

Analysis of Post-Feminism in Chinese Background-Based Chick Flick

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ABSTRACT

Based on the background of the 2010s' movie industry, this essay aims to analyze the Chinese Chick Flick of that time to explore the feminism part of those movies. To answer whether there is feminist thought in Chinese Chick Flick films, the writer has analyzed the details of these movies and compared them under the perspective of post-feminism. Typical cases are picked out for further exploration to find out the unique characteristics and influences of Chinese Chick Flicks. Besides, the period of selected Chinese Chick Flick films are in 2000s and 2010s. From all the analyses that are done in this essay, it is easy to conclude that the Chinese Chick Flick always contains the concept of post-feminism, which is also written as consumerist pseudo-feminism in this essay. As a continuation of the conclusion, the certain hypothesis of the purposes of these kinds of movies is listed at the end of this essay.

Keywords: *Post-feminism, Chinese Chick Flick, Feminism awareness*

1. INTRODUCTION

While feminism focuses on the issues related to reproductive rights, equal pay, the family and legal realms, and the workplace, post-feminism serves as a paradoxical "double-movement". "It is a set of ideologies, strategies, and practices that marshal liberal feminist discourses such as freedom, choice, and independence, and incorporate them into a wide array of media, merchandising, and consumer participation". As a result, "the core features of post-feminism included an emphasis on individualism, choice, and agency", which creates the difference between post-feminism and feminism. In other words, post-feminism combined with capitalism makes them be interpreted into a more commercial way of feminism, and it is to engage feminist values into popular media and consumer culture resulted in what McRobbie described as "feminism taken into account" [1].

In this paper, the main theme is the study of the existence of feminism in chick flicks, which closely relates to the study of Fan Yang. In his article '*feminism post-feminism and chick flicks in China: Subject, Discursive Origin, and Gender Norms*', he analyzed some characteristics of chick flicks in China during the 2000s and coined a new term --- consumerist pseudo-feminism for the Chinese equivalent of post-feminism.

This term refers to "subjects who are middle-class women shaped by the values and practices of consumption in the neo-liberal economy. Moreover, they are attached to ideologies of the freedom of choice, self-betterment, and girl power" [2]. This essay serves as a continuation of Fan Yang's article as the writer intended to study the Chinese chick flick during the 2010s. In this case, some concepts in the article will be cited in this essay to explore the feminism part in the Chinese Chick Flick industry. Also, there will be a comparative study between the Chick Flick example from this essay and the Chick Flick mentioned in the article by Fan Yang. As a result, some changes that happen in the Chinese Chick Flick industry can be found to better achieve the purpose of analyzing feminism. The main research question of this passage is simple --- whether there is still post-feminism (consumerist pseudo-feminism) exists in Chinese chick flick films in the 2010s. To address this question, this essay will focus on the characteristics and the developmental history of a Chinese chick flick.

The article of Fan Yang helped prove the existence of post-feminism in a new form in Chinese Chick Flicks during the 2000s, this essay's purpose is to prove consumerist pseudo-feminism still exists during the 2010s despite all the changes that happened in the Chinese chick flick industry. For the scholars of the world, the theme of analyzing post-feminism in Chinese background is rather limited, so this essay can play a role

in gaining readers more knowledge in this certain aspect and make up for the lack of academic research in this domain. By showing readers the characteristics of Chinese chick flicks, they can develop a better understanding of both post-feminism and how this feminism affects their experience of watching these kinds of movies.

2. CHINESE CHICK FLICK

This film genre is catered specifically to women's interests and is marketed towards women demographics. They generally tend to appeal more to a younger female audience and deal mainly with love and romance. This term is typically used only about films that contain personal drama and emotion or themes that are relationship-based [3]. The main object of feminist films is women, which narrates women's pursuit of life and ideal. Most of the women in the film suffer from the hardships brought by gender in the male-dominated society, are extremely disappointed in the male society, and then re-establish the social system according to their own understanding [8]. *Sophie's Revenge* (2009) is the first chick flick in the Chinese industry. It serves as a good example of moving western ideas of chick flick into Chinese industry. It imitates lots of details in Western chick flick films. What's more, this movie is deliberately portrayed as a luxury scene to attract middle-class women as they can imagine themselves living that life. In the 2000s, the audiences liked western cultural-based Chick Flick of women being in the center of the movie very much. *Sophie's Revenge* won the championship with 90 million box office at that time.

3. CASE STUDY

In this paper, five cases will be analyzed for detailed research and explored. The first one is *Love Is Not Blind* (2011), which describes a story of the female character being dumped by her boyfriend, and during this time, she finds out who cares about her. The second one is *Go Away Mr. Tumour* (2015) which describes a story of a female character who is cheated by her boyfriend and dismissed by the boss suddenly found she had cancer on her 29th birthday. The third one is *The Ex-File 3* (2016) which describes a story of two couples breaking up stories. The rest two are *How Long Will I Love You* (2018), which describes a story of two main characters who live in different periods magically meet each other and change the fate of each other; and *Oversize Love* (2020) describes a story of a fat girl successfully loses weight and enters into the entertainment industry and gets a relationship with her dream lover.

4. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHICK FLICKS IN THE CHINESE MOVIE INDUSTRY

4.1 Reversed gender role

Gender role is a social role encompassing a range of behaviors and attitudes that are generally considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for a person based on that person's sex, which is usually centered on conceptions of masculinity and femininity [5]. In these movies, female fantasy male roles often play opposite gender roles. Mainly, they began to become caregivers, which is a female role throughout history. For example, in *Ex-File 3*, two male opponents competing for the heroine's love took care of her after she was drunk. One gave her medicine and the other took her to the hospital. In *How Long I Love You*, the hero cooks for the heroine. In the movie *Love Is Not Blind*, the main male character also provides good care for the female character to help her get out of the sadness of being dumped by her ex-boyfriend. He cooked for her and even revenged on her ex-boyfriend for her. A more novel case occurs in *Oversize Love*. The hero not only provides family care but also provides professional support. When the heroine became a star in the entertainment industry, her admirers decided to be her agent. He gave up his music career, but became "the man behind her", helping her plan every aspect of her career and family life. It is similar to *Sophie's revenge* in 2009, where the male character is portrayed to be a good cook, while the female character cannot take good care of herself, which turns the conventional masculinity to incorporate thoughtfulness and family care to satisfy the women's fantasy of being taken care of by men. With these, we can no doubt see that the fixed social norms on gender roles are beginning to loosen.

Nevertheless, the meaning of this reversal is still questionable: gender roles may be reversed, but gender hierarchies will not. Men can play two gender roles at the same time and easy to get praised. However, it is difficult for women to play the gender role of men without criticism, discrimination, or internal obedience to their subjectivity from society. In addition, in movies, men usually only care about short-term goals, either pursuing relationships with women or profiting from their career success. They do not intend to undertake, nor do they undertake, this long-term responsibility for care, and women, who have been forced by society for generations, are taken for granted, let alone praised or expected by anyone.

4.2 A "Typical Patriarchal Brainwash"

The films often convey strong patriarchal messages. For example, the film *Ex-File 3* held a rating of 5.9/10, which is pretty low compared with another film. Many of

the bad reviews focused on the sexism and problematic jokes in Chinese comedy. Some of the highly cited sexist lines include "A woman only has few years for her golden age," and "There are a lot more girls that are unused, clean." "After breakups, the first thing women do is to get drunk and have a big cry, whereas the first thing men do is to liberate his lower body, picking up girls at nightclubs and karaoke." [4].

In addition to lines, the whole story can also be patriarchally discriminating. For *Oversize Love*, the dramatic conflict of the whole film is based on the shocking patriarchal value system. The main female character Lin Xiaoxi is suffering in all aspects of her life, just because she is too fat: she has no good career, no friendship, no relationship, and no ability to let her childhood crush her boyfriend. The film proves this by portraying Lin Xiaoxi as unable to control her excessive appetite, but it can hardly hide her gender-based stereotypes. In the story, Lin Xiaoxi magically becomes slim. Seeing this, she became a star almost immediately and became famous, even without any description of her professional abilities. After she became slim, she also got her lover Han Bing. In addition, as in the past, she is also actively involved in discrimination against fat girls. More ironically, Han Bing became obese at the end of the film. However, he has not experienced the discrimination and hardships experienced by women. No one is judging him; his work was not affected; he can even enjoy his relationship with the slim Lin Xiaoxi. We can see that people have different views on the body shape of men and women. This phenomenon continues even today because people are still judging women's faces and bodies while being tolerant of men in this regard.

These lines and plots from the movie are highly sexist towards the women population, which has proved that success in mainstream Western culture won't necessarily work in China, and what has become taboo in Hollywood won't be a problem for Chinese studios, either.

4.3 Comprehension

Research suggested that if the audience's value orientation cannot change from the shallow desire consumption of commercial films to the deep attention to the artistic and cultural nature of films; If the consumption behavior of films cannot change from "instinctive consumption" to "thinking consumption", a series of social crises implied in "consumption alienation" will not be effectively alleviated [7]. As a result, the films also started to diverge from their predecessors by incorporating a variety of societal issues. *How Long Will I Love U* reflects on the social stratification and capitalist influence on both genders in different eras. *Go Away Mr. Tumor*, implied by its title, discussed localized topics like hospice care for cancer patients, patient/doctor relationships, and familyhood in China. Even *Oversize Love* mentioned the problem of

getting obese, though it contributed only more stigmatizing comments on this social problem stigmatizing comments.

Chick-flick films will certainly become more comprehensive because they focus on social issues rather than fictional romantic stories, but it is also worrying because of their unequal information quality. Most discussions are only a touch-up: their purpose is not to explore the topic but to add more political correctness and moral responsibility to make it a more valuable movie. This may be partly due to the limitations of genre and partly due to the different backgrounds of directors. However, this status can be attributed to consumerism. After the rights movement of contemporary minorities, Chinese citizens also began to pay attention to these vulnerable groups through the movie to speak up for them. When these social and political trends appear on the screen, they can bring profits that cannot be ignored as they can attract audiences with the same value system, which means almost everyone because the problems that these movies mentioned are already becoming a political trend without a doubt. In addition, most participants in the market are rational: they seek to maximize benefits while minimizing costs. This in turn explains the uneven quality of cross discussion in Chick Flicks: understating these issues can bring sufficient profits while minimizing the costs.

4.4 Consumerism

Consumerism is about the consuming power of consumers in society. Only by producing and selling things and services does capitalism in its present formwork, and the more that is produced and the more that is purchased the more we have progress and prosperity [6]. It plays a big role in the Chick Flick movie industry. In *oversize love*, the main character has a strong desire for wealth and fame and she's desperate of entering the entertainment industry. In Sophie's revenge, there also exists an unjustifiable appeal to the entertainment industry as one of the characters belongs to that industry; consumerism is fully represented in these two movies. The elements of luxury are successfully shown in these two films. Moreover, the elements also appear in *Go way Mr. Tumor*. The movie contains the scene of characters shopping in the mall and having fancy dinners. All of these are supposed to help the audience to imagine the lives of upper-class women. It can be seen that the method of introducing consumerism to the movie is successful in the past time, but now, people are not really into it as the office box of *oversize love* is only 28 million, which was pretty low that time. Also, it is criticized by the audience for its detachment from reality: the lower-class women are hard to be seen in the movie to be considered as the main character.

However, things changed in the movie *How Long Will I Love U*. In this movie, Lu Ming, the main male

character is kind, and he knows how to make the female character Gu Xiaojiao happy. Interestingly, Gu Xiaojiao is the first to be portrayed as a woman who is a gold digger, looking for a man to buy her a big mansion that costs 20 million. Lu Ming is a poor man who passed through time from 1999 to 2018. Logically speaking, Gu Xiaojiao should not pay attention to Lu Ming as he is not the one that can afford a big mansion. However, it turns out that Gu Xiaojiao eventually falls in love with Lu Ming. Like other Chick Flicks, Lu Ming is also characterized as a man who can shoulder the responsibility at home. It is to say without looking at wealth, Lu Ming is a perfect guy to get married to. He reminds Gu Xiaojiao that she is not really into a rich man but a caring man. It also calls attention to the audience that awakes them subconsciously desire for the man that can take care of them and subvert the consumerist norm. In this way, the women audiences are strongly satisfied by seeing women can also be taken care of by men at home, which changed the stereotype from women being gold diggers and dependent on men to being emotionally in need of a marriage full of love and care.

4.5 Diminishing foreign urban imagination

In Yang Fan's essay, it mentioned the typical example of *Sophie's Revenge*, which bewilders the audience with its Western landscape. For instance, a taxi looks like the yellow cabs familiar from New York streets yet has the English words "China Taxi" on its body. It is bizarre to note that the director lands an American taxi on the street of a supposedly Chinese city and tries to designate it as Chinese, while no taxi in China refers to itself as China taxi [2]. The imagination for foreign elements can still be observed in *Go Away Mr. Tumor*. For instance, the characters hold a Halloween party, attend a wedding in a church, participate in a parody of *Walking Dead*, and the background music's choice of western pop songs like Avril Lavigne's *Knockin' on Heaven's Door* (2004) and *Closer* (2007) from the Scottish band Travis, but the foreign landscape can be witnessed with a decline of as this film also mix the elements of reality. The film *How Long Will I Love U* served as an outstanding representation of the decline of foreign elements. It serves as a recollection of the 1990s, so the buildings are all full of Chinese styles. In other words, People are not madly into foreign styles anymore. In fact, the movie *Oversize Love* is criticized by the audience for its detachment of scene and the over added international urban space. The possible reason behind this phenomenon is the economic boost in China. In other words, the audience does not need to imagine the lives of upper-class women as they have better lives themselves. So, the luxury lives for them might be considered boring and unappealing. Another reason can be the political trend of China as people are more and more confident in their own culture. They don't have to contain as much as a foreign culture to win a position in the movie industry.

It is more diversified in the movie industry without having to mimic other country's style.

However, the metropolis has never disappeared. It is only transferred from abroad to domestic. These roles are always educated upper-middle-class elite women living in first-tier cities. For example, in *Mr. Tumor*, Xiong Dun's hospital is quieter, more organized, and has more resources than ordinary public hospitals in China. Therefore, it can be said that some foreign elements have become globalized and integrated into the background [10].

5. THE FEMINISM AWARENESS OF IN CHINESE CHICK FLICK

5.1 Ideology of Chick Flick Films

Chick flick in China contains the concept of consumerist pseudo-feminism. It promotes the freedom of women in the area of families and workplaces instead of focusing on the political equality of women. In reality, women encounter a variety of problems about the inequality in work and family roles. However, in the movie, these problems are deliberately weakened to achieve the ideal conditions of the women population, which is to eliminate all the competitive pressure that exists in the workplace. For instance, in *Sophie's Revenge*, Sophie is a cartoonist, which is an artistic and desirable job. In real life, especially the 2000s, it seldom happens. It is difficult for women to achieve such accomplishments, yet the description of intense competition is neglected by the director. Chinese Chick Flick also eliminates the sound and the pressure from society for women. The main female characters all have a fine job, which is supposed to be judged by the society of the imbalance of family and work. However, in the movies, it doesn't happen. Instead, the female character is being taken care of by men.

Except for the above culture that the director wants to spread, the Chinese Chick flick also contains other social output. It mixes the heated social issue with the fundamental plots of Chick flick. For instance, the strike of terrible illnesses from *Go Away Mr. Tumor*, the pressure from the society of obesity from *Oversize Love*, and the Chinese elements of the 1970s from *How Long Will I Love U*. It enriches the content of Chick flick, which increases its value in a consumerist way---The audiences can absorb more knowledge to their value system and give their opinion for the social issue the movies want to explore.

5.2 Feminism awareness

These movies all serve as representations for post-feminism as they embody the freedom of choices from the female character. The well-educated main female character is all entitled to the freedom to choose her

husbands among at least two eligible candidates. They are either rich or with good manners. In the movie *Ex-File 3*, both her admirer and her ex-boyfriend are graduates with a fine degree. Also, they are patient and careful of the female heroines. In *Oversize Love*, the male character even quits his job to be the supporter of a female heroine. It emphasizes the masculine aspect of females and their reimagined masculinity towards the male population. These points all suit the consumerist pseudo-feminism characteristics, which is a set of ideologies that emphasizes the freedom and independence of female characters.

5.3 The influence of Chick Flick Films

Chinese Chick flick generates a considerable effect on the women population. The most outstanding example should be their expectation for a more romantic relationship. In the movie, all the moving things done by male characters to female characters are intended to attract the audiences. It produces an expectation for women to seek a more romantic relationship rather than a rich husband. They learn that they can also be taken care of by males and enjoy the romantic relationship as the movies describe, which improves their requirement for eligible boyfriends [9]. Moreover, Chick flick of 2010s is also focusing on some realistic problems, which generates thoughts to the audiences on realistic social issues. The mixture of the romantic plots with this real social issue can make Chick Flick even closer to life.

It also strengthens the opinion that women can make their own free choices without listening to others and suffering from social pressure. She can decide whether she wants to go to work or she wants to stay at home. The decisions must all be based on her own will instead of what society will prefer. Through seeing these movies, the audience can be greatly affected by the consumerist pseudo-feminism, which promotes their free will to make the decisions that they enjoy and raises their awareness of being independent by shouldering what typically is considered as men's job---go out for work.

6. CONCLUSION

Post-feminism is about "a set of ideologies, strategies, and practices that marshal liberal feminist discourses such as freedom, choice, and independence, and incorporate them into a wide array of media, merchandising, and consumer participation" [1]. The movies that are mentioned in this essay, all emphasize the freedom of choices as the main female characters are making decisions between two eligible men; It also emphasizes women's independence as they are all put in a metropolis background to work. In the 2010s, Chick-flick TV dramas are gaining popularity. As a result, it eventually realized broadcasting Chick Flick in a variety of media. In another word, it is to say that the Chinese Chick Flick in the 2010s fully represents post-feminism (consumerist pseudo-feminism).

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