



Affective Repair and Crisis Response in Mother-Daughter Relationships

--Take Lina Yang's "Song of Spring" as a Case Study

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Abstract. Mother-daughter relationships is intricately linked to the physical and mental well-being of female. The conflicts in mother-daughter relationships are influenced by cultural norms and social systems in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, the process of aging and the presence of diseases pose major hazards that should not be disregarded in mother-daughter relations. This study employs qualitative analysis to examine how affective repair and crisis response processes unfold in mother-daughter relationships among contemporary elderly sick women in China from a feminist perspective. By exploring the film *Song of Spring*, the study reveals two approaches for resolving mother-daughter relationship conflicts for elderly sick female: implementing the mutual aid and mutual dependence model can alleviate the fear of aging, while prioritizing the nursing culture based on patient personhood can decrease the stigmatization of diseases. This research aims to reinforce the mother-daughter relationships of elderly sick female and facilitate the personal growth and development of modern Chinese women.

Keywords: mother-daughter relationships; ageing; dementia; feminism; Lina Yang's "*Song of Spring*"; film study.

1 Introduction

In 2022, *Turning Red*, a 3D animated film produced by Pixar and directed by Domee Shi, garnered international acclaim and was nominated for the Best Animated Feature category at the 95th Oscar Awards. This animation centers on the mother-daughter relationships of Asian immigrant females, depicting the emotional interaction and inter-generational discord between them. [1] (Liu, 2023) This case to the substantial impact of Women's liberation movements, since the 20th century, feminists focused on the private lives and emotions of individuals that are influenced by politics, leading to an enhanced discourse on intimate relationships. Furthermore, films exploring the mother-daughter relationships serve as a significant cultural and sociological approach to comprehending the intricate and ever-changing nature of familial connections, societal norms, and the development of personal identity. Author believes that the mother-daughter relationships have an enormous effect on the development of females' self-

esteem, confidence, and sense of belonging. According to Genovese (1988), the tie between mothers and daughters is an intimate relationship in which they share a mutual understanding and agreement over the goals of love, acceptance, and approval. [2] Therefore, examining the mother-daughter relationships is advantageous for exploring the unresolved issues in feminism and offering solutions.

Existing research on mother-daughter relationships is well-established. Evans (2010) argues that the "feminization of intimacy" in urban China reflects women's conflict between independence and traditional gender norms. [3] Blieszner, Usita, and Mancini (1996) identify companionship, cohesion, and conflict as key aspects of late-life mother-daughter relationships influenced by quality. [4] Ward-Griffin, Oudshoorn, Clark, and Bol (2007) propose four forms of mother-daughter relationships in dementia care: custodial, combative, cooperative, and cohesive. [5] Liu, Wang, and Yuan (2023) identify family values, marriage problems, sexual identity, and personal autonomy as primary conflict sources in films about Chinese women abroad. [6] However, there is a scarcity of studies that incorporate the elements of feminism, aging, and dementia in modern China when examining mother-daughter relationships. In fact, feminism, gerontology, and the culture of care share a same objective: to expose the prevailing disparities in rights and personhood within society, while providing compassionate attention and pursuing viable solutions to enhance the condition of marginalized populations. Consequently, is crucial to prioritize research subjects within the overlapping area.

Given the discussed knowledge, it is evident that the current cohort of older Chinese women who are ill are encountering various challenges. Thus, conducting research on affective repair and crisis response in mother-daughter relationships is both relevant and essential. Recently, films that focus on female consciousness have gained popularity in China, indicating a growing interest in addressing the challenges and hardships faced by women in real life. Specifically, in the film *Song of Spring* in 2022, Chinese feminist director Yang Lina employed a subtle and gentle approach to illustrate the physical and psychological difficulties experienced by an old mother and daughter who rely on each other. How do affective repair and crisis response processes unfold in mother-daughter relationships among contemporary elderly sick women in China from a feminist perspective? This study aims to examine the process of transitioning from conflict to reconciliation in mother-daughter relationships among contemporary women in China, providing namely mutual assistance and dependence, and nursing culture, to address the challenges presented by age and disease, respectively. The author will dive into this topic by analyzing relevant feminist concepts and doing a case study on Lina Yang's *Song of Spring*.

2 Literature Review

In the East Asian patriarchal family, the roles of mother and daughter are in contradiction to each other. Furthermore, the conflict does not arise from the individuals, instead it comes from the burdens of social responsibility and expectation, as well as the constraints of traditional culture.

The conflicts that exist in mother-daughter relationships are widespread. From daughter's perspective, she desires both nurturing and a significant level of autonomy. Nevertheless, women living in a male-dominated culture may face the challenge of doubting their self-worth and the value of their careers. As it seems evident, there is a tough decision for girl: finding a trustworthy and nurturing person but sacrificing independence, or pursuing autonomy but becoming separated from her mother. [7] (Flax, 1978) From mother standpoint, in a highly under the high pressure of Confucian traditional culture, women tend to have a greater inclination towards giving birth to a son.[8] (Chang,2020) However, within the same gender category, a daughter is more likely to empathize with her mother and contribute to the reinforcement of her sense of self-identity. [9] (Matsila,2020) Due to the abnormal relations between mothers and daughters, women find themselves in a distressing situation where they lack the necessary emotional support.

As individuals reach advanced age and experience health issues, the disagreements between a mother and daughter tend to escalate. Entering late life, women face numerous challenges: experiencing depression related to the impermanence, futility, and emptiness of life; and developing a sense of gender dysphoria concerning their appearance, sexuality, and identity as females. [10] (Pickard,2023) Consequently, in this negative life stage, the contradictions in late life mother and daughter primarily revolve around intergenerational disputes, anxiety about getting older and dying, challenges in forming one's identity, and concerns about a decline in femininity. [11] (Gilleard,2010) In addition to the process of becoming older, the threat of parental illness is the primary concern for adult offspring. Given the vulnerability of elderly individuals to diseases, it is expected that emotional disorders would become more prevalent among both the elderly and their families. More particularly, the daughter experiences distress as a result of her mother's health anxiety, which might potentially lead to the development of a chronic illness. [12] (Segel-Karpas and Ayalon,2022) When dealing with Alzheimer's Disease, the daughter is forced to take on the dual role of being both a child and a caregiver to her ailing mother, creating a conflict between her desire for freedom and her obligation to provide constant care. [13] (Menon,2023). In apart from this, the conflict arising from the caregiver's actual responsibilities and the recipient's cognitive disorientation impedes communication between the mother and daughter. [14] (Sandberg Hensch,2023).

To manage the anguish and avoid conflict, some women adopt the method of staying silent. This is a powerless reaction to feelings of bitterness and shame, which can result in bewilderment, isolation, despair, and potentially even mortality.[15] (Ewaidat,2021) Besides, silence in mother-daughter relationships is harmful to both parties involved. [16] (Aldeeb,2022) The absence of interpersonal interaction and connection hinders their ability to express feelings, resulting in a sense of alienation and estrangement within their familial affection. This indicates the existence of an internalized approach of oppression among women: they are victims of patriarchy, but they also contribute to self-oppression and oppression of other women. In this case, true liberation cannot be achieved without breaking the silence.

3 Two Approaches for Resolving Mother-Daughter Relationship Conflicts

Regarding the increasing number of conflicts in mother-daughter relationships, particularly among elderly women who are sick, it becomes essential to develop and implement effective resolving approaches within female groups. The author observes that the film *Song of Spring* portrays the interaction between the mother and daughter, Jiang and Feng, as an exemplary model. In this study, the author will utilize the text *Song of Spring* to examine the effectiveness of the mutual aid and mutual dependence model in addressing the fear of ageing. Additionally, for the second approach, the author will explore how the nursing culture based on patient personhood reduce stigmatization of diseases can help minimize the stigmatization of diseases.

3.1 Fear of Aging: The Mutual Aid and Mutual Dependence Model

Aging often subjects both men and women to stereotypes of weakness, dependency, and passivity, traits traditionally linked to femininity [17] (Wehrle, 2020). Thus, aging is closely tied to gender issues. Due to women's longer lifespans and matriarchal societal patterns, mother-daughter relationships are vital in later life.

Fear of aging and death becomes more pronounced in old age. The decline in a mother's abilities, mobility, and independence mirrors the progression towards a woman's death. This resulted in a reversal of traditional mother-daughter roles, with moms now receiving care and daughters taking on the responsibility of providing care.[18] (Bromberg,1983) In *Song of Spring*, before the daughter Feng's dementia diagnosis, she managed the mother Jiang's daily life, including preventing her from standing on a chair to reach a book to avoid falls. Dealing with the immutable laws of nature, older women consistently experience a sense of helplessness and frustration about aging. In film, Jiang's pretend fainting in the living room symbolizes a "death maneuver," aiming to ease her daughter's pain of parting with their mother in a gentle manner. However, aging is an inevitable process of live. Three years after Feng got Alzheimer's, Jiang, who is nearing the age of ninety, also developed symptoms of Parkinson's disease. Ultimately, nursing home become their helpless choice. It is imperative to investigate a method to alleviate the fear associated with ageing in both the elderly mother and daughter in this particular situation.

The models of mutual aid and mutual dependence in mother-daughter relationships contribute to alleviate the anxiety associated with aging. Likewise, assistance behaviours happen more frequently among women organizations and female lineage. More precisely, mutual aid encompasses a range of activities such as shopping, cleaning, cooking, repairing, entertainment and caregiving. [18] (Bromberg,1983) As an instance, for Feng and Jiang, reading together, cleaning the yard, eating and walking have become part of their daily interactions. In one specific scene, prior to going to sleep, Feng read Petöfi's poetry to her mother. " You like spring. And I like the fall. I'm the fall. And you are the spring" A linguistic metaphor occurs when the process of this daily bedtime ritual, Feng reversing "you" and "I" to signify a strong mother-daughter

symbiotic link. This kind of ingenious daily interaction not only demonstrates their strong connection, but also amplifies each other's emotions and provides them with the impetus to live with optimism. The instance above serves as an illustration of an overall pattern noticed in later life: mother-daughter interactions are characterized by interdependence and positive connections. To some extent, interdependence is not only a fundamental aspect of human relationships, but also a natural role in individuals' lives. Considering that individuals rely on one another for survival, reciprocal interdependence is an essential means of sustaining life rather than a pathological pattern. In this regard, Feng and Jiang depend on one another for assistance and recuperation. The doctor diagnoses Jiang with geriatric hypochondriasis and recommends that she requires familial solace and companionship, so the daughter immediately accompanies her mother back to their previous residence for spiritual comfort, demonstrating the daughter take highly serious to the relationship with her mother.

3.2 Stigmatization of Diseases: The Nursing Culture Based on Patient Personhood

Alzheimer's disease, a distinct neurological disorder, is the primary cause of dementia. Recognizing that almost two-thirds of individuals affected by late-onset Alzheimer's Disease are women, gender plays an invaluable part in the development of this condition.[19] (Subramaniapillai, et al., 2021) Along with that, the identification of dementia has not only shifted from being attributed to normal aging to being considered a disease, but it has also moved from the realm of medicine to the area of psychosocial factors. This means it is paramount to prioritize the psychological and emotional requirements of female dementia patients. In light of this, the nursing culture based on patient personhood serves as an effective means to eliminate the stigmatization associated with diseases.

Just as the doctor in film tells to Feng, "The disease's onset is slow and gets progressively worse. You'll hear voices out of thin air and see hallucinations. You'll suffer a decline of cognitive abilities like memory and orientation. Finally, it'll affect performance of daily activities and social function", Alzheimer's disease will deprive individuals of their personhood, a quality that is vital for valuing and protecting people, as well as treating them with respect and compassion. An instance in cinema arises when urinary incontinence causes intolerable disgrace and agony for Feng, particularly considering her previous occupation as a respectable university professor prior to experiencing dementia. The scene where Feng embraces her mother and sheds tears efficiently shows that individuals with dementia can experience feelings of shame and embarrassment, pointing out their constant desire for compassion and respect from others. In mother-daughter relationships, ensuring the affirmation of the patient's personality, honoring her unique characteristics and values, providing essential assistance, and understanding her needs and emotions are crucial factors for maintaining a relationship. For example, recognizing her daughter's irreversible health condition, Jiang, aged eighty-five, resumes her caregiving role. She conveys to Feng, "I made a decision: I want to set a good example for you and live positively." Her reassurance significantly

alleviates Feng's anxiety, helping her to courageously prepare for the arrival of dementia.

As well, patients' loss of self and social isolation are caused by the outdated care practices rather than dementia itself. This dysfunctional culture not only fails to provide adequate care and support, but also exhibits a dehumanizing trend that violates patients' rights. In *Song of Spring*, Jiang becomes highly agitated when her daughter is accused of theft, to the point where she physically attacks the skeptic in response. This case exemplifies the serious prejudice against patient groups and the challenges that patients and their families encounter when confronted with the stigmatization of diseases. *Song of Spring* seeks to eradicate prejudice toward older women who are ill. The film grants the mother and daughter a sufficient level of autonomy and subjectivity. In one scene, Feng generously assists a girl who had unjustly accused her and stolen her money, while being at a low time in her own life. Also, Jiang consistently demonstrates an optimistic attitude in caring for her daughter. She reassures Feng by saying, "I've rested for 20 years on retirement, I thought I'd lived long enough, but you've saved me by accident" to conform Feng. From a humanistic standpoint, *Song of Spring* portrays the obstacles encountered by this particular group as well as their benevolence.

4 Conclusion

In summary, conflicts in mother-daughter relationships are unavoidable due to the manifestation of cultural values and social structures. However, silence, despite being the most frequently employed countermeasure, is ineffective in reconciling tense relationships. Conversely, the narrative of female growth necessitates the collaborative contributions of both the mother and daughter in order to be documented. Through investigating the dynamics between the mother and daughter in *Song of Spring*, the author discovers that the mutual aid and mutual dependence model is advantageous in alleviating fear of aging, as well as the nursing culture based on patient personhood proves effective in reducing stigmatization of diseases. When confronted with the process of aging the human life becomes negligible. However, the bond between mothers and daughters can transform these final moments into something valuable and significant. In relationships with mutual aid and interdependence, the feeling of intimacy and unity fosters female self-assurance in overcoming challenges. When studying dementia, it is critical to not only concentrate on the medical element but also take into account the psychological and social factors. The stigmatization of diseases generates social exclusion and discrimination against elderly sick women, which has a detrimental impact on their relationships with their families. To effectively improve the quality of life for individuals with Alzheimer's and their families, it is imperative to abandon the outdated approach to caregiving and prioritize the needs of the senior patient population.

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