

How Hollywood Influenced Post-Feminism in China

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the interplay of Chinese cinema and Hollywood over the post-feminist discourse: entering the 21st century, the representation of post-feminism has received gradual development in Chinese media, including films. At the same time, Hollywood films, which have been stably imported for almost a century in China, also have been shaping the Chinese film market with its western messages and patterns. As a growing media of western influence, Hollywood import might have affected the development of post-feminism in China. However, most works have not yet delineated this possible correlation. This paper manages to do so by studying film history and feminism movements in a localized context and interdisciplinary approach. By reviewing 20 major works in the academic literature, this paper argues that Hollywood import, as a major form of media representation of western feminism, might have contributed to the growth of post-feminism in China. Specifically, this paper finds three associations that Hollywood import has over the growth of Chinese post-feminism: content and expression, industrial mode, and power relationship behind consumption.

Keywords: China, post-feminism, film industry, global Hollywood

1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism has gained increased focus in China. Especially entering the 21st century, with the invention of the internet and the introduction of western thoughts, Chinese feminism has adopted new characteristics from western post-feminism while blending local discourses. One of the major developments of feminism in China would be the emergence of post-feminism, which finds its presence majorly in different types of media. As one of a forceful media realm, the film market, which, in parallel, also has received influence significantly from Hollywood, the western predecessor. This paper, recognizing the possible linkage here, attempts to conclude the association between Hollywood and post-feminism development. By conducting an interdisciplinary literature review on the two topics, it contributes to the small and separated volume of academic literature on these two issues.

1.1. Background

1.1.1. Hollywood in China

Films and cinema were introduced by westerners under the influence of the first Sino-Japanese war at the start of the 20th century. As Hollywood has grown

popular across the world, its power in China consequently rose quickly after the 1920s but dissipated after CCP controlled the film industry as state-owned and further banned all Hollywood films in the later Cultural Revolution [2]. Hollywood movies only re-entered in Deng Xiaoping's marketization reform. Ever since then, the Chinese film industry has also been operating under the market economy logic with domestic and Hollywood films [3].

1.1.2. Chinese Feminism

Before the 21st century, the major branch of Chinese feminism is socialist feminism, which has largely been recognized and critically evaluated by academia. Then, post-feminism started to develop in China. It represents a middle ground where people are often radical but, believing that most fundamental gender issues have already been solved, give concession to traditional gender values especially with the presence in media. This hesitant stage quickly got criticized in western academia; however, given the political and social atmosphere in China, post-feminism remained a major force in the current century.

1.2. Contribution

On the one hand, the development of socialist feminism in China has been largely recognized, while that of post-feminism, as the ideology itself, still remains in the middle ground. However, not many scholars currently have analyzed post-feminism based on social development in China. This article will contribute from this perspective and add to the small volume of academic literature on localized examination of post-feminism in China.

On the other hand, Hollywood, as one of the western cultural products, should be involved in the development of western feminism. But current academic literature has yet linked the two realms explicitly in the works. Thus, this paper attempts to do so by conducting a literature review on the two topics and drawing the associations. It will examine the parallel and dependent relationship Chinese post-feminism has on its western predecessor. Moreover, it's one of the first to pinpoint the influence of the entertainment industry, not to mention specifically of the global film industry, on feminism development.

From the methodological perspective, this interdisciplinary work can expand the analysis from both areas to better understand the connection behind societal events. The research approach also contributes to one of the means to analyze the creative industry qualitatively and examine how it can influence social development.

This paper has conducted a search of academic articles on GS and CNKI, two of the most notable platforms in the US and China respectively with keywords of "feminism China", "post-feminism China," "Hollywood China," "film industry China" "female film China". 20 articles that are most related to the topics have been selected. After gathering the key findings of the reviewed articles, this paper has categorized the major works based on their relationships with the topics. Finally, this paper will discuss the findings, describe the potential association between Hollywood and Chinese post-feminism, and refer to future research direction.

2. HOLLYWOOD INFLUENCE ON CHINESE POST-FEMINISM

Currently, few academic works have straightforwardly targeted the possible association between Hollywood import and Chinese post-feminism but discussed them separately in their own disciplines. For example, work discussing the history Chinese movie industry often has identified the considerable influence from Hollywood, but not examined feminine films one of the growingly diversified genres of contemporary films, under this trend. Similarly, works from women studies have discussed Chinese post-feminism's influence from its western predecessor, but rarely discussed its expression in visual arts. Thus, this paper has filed the

articles, based on their relations with the two variables respectively, into 3 categories: the expansion of the Chinese film industry under Hollywood influence; post-feminism in China and its socio-political implication; feminine discourse in Chinese media. The results are shown in Table 1.

2.1. Content and Expression

The first aspect of Hollywood import that might have contributed as a medium in influencing the Chinese post-feminism is content and expression. Hollywood films introduced to content and expressions that embody sexism natural in western countries, but uncommon and much stronger in China. In Hollywood films, modern women are able to choose their own career plans, sexuality, and marital status, which are not in the mainstream of Chinese society. These thus have inspired Chinese women in expanding their definition of femininity and encouraged diversity in film expressions.

The main representation of this is chick-flick films. From first being introduced to China by Tiffany's breakfast and made locally through Sophie's revenge, the genre influenced the feminine discourse of Chinese films with, starting from simple, its definition. Chick-flick films are designed to appeal to female desires, which has been rare in the history of Chinese cinema. Before the introduction of chick-flick films, the desire of Chinese women was seldomly expressed in films made by Chinese and suited for Chinese audiences. Most of the expressions can only be found in small-budget literary works of Hong Kong or Taiwan directors in pursue of winning honors in international film festivals. Even if works in mainland China did so, they were under the political purpose for the party in socialist China. Representing the possibility of gender equality for women in work and family lives is meant to encourage women to enter the workforce and contribute to increasing the nation's economy. Thus, even though women's desire for greater freedom might be presented, it was never originated from women's perspective and meant for them, not to mention they objectify women as the tool for nation-building and might convey false ideas of gender equality.

However, chick-flick films reversed this underrepresentation. It centers on women's desires and presents visual aesthetics to satisfy women's fantasies. Even though it was moderated compared to that of the western counterpart, in the age of development from globalization for China, it still represents women's ideal for economic independence, reversed gender norms- especially ideal male types- and decent class positions. Moreover, after moderated to suit the Chinese market, it largely depoliticizes feminism, attracting more women to pay attention to feminist concerns. Irrelevant to the party's socialist messages, these female desires, whether materialistic or freeing, nevertheless have increased the

diversity of content in the regulated market and suggested one of the important directions of commercialization.

2.2. Industrial mode

The second aspect is the industrial mode. The Hollywood producing companies, already powerful across the global market, have developed mature business modes. In such patterns, after identifying popular types of film and investing enough capital, producers and artists can easily recreate similar films in a streamlined mode of production. Though the Chinese film market has not fully embraced such a business mode, it nevertheless adopted several characteristics of the streamlined industrial pattern. Majorly, released by the marketization reform, the Chinese film market has been enabled to follow the profit-driven logic with less state control and developed a set of industrial aesthetics, which requires films that hold producing and business goals as the center and prefers stories that can attract a public, average set of audiences.

Such a Hollywood-influenced aesthetic is acute in identifying female desires in the market. Female audiences, which obviously consists half of the market, have been growing not only in numbers but also, more importantly, the ability to consume. As the her-economy has been burgeoning in multiple areas in Chinese business, the film market has also unavoidably fallen under the trend. Putting female desires on screen becomes more profitable. Delineating fantasies about wealth for women and sexualizing male ideals consequently becomes the new considerable product in the her-profit-driven film market.

Moreover, it contributes to representing localized post-feminism rather than western feminism on screen. On the one hand, the film practitioners, hoping to avoid the most risk, whether economic, social, or political, would shirk from investing too much in representing

western feminist ideologies that have been truly influential in subverting the patriarchal discourse. This is because, for one, the cost of research would be considerable but not demanded; for two, western feminism still carries certain negative political associations in the fight over ideologies in China. On the other hand, the discussions that these films have are still restrained under the consumerist culture. They celebrate consumption rather than the progress of feminism. Thus, post-feminism becomes the most voice message in the Hollywood-influenced film market: the films that express female desire in its easy, materialistic, and consumerist manner become the most profitable and got reproduced the most.

2.3. Power relationship behind consumption

The third is the power relationship behind consumption. Hollywood films often represent middle-class values, including but are not limited to fantasies of stable and wealthy life, happy endings, and lack of reform. As the Chinese film market also has become profit-driven, the representativeness of the middle-class has also become prominent, for the number and consumption power of this class has been growing and stays active. In the case of feminine desires, middle-class women become the central force in inspiring the representation of post-feminism in the film market. As middle-class women in China accumulated more consumption power, their taste, or to be specific, their post-feminist desire become increasingly profitable in the entertainment business. Thus, film artists and producers are prompted to appeal to their consumerist interests, like economic independence, desiring to be in the upper-class, finding the ideal male that's both caring and economically powerful, rather than, for example, reflecting lower-class women on screen. Thus, this in turn encouraged the post-feminism expressions in the Chinese film market.

Table 1 Analysis of 20 papers containing keywords of “feminism China”, “post-feminism China,” “Hollywood China,” “film industry China” “female film China”

References	Category	Findings
Zhu 2015 [1]	The expansion of the Chinese film industry under Hollywood influence	Hollywood films have long been a major attraction for Chinese audiences. For Hollywood practitioners, after grappling with Chinese protectionist approaches and political censorship for centuries, they have adapted to the Chinese market by modifying expectations and content for the Chinese market. For the Chinese practitioners, they have adopted various aspects from Hollywood, from content to production, to receive more profit.
Aranburu 2017 [2]	The expansion of the Chinese film industry under Hollywood influence	Chinese film artists, seeking to be competitive as the Hollywood blockbusters, started from replicating the stories and designs of popular Hollywood films at that time.

Davis 2010 [3]	The expansion of the Chinese film industry under Hollywood influence	Marketization reform, rather than promoting full commercialization and privatization, is a socialist approach to increase the profit for the nation. It entertains the Chinese audience while stably upholding the Party values.
Davis 2014 [4]	The expansion of the Chinese film industry under Hollywood influence	Because of the limitation of the domestic market, the success of such replications of creative content has been unstable. Recognizing this instability, Chinese producers and distributors started to adopt the profit-driven logic that has been long existing in the western film market.
Fan 2019 [5]	The expansion of the Chinese film industry under Hollywood influence	The development of the Chinese film industry has been influenced back and forth constantly under the party's post-socialist condition. On the one hand, influenced by Hollywood, the market is an open space where various profit holders can exert their influence. On the other hand, the party can consistently project its political message at ease in the market zone.
Berry 2013 [6]	The expansion of the Chinese film industry under Hollywood influence	The Chinese film industry has gradually adopted various Hollywood characteristics. Because of ways include but are not limited to Chinese-Hollywood co-productions, Chinese remakes of Hollywood films, or international practitioners in the industry, the Chinese film market changed from a closed national cinema to a global system with multiple Hollywood aesthetics and qualities.
Su 2011 [7]	The expansion of the Chinese film industry under Hollywood influence	The import of Hollywood films has prompted dividing debates over China's proper position in the growing globalization. These debates, regardless of their attitudes, reflect China's quest for a new global identity. Whether there exists alternative modernity as the counterpart of western alternative modernity remains in question.
Su 2021 [8]	The expansion of the Chinese film industry under Hollywood influence	After the Trump administration and the COVID pandemic hit the international community, the honeymoon period between Hollywood and the Chinese film market, when the number of Chinese-Hollywood coproduction and share of Chinese capital in Hollywood studios reached the climax, has declined. However, some characteristics of the Chinese market have been fundamentally changed by Hollywood, including but are not limited to the profit-driven logic and dependent partnership.
Su 2016 [9]	The expansion of the Chinese film industry under Hollywood influence	The Chinese film industry has gradually absorbed Hollywood organically. With the state playing the central role, the market reverses the original capitalistic power relationship in the Hollywood market and utilized the industrial mode to promote the soft power of the country and the party.
Spakowski 2018 [10]	post-feminism in China and its socio-political implication	Socialist feminism has been rejected by the Chinese public gradually entering the 21st century because it is often associated with the political authoritativeness of the party.

Wu & Dong 2019 [11]	post-feminism in China and its socio-political implication	1. One of the prevailing feminine ideologies in post-socialist China can be coined as critical socialist feminism. Feminists in such a genre recognize the relationship between gender and capitalism and delineate a socialist approach as the solution. 2. Finding presence in a her-economy acutely captured by merchants, the female image receives not coherent femininity but contradictions and objectivity.
Peng 2019 [12]	post-feminism in China and its socio-political implication	Chinese women started to value qualities that avowed female subjectivity-economic independence, reversed gender roles, and freedom of choice, etc. Radical discussions and even online supports also emerged especially after the 2010s.
Thronham & Peng 2012 [14]	post-feminism in China and its socio-political implication	Liberal participators in promoting Chinese feminism failed in seizing the opportunity fully by failing to analyze from a local perspective.
Liang 2020 [15]	post-feminism in China and its socio-political implication	By examining the process of subtitling western chick-flick films and the reaction from the Chinese audience over the result, the paper finds that even though the western films addressing post-feminist autonomy receive a potentially large audience in China, its sexuality is often moderated when presented in Chinese cinema.
Jankowiak & Hattman, 2008 [16]	post-feminism in China and its socio-political implication	The perception of physical attractiveness has been potentially influenced by globalization. Chinese women, on average, find Caucasian males and females as more attractive, according to the experiment the authors conducted.
Li 2020 [20]	post-feminism in China and its socio-political implication	"Nan Se Consumption", or the consumption of sexualized men, has emerged in the her-economy of postfeminist China. It reserves some gender stereotypes by presenting the female gaze and making men the product for women. Nevertheless, its discourse is still largely limited under the patriarchal and consumerist structure.
Yang 2020 [13]	feminine discourse in Chinese media	Chinese post-feminism is distanced from either socialist feminism or the original western post-feminism. In the process of nation-building under the transnational perspective, Chinese post-feminism can be coined as "consumerist pseudo-feminism", shaped by the Chinese context of consumerism and patriarchy.
Wallis 2014 [17]	feminine discourse in Chinese media	From a non-profit perspective, feminists in 21 st century China would utilize online expression to resist the patriarchy outside the governmental system. Though they creatively used visual messages and texts from different genres, the ideas that came across still remained uncritical to the Chinese structure of gender inequality and fetishization of media.
Wang, 2018 [18]	feminine discourse in Chinese media	Feminists in post-2000 China largely employed "non-governmental organizing" for the cultural contestation of the gendered discourse. Specifically, they have utilized performance art, or street performances to promote their ideologies in the early 2010s.

Li, 2014 [19]	feminine discourse in Chinese media	Chinese cinema utilizes a visual economy for women audiences, imitated from western postfeminist works, that present the cultural discourse of post-feminism and consumerism. Particularly, the chick-flick films, which started to be adopted by Chinese film artists, legitimize partial women's autonomy under the celebration of consumerist China.
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3. CONCLUSION

By reviewing major scholarly works about the Chinese film market and post-feminism, this paper concludes that Hollywood import, as one of the western elements, has contributed to the growing presence of post-feminism on Chinese screens in three ways: content and expression, industrial mode, and power relationship behind consumption.

Nevertheless, it should be admitted that first, this literature review cannot be fully comprehensive. More academic works are still needed to be examined if a more solid correlation between Hollywood and Chinese post-feminism would like to be concluded. Moreover, future research can also move forward in this discussion. In other words, there might have been other western elements, similar to Hollywood, that influenced Chinese post-feminism, and identifying themselves should not be the ending point.

More importantly, the Chinese film market has grown to become compatible with, even outperforming the Hollywood market sometimes as the nation has been steadily developing. The expression of feminine discourse in Chinese films, comparatively, has moved out from the consumerist commercialization and started to represent deeper feminism starting from the late 2010s. It seems that the market's interest and discussion have been changed from simple replication from Hollywood and became localized in the context of a changing nation. In the future, the academic interest can focus on how Chinese post-feminism, after localization, developed on itself, and even what stage is Chinese feminism currently in or heading to. These, if possible, can boost the development of feminism in the long term.

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