above
Number of Protagonists (persons)	2	11	10	2	1
Percentage	7.7%	42.3%	38.5%	7.7%	3.8%

Amongst 26 protagonists in the top 20 box-office chick flicks, there are 2 under 25 years old, 11 in their 25-27 years old, 10 in their 28-31 years old, 2 in their 32-36 years old, and only 1 in their late 50s.

### Marriage Status



As stated in the introduction, I do not want to assume that the protagonists are all single or unmarried, because the chick flicks could be telling a different story from the “left-over girls” discourse in the mainstream news media. Therefore, I looked at the marriage or relationship status that the female protagonists were in at the beginning of the film and the end of the film. I chose to count the status twice based on the reason that the chick flick genre tent to base their overarching story line on personal growth of the protagonist, and usually the representation at the end is usually a fuller and happier version of the protagonists. The potential difference between the two set of data could be a good indicator to the value that the filmmakers tries to adhere to in their films.

### Relationship Status of Protagonists in Chinese Chick Flicks

	Single	in a relationship	Engaged	Married
Beginning of Film (Number of persons)	18	5	0	1
End of Film (Number of persons)	4	16	2	3

Among the 26 protagonists analyzed, there were 18 singles, 5 in a relationship, 0 engaged and 1 married at the beginning of the film. The number of single protagonists dropped significantly to 4 at the end of the film, as the numbers of the other categories all increased at 16 in a relationship, 2 engaged and 3 married. Overall, more protagonists enter a marriage or marriage alike relationships at the end of the film.

### The Education and Career

Appendix 5 showed the education and career statue of the unmarried female characters in the 21chick flicks examined.

### Education Status of Protagonists in Chinese Chick Flicks

	High School or lower	Diploma	Undergraduate	Not Specified
Number of persons	1	3	20	2
Percentage	3.8%	11.5%	77%	7.7%

Out of 38 unmarried characters, 2 had unfinished high school education, 2 had diploma, 26 had undergraduate degree, 8 character’s education statues were not specified. Clearly, the films chose to represent a group of highly educated women as the protagonists.

In some of these films, the career of the main characters was not specified. When career did become a part of the storyline, their jobs were either artist, designer, magazine editor, human resource manager, marketing or public relation related fields. These jobs are all associated with high pay rate and middle-Class lifestyle. Based on the median salary on the Chinese pay scale of the protagonists' jobs specified in the films, the result showed:

### Income Status of Protagonists in Chinese Chick Flicks

	No Income	Low-Income Average 2,100RMB-5,000RMB monthly	Mid-Income Average 5,000RMB-10,000RMB monthly	High-Income 10,000 RMB and above monthly	Not Specified
Beginning of Film (Number of persons)	4	0	14	7	1
End of Film (Number of persons)	6	0	14	5	1

Out of 26 protagonists, 4 of them had no income, and 14 earning in the mid-income range, and 7 earning in the high-income range at the beginning of the films. At the end of the films, 6 of them ended up with no income, and 14 earning in the mid-income range and 5 earning in the high-income range.

### Attitude Towards Romantic Relationship

From the conversations made between the protagonists and other characters in the film, the attitude towards a romantic relationship were shown quite clearly, as a lot of these films were stories about their love lives. However, the protagonists' attitudes towards having a romantic relationship were not always positive at the beginning of the film. Some of them believe in true love, and others think true love is made up. I did a counting on the positive and negative attitudes that the 26 protagonists had. Positive attitudes include aspiring, believe, wanting, happy, hopping and content etc. Negative attitudes include hasty, sad, disbelieve, ignoring, avoiding etc.

### Protagonists' Attitude towards Romantic Relationship in Chinese Chick Flicks

	Positive	Negative
Number of persons	11	15
Percentage	42.3%	57.7%

## Discussion

Using the top 20 box-office Chinese chick flicks as a sample, the content analysis outlined that the protagonist stereotype of this genre in the PRC: women in their later 20s to early 30s, with a high education and middle-class income, who struggle with their romantic relationship aspect of their life. Most of these women started as single, and majority of them ended up in marriage and marriage alike relationship, hinting towards the value that marriage or relationship is a very important part of women's happiness. How exactly does this image fit with the "left-over girls" discourse pinpointed by Luo Wang & Zhang's research in 2011?

In terms of age demography of the women represented in the "left-over girls" media posts, Luo Wang & Zhang stated in their book there were 16 under 25 years old, occupying 4.1% of the 385 sample that age of the woman was specifically mentioned, and 60 in their 25 to 27 years old(15.6%), 185 in their 28 to 31 years old(48.1%), 92 in their 32 to 36 years old(23.8%) and 32 in their 32 years old and above(8.4%). (Luo, Wang & Jiang, 2011, 389) This set of data showed that the "left-over girls" discourse in the mainstream media and the chick flick fixated on representing women from the same age group, which was between 28 to 32 years old.

As in the education status, Luo, Wang & Zhang stated that the media was portraying the unmarried women as a group of highly educated population. Out of all the cases mentioned in the media, 95.1% of these women had an undergraduate degree and above education level, contrast with 4.9% of women had other qualifications. (Luo, Wang & Zhang, 2011, 357) This is also true to the result from the content analysis on the Chinese chick flicks, with overwhelming 84.7% of the protagonists having an undergraduate degree and above.

The data related to the income status reported in the mainstream media also showed similar traits to the result from the content analysis above. Luo, Wang & Zhang found that only 2.2% of women reported in the articles had a low income, 24.5% of women had medium income, and the income status were not reported in 73.3% of the cases. (Luo, Wang & Zhang, 2011, 323) However, they also pointed out that many these cases where their income was not mentioned, a high income could be assumed as they were iconic singers, idolized actress, or in other prestigious positions. More interestingly, this genre of film was supposed to show of a stereotypical overarching story of a woman becoming a better version of themselves after all the twist and turns in the plot. However, career development was not a big part of any of these stories, most of the protagonists' job stayed the same, and in some cases, the protagonists even lost their job in the happily ever after ending.

When mentioning women's attitude towards marriage or romantic relationships, the result of the content analysis on the protagonists in Chinese chick flicks were in consistency with the data presented by Luo, Wang & Zhang. Besides 38.1% women did not mention their attitude towards marriage and romantic relationships, 36.7% of reported cases were having negative attitude, in

contrast to 24% of women had positive attitude. (Luo, Wang & Zhang, 2011, 409) Take out the 38.1% of women who did not mention their attitude, 60.5% of women reported in the media had negative attitude towards romantic relationship. This number is just a little bit higher than that in the representation of female protagonist in Chinese chick flicks.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the result of the two content analysis were highly consistent across the categories. Therefore, the correlation between the Chinese chick flicks and the “left-over girls” discourse identified by Luo, Wang and Jiang in their book is certain.

In the west, chick flicks generally came out of a liberalistic or neoliberalistic feminist background. The gender order that they adhere to is related to encouraging women’s participation in the public sphere and empowering themselves by earning and spending in the capitalistic social setting. Compare to their western counterparts, Chinese female directors who are famous for making multi-million box-office chick flicks were hardly coming from a feminist point of view. Jin Yimeng, who directed the first chick flick in Chinese film history and continued to produce similar films afterwards, expressed that “I think the world is belonged to man, and when women are gentle and calm, man would be gentle and calm, thus the world will become a better place. I strongly dislike feminists; I think it is not necessary to yell out the point you have. It is hard for man to survive in this world as well after all.” (Wang, 2013) Xu Jinlei who directed *Go, Lala, Go!* (2010) expressed her discomfort with the label of feminist filmmaker.

*“I don’t understand what feminism is. I sometime think that we should be advocate for man’s right since some of the indie films portrayed really bad image of man in recent years. A lot of people talked to me about feminism. I asked them what feminism is, sometimes they didn’t have a clear answer, other times they said its women who are professionally successful but failed in relationship. I’d think this definition is oversimplified. I think men and women should just use their gender characteristic traits well, the world if balance, there is no need for advocating any kind of privilege.” (Xu, 2004)*

This strong notion of disconnect between feminist expression and neoliberalist feminist filmmaking signified that the female directors were not coming from an intention that challenge the current patriarchal socio-cultural reality in PRC. What exactly is the gender order that the filmmakers were portraying in these chick flicks? How did these representations contribute to the “left-over girls” discourse? I followed up with a text analysis in the next chapter to answer these questions.

## **Chapter 5 The Gender Role Presented**

### **A Textual Analysis of the representation of Gender in Chinese Chick Flicks**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapters established that the representation of women in the Chinese chick flicks were align with the representation of women in the “left-over girls” discourse in main stream media. How did the popularity of Chick Flicks provide the reinforcement of the gender roles in the “left-over girls” discourse that has dominated the media for the past 10 years? In this chapter, I did textual analysis on 3 films from the top 20 box-office listed in the previous chapter to highlight what kind of gender roles that these films has been portraying.

#### **Unrealistic Career Development**

Under the influence of neoliberalist feminist, most of the women represented in Chinese chick flicks had a career of some sorts. One of the major topics in this film genre sustained throughout its production history in China was the career development and obstacles that women are facing in the modern age. On the surface, these films seemed to be sending out positive and empowering messages about female should be financially independent and career driven. However, the illustration of the career development is either unrealistic or become less relevant as the plots moving forward. *Go! Lala, Go!* (Xu, 2010) was one of chick flicks in the top 20 box office list that featured the protagonist’s career as its theme.

The plot of *Go! Lala, Go!* (Xu, 2010) builds around the female protagonist Du Lala, who was a university graduate at the beginning of her career in an International corporate company named DB. She started as a primary secretary at the bottom of cooperate chain and worked her way up to the human resource manager. As the name and the beginning illustrated, this film seems to be discussing the career development of young educated urban women in China. The first one third of the film showed that Lala is a very dedicated and diligent employer, who demonstrated a wide range of abilities including leadership skills and interpersonal skills. Thus, she positions, and salary quickly raised from primary secretary at 3,000 Yuan a month to senior secretary at 6,000 Yuan a month. However, the rest of the plot suddenly changed its focus from the development of her career to an unexpected office romantic relationship with Wang Wei, which is strictly prohibited by the DB. Wang Wei is the executive director of Sales at DB. His ex-girlfriend is the executive director of human resources Rose, who directly manage Lala. The jealousy of Rose became the biggest source of obstacle of Lala’s career development. At the end, Wang Wei, Lala and Rose all left DB and started to live a new lifestyle. Two years later, Lala went back to the place in Thailand, where Wang Wei and her

first kissed, and found out that Wang Wei runs a bar in that city and became a tourist guide. The film ended on a scene where they met under the majestic love tree in front of a temple and realized that they still feel deeply in love with each other. Lala kissed Wang Wei in the crowd.

Despite having the career development as the theme of the movie, the story ends on the note where the protagonist finally finds her happiness when her love life is fulfilled by meeting a promising partner. Valuing marriage and marriage alike relationship over career success is emphasised throughout the film. After Rose gets promoted to be the director of human resources in the movie, she tells Wang Wei that: "I used to care about promotion a lot, because I think it was the only way to prove my value. But now, my title has changed, I still feel unhappy. David, do you think we could try to get back together?" This dialogue hinted that the huge promotion in career to women is not enough comparing to the unbearable aloneness of being single. At the end of this film, Du Lala was not happy that she is at the very high end of the socio-economic ladder of the company DB. She only smiles when she sees Wang Wei again in the crowd in Thailand. Similarly, the film ended with Du Lala falls back in love with Wang Wei. These chick flicks often encourage the women to have a career of their own, but also discourage the women to value their work over their family and marriage.

### **The Anxiety of the "Unloved"**

Pursuing romantic relationship is the most major topic in Chinese chick flicks. Because of the fact that the production of Chinese chick flick is a direct response to the "left over girl" phenomenon in China. The anxiety of becoming unloved or unwanted as the women grow older is quite seriously emphasised in these films.

*Sophie's Revenge* (Jin, 2009) is about Sofie, a comic artist who cannot get over her ex-boyfriend Jeff. She tries many tactics to get him back in her life but fails. In one of the fashion events that Jeff and his new girlfriend participate, Sofie runs into photographer Chang Rui. After plotting her revenge against Jeff's new girlfriend with Chang Rui, she discovers that she has fallen in love with Chang Rui. However, Chang Rui has left the city because Sofie is too blind by her revenge to see his love. Sofie draws her story with Jeff and Chang Rui as a comic book, which becomes very successful. The film ends in a scene where Jeff knows from his sister that Sofie is in love with him, and flies back to the city to surprise her.

In this film, the older generation plays a big part in contributing to the anxiety of being unwanted after 30 years old. Sofie's mother told her that: "Men will be damned to choose a wrong career as women a husband. Therefore, men are women's career for her entire life." Her mother believes that if she cannot get married after 30 years old, she would be a loser in life. These message is portrayed as a kind of traditional value because it's been emphasised through the dialogues of the parents. Unmarried is often linked with not paying enough respect to your parents for raising you good in these

scenarios. The protagonist usually would feel guilty and ashamed because they are single and would not be able to fulfil their parents' will of having a completed family before 30 years old. The patriarchal ethic of "Xiao Dao", which means be a good daughter and obeying to the wishes of your parents, is very strongly emphasised in these films.

## **Motherhood**

Motherhood is not a very popular topic among these chick flicks in China, probably because most of the protagonists are young and unmarried. However, one of the top 20 box-office chick flicks were about motherhood.

*Finding Mr Right 1* (Xue, 2012) is told from the perspective of Wen Jiajia, who used to be a writer for a food magazine. She is impregnated with a child of a married rich man. She decided to give birth to the child in America in order to give her child US citizenship. Frank as the driver for Jiajia's accommodation services picks her up at the airport. Along the pregnancy, she become affectionate towards Frank, who helps her a lot in all aspect of her life in America. The film ended the scene, where after several years apart, she meets Frank and his daughter again on the top of the Empire State Building in New York and falls back in love again.

It is interesting to see that in 2012, there are four different kinds of mother represented in *Finding Mr Right 1* (Xue, 2012). The first kind is the protagonist Jiajia, who is a mistress. She does not shy away from her identity as a mistress. In terms of personality, she seemed to be straightforward and mean. She becomes a single mother as the plot develops because her lover was convicted into jail for fraud. The second kind is Zhou Yi, who is a lesbian. She and her partner decide to have a child medically with sperm donor. The third kind is Mai Hongmei, a woman from a middle-class family who wants to have a second baby, which is prohibited by the regulation of the One Child Policy. The fourth kind is the ex-wife of Frank. She is a very successful and career-driven women, who earns a lot more money than her ex-husband, therefore has no time to take care of her family. She only visits her daughter during family holidays, and her daughter dislike to spend time with her. This wide range of social class and personality displayed in the representation of mother is challenging to the socio-cultural hegemony of the traditional family value in China. The release of this film hinted the relaxation in the gendered moral criteria of being a loving mother in China. The non-clownish representation of lesbian motherhood is especially appreciated by many scholars and critics. (Lu, 2013) Despite that the mother characters represented in this film is very inclusive and diverse, this film has been emphasising the importance of motherhood to a women. All of the characters has expressed in one way or another that being a mother is the best thing that could happen to them. The glorification of motherhood to prepare young women to aspire to motherhood is the key value of this film. The fact that all of these women take the risk to go abroad and give birth alone, emphasised the point that Hongmei made in the film in a dialogue: " the most important task of a women is to reproduce new lives for the family."

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the chick flicks were promoting specific gender roles which values family at the top of the priority in women's lives. Women were not only see as the primary care-taker in the private sphere, but also their lives were valued based on their contribution to families sometimes. It is encouraged in the films that women should be financially independent and have a career, but they should not value career over marriage. Motherhood is the most important stage of women's lives, and it is the most important contribution that women can make to their families. The importance of marriage is portrayed as an unshakable traditional value to the older generation to the point where if women were not marriage over certain age should be seen as a disrespectful, hurtful choice they made against their parents.

## **Chapter 5 Conclusion**

As a cultural phenomenon, the production of chick flicks has passed its prime point, there are much less big budget chick flicks produced in the Mainland China cinema passed 2019. As a part of the "left-over girls" discourse, it contributed as a form of mass entertainment, to reproduced the gender roles defined by the discourse and portrayed it in dynamic and entertaining ways. This thesis highlighted the stereotypical representation of women in these chick flicks by presenting the result of a content analysis based on the top 20 box-office chick flicks in the Mainland China cinema between 2009-2019. The stereotypes of the age, education, income, relationship statues, and attitude towards marriage represented in the film aligned with the stereotypes of women represented in the "left-over girls" discourse. Furthermore, the films re-enforced the gender roles in the "left-over girls" discourse, emphasising the importance of marriage, family and reproduction in a women's life.



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## Appendix 01

List of Chinese Chick Flicks 2009 - 2019

Male Director Female Director

No.	Title	Release Date	Director	Box Office (RMB)	Main Theme
<b>2019</b>					
152	爱情图鉴之暗恋 The Hidden Love	2019-11-08	Ye Wang	66,000	Coming-of-age, Romance
151	一吻定情 Fall in Love at First Kiss	2019-02-14	Yushan Chen	174,064,000	Coming-of-age, Romance
150	50米之恋 Love in 50 Meters	2019-02-12	Yili Li	1,328,700	Romance, Career
149	差等生乔曦 Inferior Student Qiao Xi	2019-01-20	Kelong Li	638,000	Coming-of-age, Romance
<b>2018</b>					
148	美丽战争 Super Model Fantasy	2018-10-19	Xunqi Chen	650,000	Career, Romance
147	冷恋时代 Ice Cream Lover	2018-09-21	Jiangnan Tong	3,327,200	Romance, Friendship
146	闺蜜的战争 Besties Battle	2018-07-20	Junxiang Wang	21,800	Romance, Friendship
145	给19岁的我自己 To My 19-Year Old	2018-05-29	Chaoliang Huang	4,315,500	Coming-of-age, Romance
144	火魔高跟鞋 The High Heels	2018-05-18	Xinlong Geng	91,300	Career, Romance
143	我是你妈 I Am Your Mother	2018-05-11	Xiao Zhang	36,417,400	Romance, Family
142	求求你爱上我 Sasha	2018-04-20	Chunze Dong	185,600	Romance
141	闺蜜2 Girls 2	2018-03-02	Zhenzhen Huang	63,655,100	Friendship, Travel
140	翻滚吧姐妹 Go Sister	2018-03-01	Zheng Wang	77,300	Friendship, Travel
139	泡芙小姐 Miss Puff	2018-02-09	Yixin Zhang	19,194,100	Romance
138	时空偷渡少女 The Girl From Future	2018-02-01	Qin Wu	2,006,400	Romance, science fiction
<b>2017</b>					
137	一路绽放 All the Way to Bloom	2017-11-23	Jin Shao	6,800,000	Romance, Career
136	因为爱情 Fight for Love	2017-10-27	Dawei Cao	2,250,000	Romance
135	镜头前的女人 Nude Love	2017-10-20	Wei Ju	10,000	Romance, Career
134	初恋日记 To Love Or Not To Love	2017-09-15	Xi Ye	2,140,000	Romance
133	蜜月计划 Honeymoon Plan	2017-09-08	Ran Hao	560,000	Friendship, Travel
132	一路向爱 Autumn Sunshine	2017-08-28	Yihua Xu	1,040,000	Romance
131	胖女不愁嫁 Fat Girl wedding	2017-08-25	Yili Yang	770,000	Romance
130	闪光少女 Our Shining Days	2017-07-20	Ran Wang	64,860,000	Coming-of-age, Romance

129	梦幻假期 Dream Holiday	2017-06-09	Kaiyang Wang & Junfu Zhang	500,000	Romance
128	美好的意外 Beautiful Accident	2017-06-02	Weiting He	17,620,000	Romance
127	吃吃爱 Didi's Dreams	2017-05-27	Kangyong Cai	27,500,000	Career, Family
126	美容针 Special Encounter	2017-05-19	Meina Huang	10,050,000	Romance
125	合约男女 Love Contractually	2017-02-14	Guonan Liu	59,520,000	Romance
<b>2016</b>					
124	人鱼校花 She's From Another Planet	2016-12-31	Ming Ye & Yunxiang Lin	190,000	Coming-of-age, Romance
123	我的女神女汉子 My Super Girl	2016-12-24	Shen lin & Xiaowen Xu	110,000	Career, Romance
122	五女闹京城 Five Besties: Divorce Busting	2016-12-16	Jianfei Chen	1,950,000	Friendship, Travel
121	28岁未成年 Suddenly Seventeen	2016-12-09	Mo Zhang	129,370,000	Romance
120	我是处女座 Perfect Imperfection	2016-11-25	Bin Chen	4,670,000	Romance
119	减法人生 The Light	2016-11-09	Yan Huang & Lin Ma	310,000	Romance
118	T台魔王 Super Model	2016-10-14	Hui Niu	80,000	Career
117	为爱放手 For Love to Let Go	2016-09-09	Min Luo	450,000	Romance, Career

116	我们的十年 Days of Our Own	2016-09-02	Weihao Ma & Hai Liu	44,080,000	Romance, Friendship
115	爱在星空下 Elanne Starlight	2016-08-26	Ziqi Wang	1,710,000	Romance
114	我最好朋友的婚礼 My Best Friend's Wedding	2016-08-05	Hongfei Chen	37,300,000	Romance
113	情况不妙 A Busy Night	2016-07-29	Li Wang	8,860,000	Romance, Family
112	泡沫之夏 Summer's Desire	2016-07-21	Junyu Lai	8,140,000	Romance
111	假装看不见之电影大师 Pretend Not To See	2016-07-15	Jie Wei	90,000	Romance
110	所以.....和黑粉结婚了 So, I Married an Anti-fan	2016-06-30	Dirong Jin	81,020,000	Romance
109	购物女王 22nd Catch	2016-05-13	Guanghui Liu	270,000	Romance
108	北京遇上西雅图之不二情书 Finding Mr. Right 2	2016-04-29	Xiaolu Xue	786,790,000	Romance
107	梦想合伙人 Miss Partners	2016-04-29	Taiwei Zhang	81,000,000	Career, Friendship
106	女神时代 Goddess Era	2016-04-22	Zihao Lin	220,000	Romance
105	女汉子真爱公式 The Rise of a Tomboy	2016-03-18	Dalei Guo	63,380,000	Romance
104	半熟少女 Girls Generation	2016-03-25	Niu A / Yu Zhao / Liqian Chen	2,320,000	Coming-of-age, Romance
<b>2015</b>					

103	最美的时候遇见你 The Spring of My Life	2015-12-11	Na Wu	1,560,000	Romance
102	擦枪走火 An Accidental Shot of Love	2015-12-11	Wei Zhou	5,520,000	Romance
101	杜拉拉追婚记 Go Lala Go	2015-12-04	Zhujian An	49,710,000	Romance
100	时尚女郎之女人江湖 A Time of Beauty	2015-11-06	Haifeng Wang	20,000	Career
99	剩者为王 The Last Woman Standing	2015-11-06	Luo Luo	61,490,000	Romance
98	幸福很囧 Happiness Is Very Embarrassing	2015-10-29	Yong Ma	230,000	Family
97	浪漫天降 Romance Out Of The Blue	2015-10-23	Yi Ning	7,850,000	Romance
96	男神时代 The Old Cinderella 2	2015-09-02	Zhengcaho Xu	8,250,000	Romance
95	情敌蜜月 The Honey Enemy	2015-09-02	Linzi Zhang	10,350,000	Romance
94	新娘大作战 Bride Wars	2015-08-20	Guohui Chen	173,360,000	Friendship
93	滚蛋吧！肿瘤君 Go away Mr. Tumor	2015-08-13	Yan Han	511,800,000	Overcome Fatal Disease Romance
92	宅女侦探桂香 Detective Lady	2015-08-13	Shun Peng	41,360,000	Romance
91	命中注定 Only You	2015-07-24	Hao Zhang	67,930,000	Romance, Travel
90	小时代4：灵魂尽头 Tiny Time 4.0	2015-07-09	Jingming Guo	488,420,000	Romance, Friendship

89	约定倒计时 Come Back, Love	2015-06-25	Shenhao Xie	670,000	Romance, Family
88	再见我们的十年 Gone with the time	2015-06-12	Hao Sun	5,350,000	Romance, Family
87	分手，不分手 Relationship Dilemma	2015-05-08	Xiaoxin Yang	180,000	Romance
86	我是女王 The Queens	2015-04-15	Nengjing Yi	15,530,000	Romance
85	璀璨的婚礼 Bright Wedding	2015-03-24	Ye Yuan	90,000	Romance
84	我只要我们在一起 Be Together	2015-02-13	Fei Yan	3,070,000	Romance
83	有种你爱我 One Night Stud	2015-02-06	Xinman Li	68,220,000	Romance
82	找个高富帅？ Who's the One	2015-01-16	Tong Chen	910,000	Romance
81	重返20岁 20 Once Again	2015-01-08	Zhengdao Chen	366,120,000	Romance, Family, Fantasy
<b>2014</b>					
80	爱你不等来生 Cherish in Love	2014-12-24	Anqing Wang	250,000	Romance
79	我的早更女友 Meet Miss Anxiety	2014-12-12	Zairong Guo	161,800,000	Romance
78	谁动了我的梦想 Who Moved My Dream	2014-12-11	Wei Wang & Guoshu Bi	3,190,000	Romance, Career
77	坏姐姐之拆婚联盟 Bad Sister	2014-11-28	Taiyun Jin	9,930,000	Romance

76	撒娇女人最好命 Women Who Flirt	2014-11-28	Haoxiang Peng	230,480,000	Romance
75	等你追我 Wait for You To Pursue Me	2014-11-21	Genrong Gao & Lianghong Xie	100,000	Romance
74	换爱七日 Give Seven	2014-11-21	Xu Tang	180,000	Romance
73	我的青春蜜友 Young Friend Forever	2014-10-10	Yu Zhao	560,000	Friendship
72	我是你的野蛮女友 You Are My Sassy Girl	2014-09-12	Li Zhen	770,000	Romance, Career
71	美人邦 Turn Around	2014-08-28	Juncheng Zhang & Wei Wang	7,020,000	Romance
70	下一站再爱你 Next Station I Love You	2014-08-22	Dewei Li	2,540,000	Romance
69	爱情进化论 Love Evolutionism	2014-08-15	Rongyan Liu	7,620,000	Romance
68	闺蜜 Girls	2014-07-30	Zhenzhen Huang	204,940,000	Romance, Friendship
67	小时代3: 刺金时代 Tiny Time 3.0	2014-07-17	Jingming Guo	521,560,000	Romance, Friendship
66	激浪青春 Breaking The Waves	2014-06-06	Bojian Liang	4,980,000	Romance
65	求爱嫁期 To Love Somebody	2014-05-16	Haohui Song	3,820,000	Romance
64	放手爱 Let Go For Love	2014-04-30	Min Zhang	1,980,000	Romance, Friendship
63	整容日记 The Truth About Beauty	2014-04-04	Aihua Lin	84,400,000	Romance

62	脱轨时代 The Old Cinderella	2014-03-07	Bai Wu	54,730,000	Romance
61	完美超越 Perfect Beyond	2014-01-05	Bo Yi	2,320,000	Career
<b>2013</b>					
60	等风来 Up in the wind	2013-12-31	Huatao Teng	79,780,000	Romance, Travel
59	有招没招之爱情达人 The Love Experience	2013-12-27	Lei Zhi	440,000	Romance
58	我的美丽王国 My Beautiful Kingdom	2013-12-13	Yonglin Mai	570,000	Career, Friendship
57	暴躁天使 An Irascible Angel	2013-11-22	Ye Zhao	1,270,000	Romance
56	我的男男男朋友 My Boy 4 Friends	2013-11-15	Zongji Zhao	7,800,000	Romance
55	甜心巧克力 Sweetheart Chocolate	2013-11-08	Tetsuo Shinohara	4,120,000	Romance
54	意外的恋爱时光 Love Speaks	2013-11-08	Zhi Li	23,620,000	Romance
53	我为相亲狂 Dating Fever	2013-11-01	Jing Han	5,170,000	Romance
52	公主的诱惑 Princess Show	2013-10-25	Xiaoyin Huang	1,610,000	Romance
51	非常幸运 My Lucky Star	2013-09-17	Dennie Gordon	137,070,000	Romance
50	时光恋人 Timeless Love	2013-09-06	Dong Shen	4,130,000	Romance

49	逆袭 A Young Girl's Destiny	2013-09-06	Zhanjun An	190,000	Romance, Career
48	夏日示爱 Sweet Summer Love	2013-08-30	Jialin Chen	720,000	Romance
47	粉红女郎之爱人快跑 Pink Lady: Lover Run	2013-08-23	Zongde Wu	4,000,000	Romance, Friendship
46	回到爱开始的地方 A Moment of Love	2013-08-23	Xiaoxian Lin	11,080,000	Romance
45	唇唇欲动 Lips and Soul	2013-08-16	Lun Su	330,000	Romance, Friendship
44	玛德2号 Saving Mother Robot	2013-08-09	Jialin Zhu	1,170,000	Family
43	一夜惊喜 One Night Surprise	2013-08-09	Eva Jin	177,320,000	Romance
42	小时代2: 青木时代 Tiny Times 2.0	2013-08-08	Jingming Guo	296,290,000	Romance, Family
41	爱爱囡事 Love Story	2013-08-02	Er Guan	2,110,000	Romance
40	爱很美 Love Is Beautiful	2013-07-25	Yue Yin	380,000	Romance
39	早见, 晚爱 Day of Redemption	2013-07-19	Guochang Liu	2,440,000	Romance, Crime
38	初恋未满 Singing When We Are Young	2013-07-04	Juan Liu	2,250,000	Coming-of-age, Romance
37	小时代 Tiny Times 1.0	2013-06-27	Jingming Guo	484,780,000	Romance, Friendship
36	非秀不可 Time to Show	2013-06-14	Luji Qian	330,000	Romance, Career

35	分手合约 A Wedding Invitation	2013-04-12	Jihuan Wu	192,840,000	Coming-of-age, Romance
34	北京遇上西雅图 Finding Mr. Right	2013-03-21	Xiaolu Xue	520,160,000	Romance
33	暴走吧, 女人 Runaway Women	2013-03-08	Dong Dong	1,990,000	Friendship, Travel
32	大叔, 我爱你 Born to Love You	2013-01-11	Chongxi Hu	4,760,000	Romance
31	101次求婚 Say Yes	2013-02-12	Zhengdao Chen	200,000,000	Romance
<b>2012</b>					
30	小鱼吃大鱼 Kill The Boss	2012-12-07	Chuanyi Cha	1,050,000	Romance, Career
29	恋爱三万英尺 Sky Love	2012-11-23	Zi Yang	3,400,000	Romance
28	缘来是咱俩 Predefined Around Us	2012-11-08	Yifei Zhang	280,000	Romance
27	毕业那年 That Year School Ended	2012-09-21	Yu Yao	6,230,000	Coming-of-age, Romance, Friendship
26	擒爱记 Diaries of the Cheating Hearts	2012-06-21	Chengquan Han	4,170,000	Romance, Friendship
25	第一次 First Time	2012-06-08	Yan Han	35,800,000	Romance
24	初恋浅规则 Believe In Love	2012-05-11	Yibing Wang	1,630,000	Romance
23	嫁个100分男人 Marrying Mr Perfect	2012-03-16	Jing Wang	25,260,000	Romance



22	我愿意 I Do	2012-02-10	Zhou Sun	84,970,000	Romance
<b>2011</b>					
21	2012来了 Love Shock	2011-12-31	Xiao Yan	2,440,000	Romance
20	极速天使 Speed Angels	2011-12-27	Chucheng Ma	24,600,000	Romance, Career
19	追爱 Great Wall, My Love	2011-12-09	Yiming Liu	4,920,000	Romance
18	失恋33天 Love is Not Blind	2011-11-08	Huatao Teng	320,630,000	Romance
17	幸福额度 Love on Credit	2011-10-20	Chengdao Chen	29,340,000	Romance
16	恋爱恐慌症 Lovesick	2011-10-14	Yi Long	3,770,000	Romance
15	爱封了 I phone you	2011-10-13	Dan Tang	3,520,000	Romance
14	夏日乐悠悠 Love You You	2011-09-30	Chuchen Ma	4,360,000	Romance
13	全球热恋 Love In Space	2011-09-08	Guohui Chen & Yongkang Xia	58,260,000	Romance
12	今年一定要嫁出去 Have to Marry Out This Year	2011-08-19	Chuangrong Jiang	30,000	Romance
11	你是哪里人 Where Are You From	2011-05-27	Xu Jiang	640,000	Romance, Career
10	我们约会吧 Somebody to Love	2011-02-13	Nan Zhou	5,230,000	Romance
<b>2010</b>					

9	爱出色 Color Me Love	2010-11-09	Yili Chen	12,940,000	Romance
8	我的野蛮女友2 My Sassy Girl 2	2010-11-05	Weihao Ma	20,390,000	Romance
7	麻辣甜心 Sweet Heart	2010-08-27	Guojun Yin	380,000	Romance, Friendship
6	娜娜的玫瑰战争 Nana's War	2010-08-26	Xiaozhe Dai	900,000	Romance
5	摇摆de婚约 Love In Cosmo	2010-06-13	Ju Yan & Weihong Xiao	5,100,000	Romance
4	杜拉拉升职记 Go LaLa Go!	2010-04-15	Jinglei Xu	124,400,000	Romance, Career
<b>2009</b>					
3	跳出去 Jump	2009-12-03	Delun Feng	1,440,000	Career
2	完美新娘 Perfect Bride	2009-06-12	Meng	6,370,000	Romance
1	非常完美 Sophie's Revenge	2009-08-14	Eva Jin	91,980,000	Romance

## Appendix 02

### Top 20 Box-office Chinese Chick Flicks

Title	Release Date	Director	Box Office (RMB)	Main Theme
一吻定情 Fall in Love at First Kiss	2019-02-14	Yushan Chen	174,064,000	Coming-of-age, Romance
28岁未成年 Suddenly Seventeen	2016-12-09	Mo Zhang	129,370,000	Romance
北京遇上西雅图之不二情书 Finding Mr. Right 2	2016-04-29	Xiaolu Xue	786,790,000	Romance
新娘大作战 Bride Wars	2015-08-20	Guohui Chen	173,360,000	Friendship
滚蛋吧！肿瘤君 Go away Mr. Tumor	2015-08-13	Yan Han	511,800,000	Overcome Fatal Disease Romance
小时代 Tiny Times 1.2.3.4	2015-07-09	Jingming Guo	488,420,000	Romance, Friendship
重返20岁 20 Once Again	2015-01-08	Zhengdao Chen	366,120,000	Romance, Family, Fantasy
我的早更女友 Meet Miss Anxiety	2014-12-12	Zairong Guo	161,800,000	Romance
撒娇女人最好命 Women Who Flirt	2014-11-28	Haoxiang Peng	230,480,000	Romance
闺蜜 Girls	2014-07-30	Zhenzhen Huang	204,940,000	Romance, Friendship
整容日记 The Truth About Beauty	2014-04-04	Aihua Lin	84,400,000	Romance
非常幸运 My Lucky Star	2013-09-17	Dennie Gordon	137,070,000	Romance

一夜惊喜 One Night Surprise	2013-08-09	Eva Jin	177,320,000	Romance
分手合约 A Wedding Invitation	2013-04-12	Jihuan Wu	192,840,000	Coming-of-age, Romance
北京遇上西雅图 Finding Mr. Right	2013-03-21	Xiaolu Xue	520,160,000	Romance
101次求婚 Say Yes	2013-02-12	Zhengdao Chen	200,000,000	Romance
我愿意 I Do	2012-02-10	Zhou Sun	84,970,000	Romance
失恋33天 Love is Not Blind	2011-11-08	Huatao Teng	320,630,000	Romance
杜拉拉升职记 Go LaLa Go!	2010-04-15	Jinglei Xu	124,400,000	Romance, Career
非常完美 Sophie's Revenge	2009-08-14	Eva Jin	91,980,000	Romance

### Appendix 03

#### Age of Protagonist in Top 20 Box-office Chinese Chick Flicks

Title	Release Date	Main Theme	Protagonist	Age Bracket
一吻定情 Fall in Love at First Kiss	2019-02-14	Coming-of-age, Romance	Yuan Xiangqin	Under 25
28岁未成年 Suddenly Seventeen	2016-12-09	Romance	Liang Xia	28-31
北京遇上西雅图之不二情书 Finding Mr. Right 2	2016-04-29	Romance	Jiao Jiao	28-31
新娘大作战 Bride Wars	2015-08-20	Friendship / Wedding	Ma Li	25-27
			Liang Jing	25-27
滚蛋吧！肿瘤君 Go away Mr. Tumor	2015-08-13	Overcome Fatal Disease Romance	Xiong Dun	25-27
小时代 Tiny Times 1.2.3.4	2015-07-09	Romance, Friendship	Lin Xiao	25-27
			Gu Li	25-27
			Nan Xiang	25-27
			Tang Wanru	25-27
重返20岁 20 Once Again	2015-01-08	Romance, Family, Fantasy	Shen Mengjun	36 and above
我的早更女友 Meet Miss Anxiety	2014-12-12	Romance	Qi Jia	28-31
撒娇女人最好命 Women Who Flirt	2014-11-28	Romance	Zhang Hui	28-31
闺蜜 Girls	2014-07-30	Romance, Friendship	Xi Wen	28-31
			Kimmy	28-31
			Xiao Mei	25-27

整容日记 The Truth About Beauty	2014-04-04	Romance	Guo Jing	Under 25
非常幸运 My Lucky Star	2013-09-17	Romance	Sophie	28-31
一夜惊喜 One Night Surprise	2013-08-09	Romance	Mitchel	32-36
分手合约 A Wedding Invitation	2013-04-12	Coming-of-age, Romance	He Qiaoqiao	25-27
北京遇上西雅图 Finding Mr. Right	2013-03-21	Romance	Wen Jiajia	25-27
101次求婚 Say Yes	2013-02-12	Romance	Ye Xun	32-36
我愿意 I Do	2012-02-10	Romance	Tang Weiwei	28-31
失恋33天 Love is Not Blind	2011-11-08	Romance	Huang Xiaoxian	28-31
杜拉拉升职记 Go LaLa Go!	2010-04-15	Romance, Career	Du Lala	25-27
非常完美 Sophie's Revenge	2009-08-14	Romance	Sophie	28-31

## Appendix 04

### Protagonists' Romantic Relationship Status in Top 20 Box-office Chinese Chick Flicks

Title	Release Date	Main Theme	Protagonist	Relationship Status (at the start of the film)	Relationship Status (at the end of the film)
一吻定情 Fall in Love at First Kiss	2019-02-14	Coming-of-age, Romance	Yuan Xiangqin	single, have a long time crush	engaged
28岁未成年 Suddenly Seventeen	2016-12-09	Romance	Liang Xia	just break up	in a relationship
北京遇上西雅图之不二情书 Finding Mr. Right 2	2016-04-29	Romance	Jiao Jiao	single	in a relationship
新娘大作战 Bride Wars	2015-08-20	Friendship / Wedding	Ma Li	in a relationship	married
			Liang Jing	in a relationship	married
滚蛋吧！肿瘤君 Go away Mr. Tumor	2015-08-13	Overcome Fatal Disease Romance	Xiong Dun	just break up	died
小时代 Tiny Times 1.2.3.4	2015-07-09	Romance, Friendship	Lin Xiao	in a relationship	in a relationship
			Gu Li	in a relationship	in a relationship
			Nan Xiang	in a relationship	single
			Tang Wanru	single	single
重返20岁 20 Once Again	2015-01-08	Romance, Family, Fantasy	Shen Mengjun	married	married
我的早更女友 Meet Miss Anxiety	2014-12-12	Romance	Qi Jia	single	in a relationship
撒娇女人最好命 Women Who Flirt	2014-11-28	Romance	Zhang Hui	single	in a relationship
闺蜜 Girls	2014-07-30	Romance, Friendship	Xi Wen	just break up	in a relationship
			Kimmy	single	single
			Xiao Mei	single	single
整容日记 The Truth About Beauty	2014-04-04	Romance	Guo Jing	single	in a relationship
非常幸运 My Lucky Star	2013-09-17	Romance	Sophie	single, have a long time crush	in a relationship
一夜惊喜 One Night Surprise	2013-08-09	Romance	Mitchel	single	in a relationship have a child
分手合约 A Wedding Invitation	2013-04-12	Coming-of-age, Romance	He Qiaoqiao	single	engaged
北京遇上西雅图 Finding Mr. Right	2013-03-21	Romance	Wen Jiajia	single	in a relationship
101次求婚 Say Yes	2013-02-12	Romance	Ye Xun	single	in a relationship
我愿意 I Do	2012-02-10	Romance	Tang Weiwei	single	in a relationship
失恋33天 Love is Not Blind	2011-11-08	Romance	Huang Xiaoxian	just break up	in a relationship
杜拉拉升职记 Go LaLa Go!	2010-04-15	Romance, Career	Du Lala	single	in a relationship
非常完美 Sophie's Revenge	2009-08-14	Romance	Sophie	single, have a long time crush	in a relationship

## Appendix 05

### Protagonists' Education Status & Career Status in Top 20 Box-office Chinese Chick Flicks

Title	Release Date	Main Theme	Protagonist	Education	Career (at the start of the film)	Career (at the end of the film)
一吻定情 Fall in Love at First Kiss	2019-02-14	Coming-of-age, Romance	Yuan Xiangqin	Tafe equivalent	Student	Nurse
28岁未成年 Suddenly Seventeen	2016-12-09	Romance	Liang Xia	Bachelor Degree (Fine Art)	House wife	Graphic Designer
北京遇上西雅图之不二情书 Finding Mr. Right 2	2016-04-29	Romance	Jiao Jiao	High School (Not graduated)	Casino public relations	Unemployed
新娘大作战 Bride Wars	2015-08-20	Friendship / Wedding	Ma Li	Diploma (Dancing)	Small Online Shop Owner	Small Online Shop Owner
			Liang Jing		Dance Teacher	Unemployed
滚蛋吧！肿瘤君 Go away Mr. Tumor	2015-08-13	Overcome Fatal Disease Romance	Xiong Dun	Bachelor Degree (Fine Art)	Comic Artist	Died
小时代 Tiny Times 1.2.3.4	2015-07-09	Romance, Friendship	Lin Xiao	Bachelor Degree (Literature)	Intern	CEO Assistant
			Gu Li	Bachelor Degree (Business & Finance)	CEO of family company	CFO of her boyfriend's company
			Nan Xiang	Bachelor Degree (Fashion Design)	Student	Fashion Designer
			Tang Wanru	Bachelor Degree (Sport)	Student	Athletes
重返20岁 20 Once Again	2015-01-08	Romance, Family, Fantasy	Shen Mengjun	Non Specified	Retired	Retired
我的早更女友 Meet Miss Anxiety	2014-12-12	Romance	Qi Jia	Bachelor Degree (Non Specified)	Employed, unspecified	Employed, unspecified
撒娇女人最好命 Women Who Flirt	2014-11-28	Romance	Zhang Hui	Bachelor Degree (Non Specified)	Food Magazine Editor	Food Magazine Editor

闺蜜 Girls	2014-07-30	Romance, Friendship	Xi Wen	Bachelor Degree (Non Specified)	Office Clerk	Office Clerk
			Kimmy	Bachelor Degree (Media & Marketing)	Creative Director at Advertisement company	Creative Director at Advertisement company
			Xiao Mei	Bachelor Degree (Film Directing)	Filmmaker	Filmmaker
整容日记 The Truth About Beauty	2014-04-04	Romance	Guo Jing	Bachelor Degree (Non Specified)	Office Clerk	Unemployed
非常幸运 My Lucky Star	2013-09-17	Romance	Sophie	Bachelor Degree (Non-specified)	Comic Artist	Comic Artist
一夜惊喜 One Night Surprise	2013-08-09	Romance	Mitchel	Bachelor Degree (Marketing)	Marketing Director at an advertisement company	Art store owner
分手合约 A Wedding Invitation	2013-04-12	Coming-of-age, Romance	He Qiaoqiao	Bachelor Degree (Industrial Design)	Tableware Designer	Tableware Designer
北京遇上西雅图 Finding Mr. Right	2013-03-21	Romance	Wen Jiajia	Not Specified	Food Magazine Editor	Not Specified
101次求婚 Say Yes	2013-02-12	Romance	Ye Xun	Bachelor Degree (Music)	Celloest	Celloest
我愿意 I Do	2012-02-10	Romance	Tang Weiwei	Bachelor Degree (Non Specified)	Marketing Director	Marketing Director
失恋33天 Love is Not Blind	2011-11-08	Romance	Huang Xiaoxian	Bachelor Degree (Event Manager)	Wedding Planner	Wedding Planner
杜拉拉升职记 Go LaLa Go!	2010-04-15	Romance, Career	Du Lala	Bachelor Degree (HR)	Senior Secretary	Unemployed
非常完美 Sophie's Revenge	2009-08-14	Romance	Sophie	Bachelor Degree (Non-specified)	Comic Artist	Comic Artist

## Appendix 06

### Protagonists' Attitude Towards Romantic Relationships in Top 20 Box-office Chinese Chick Flicks

Title	Release Date	Main Theme	Protagonist	Attitude Towards Romantic Relationship
一吻定情 Fall in Love at First Kiss	2019-02-14	Coming-of-age, Romance	Yuan Xiangqin	Positive
28岁未成年 Suddenly Seventeen	2016-12-09	Romance	Liang Xia	Negative
北京遇上西雅图之不二情书 Finding Mr. Right 2	2016-04-29	Romance	Jiao Jiao	Negative
新娘大作战 Bride Wars	2015-08-20	Friendship / Wedding	Ma Li	Positive
			Liang Jing	Positive
滚蛋吧！肿瘤君 Go away Mr. Tumor	2015-08-13	Overcome Fatal Disease Romance	Xiong Dun	Positive
小时代 Tiny Times 1.2.3.4	2015-07-09	Romance, Friendship	Lin Xiao	Positive
			Gu Li	Negative
			Nan Xiang	Negative
			Tang Wanru	Positive
重返20岁 20 Once Again	2015-01-08	Romance, Family, Fantasy	Shen Mengjun	Negative
我的早更女友 Meet Miss Anxiety	2014-12-12	Romance	Qi Jia	Negative
撒娇女人最好命 Women Who Flirt	2014-11-28	Romance	Zhang Hui	Negative
闺蜜 Girls	2014-07-30	Romance, Friendship	Xi Wen	Positive
			Kimmy	Negative
			Xiao Mei	Positive
整容日记 The Truth About Beauty	2014-04-04	Romance	Guo Jing	Negative
非常幸运 My Lucky Star	2013-09-17	Romance	Sophie	Positive
一夜惊喜 One Night Surprise	2013-08-09	Romance	Mitchel	Negative
分手合约 A Wedding Invitation	2013-04-12	Coming-of-age, Romance	He Qiaoqiao	Negative
北京遇上西雅图 Finding Mr. Right	2013-03-21	Romance	Wen Jiajia	Negative
101次求婚 Say Yes	2013-02-12	Romance	Ye Xun	Negative
我愿意 I Do	2012-02-10	Romance	Tang Weiwei	Negative
失恋33天 Love is Not Blind	2011-11-08	Romance	Huang Xiaoxian	Negative
杜拉拉升职记 Go LaLa Go!	2010-04-15	Romance, Career	Du Lala	Positive
非常完美 Sophie's Revenge	2009-08-14	Romance	Sophie	Positive