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COURTSHIP, RELATIONSHIP, MARRIAGE AND THE STATE:
REGULATION OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE POPULAR MEDIA

BY
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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communications
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2014

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the regulation of sex-related popular media text in contemporary China, across the expected lifespan of procreative heterosexual marriage. The three case studies encompass regulation of television programming, television drama, and film. The regulative actions vary from public notices to official prohibition of the media text. Following the Foucauldian tradition of studying media regulation, and borrowing from feminist, queer and class studies, this dissertation records the contradiction-rife contemporary history of media regulation in post-socialist, neoliberal China. Under what appear to be conservative, theocratic-like regulations, I argue that nationalism, the Party's localized socialist ideology, and hetero-patriarchy are intertwined to secure a legitimized but under-supervised party-state governance. However, it is through these very prohibitions that a space for text about women's gender consciousness has opened.

Key Words: Media Regulation, Media Censorship, Discursive Regulation, Private Topics in Public, Regulation of Sexual Content, Representation of Sexuality, *If You Are the One*, *Feichengwura*, *Dwelling Narrowness*, *Woju*, *Lost in Beijing*, *Pingguo*

To My Mother and Alice Liao

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have wanted to write about the discursive regulation of Chinese women's sexuality since the day I entered the Institute of Communications Research (ICR) at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. To be admitted to ICR is the best thing that has ever happened to me so far in my life. At ICR, I acquired the theories, methods, and academic confidence to write this dissertation as it is now. I thank Prof. Clifford Christians, then director of ICR, and Prof. John Nerone, then director of Graduate Studies of ICR, for making such a meaningful and formative decision. With the formal and informal education I received here, I believe I can contribute more to my fields in the decades to come.

Words fail me in expressing my greatest appreciation to my adviser, Prof. Angharad N. Valdivia. She understands the difficulties I encounter as an international student and knows what troubles me even before I can clearly explain it. Prof. Valdivia has offered invaluable advice on career choices in the academy and shown me how to live as a confident, strong, and caring feminist media scholar. She pushed me to stick to what I want to write and supported me without reservation. The defense was made possible because Prof. Valdivia flew back from Spain during her sabbatical to host it for me.

I thank the other members of my dissertation committee, Prof. John Nerone, Prof. Cameron McCarthy, Prof. Anita Say Chan, for supporting me, directing me to the more far-reaching research questions and major, related sources, and raising intellectually challenging questions.

The courses I have taken built the theoretical and methodological foundation for my dissertation, for which I thank my doctoral committee and the professors with which I have taken great courses: Prof. Norman K. Denzin, Prof. Dan T. Schiller, Prof. Clifford Christians, Prof. C. L. Cole, Prof. Karen C. Flynn, Prof. Isabel Molina-Guzmán, Prof. Teresa Barnes, Prof. Siobhan Somerville, and Prof. Chantal Nadeau. Dr. Mariah Larsson provided much useful information to me for this dissertation and my other works, when she visited ICR. I am grateful to Prof. Deborah Davis, who explained her recent talk about Asian countries' birth rate and age, as well as directed me to important related literature. During my study in this doctoral program, my friends have been intellectually stimulating, emotionally supportive, and altruistically resourceful. Among them, I would like to specifically recognize Alice Wanru Liao (late), Amy Hasinnoff, Dong Han, Ying Zhang, Wenrui Chen, Owen Kulemekka, Wencheng Fu, Dannis Redmond, Choi Gi Bae, Ran Ju, Hong Shen, Katia Curbelo, Richard Doherty, Jungmin Kwon, Alexandra (Sasha) Mobley, Koeli Moitra Goel, Robert Mejia, Ergin Bulut, Jungmo Youn, Ian Kivelin Davis, Steven Doran and Mel Stanfill. Librarian Lisa Romero, Nick Rudd, and Erik Chapman at the Communications Library have also been very helpful to me to fully utilize the resources available in the library, and to find the most relevant literature. I received help from Elizabeth Tsukahara, from the Writer's Workshop of the university, and Jonathan Lippman in editing this dissertation. Theresa Harris helped me a great deal in going through all the procedures for dissertating, exams, defenses, and depositing. I am thankful to the stipend provided to me by the Chinese Scholarship Council (No. 2009601027), matched with the tuition waiver furnished by ICR, without which I would not have had the luxury to concentrate on my study from 2009 to 2013.

I owe deep debts the people who supported me out of love and trust, even though they may worry about the political consequences of my work. My boyfriend, Jingjing, supported me, encouraged me, and believed in me more than I did to myself. He, along with his family, fought for me so that I could pursue my academic interests. My mother, Yongping, always backs me up with all that she has. My father believed in my intellectual ability and courage to pursue only the best and most valuable. I was suffering from severe allergy of unidentified source or sources for months before my final defense. Without all the support I received, I would not have completed this dissertation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Gendered Regulation of Sexual Content in Contemporary Chinese Popular Media	1
Literature on Gender and Sexuality in China: Ruptures and Continuities from the Feudal to the Republic, Socialist, and Post-Socialist Eras	3
Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Sexuality: The Constitution of the Public by Constructing the Private	8
Previous Research on Censorship and Regulation of Sexual Content	13
Method: Reasons for Choosing These Cases and the Approach to Studying Them.....	19
Chapter Outline	26
CHAPTER TWO: SINGLE GIRLS, STOP CHECKING OUT HIS POCKET AND LOOKS: <i>IF YOU ARE THE ONE</i> MODIFIED AFTER STATE INTERVENTION	29
Chapter Abstract.....	29
The Most Popular Show(s) Got Notices from SARFT.....	29
Social Background of Leftover Women and Men: The Phantom of State Influence.....	34
Commercial Interests of <i>FCWR</i> : Not Gender Equal by Design before State Intervention.....	41
Regulators Want Television to Represent the True Reality	52
A Morally Noble and Politically Correct Dating Show	66
Conclusion	73
CHAPTER THREE: REAL ESTATE AND SEX IN THE CITY: WOMEN’S SEXUALITY AND HOUSING IN <i>DWELLING NARROWNESS</i>	75
Chapter Abstract.....	75
What Is the Sex that Should Not Be Seen?	76
It Is Not Easy to Live in Chang’An: Structural Inequality and Women’s Sex Capital as a Means of Struggle	79
The Basic Story of <i>Dwelling Narrowness</i>	83
Vulgar Content? Public Critique and Local Regulation	91
What Is Vulgar About Sex? The “Sexual” Content Edited Out from <i>Dwelling Narrowness</i>	99
State-Nationalism Smuggled into the Shorter Version under the Cover of Censoring Vulgar Content.....	123
Conclusion	126
CHAPTER FOUR: THE PROHIBITED TRANSGRESSOR: THE AWAKENED FEMALE MIGRANT WORKER IN THE “PORNOGRAPHIC” FILM <i>LOST IN BEIJING</i>	128
Chapter Abstract.....	128

The First Film Banned After Public Release in China	128
The “Impure” Female Workers Representation in the News.....	129
<i>Lost in Beijing</i> Got Lost in Inconsistent Government Reactions	131
A History of Liu Pingguo and the Awakening Women in the Film	152
Conclusion	159
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	161
What Kind of Country Is China? Internal Contradiction of Two Ideologies.....	162
What Kind of Governance Is Exerted in China Concerning Media Regulation?	164
How Are the Private Topics Allowed to Enter Public Media Discourses?	168
Is There Hope?	171
REFERENCES	175

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Gendered Regulation of Sexual Content in Contemporary Chinese Popular Media

In modern and contemporary China, whether to regulate the sexual content in the media is never a question. The problem is only how to regulate it and whose benefits and dignity to protect in this process. This dissertation explores the question of how sexuality is discursively regulated in contemporary Chinese popular media. Analyzing three cases across different media forms, including television and film, it unpacks how the regulation of sex-related content produced in the media industry balances the political requirement of the party-government in the socialist contingency and the commercial needs of the producers in the market economy. From an intersectional feminist perspective, this dissertation attempts to identify some of the main subjects behind regulatory notices and who benefits from the morality implied in these prohibitions.

Upon the founding of the People's Republic of China, women's equal status to men, along with monogamy, was confirmed constitutionally. The marital and feminist revolution was treated as an indicator of the advanced culture of the Chinese Communist Party, or CPC (Friedman, 2005). However, just as in many other socialist countries, women in China did not feel like they enjoyed equal rights. Even though the marital and feminist revolution considerably boosted women's lives, it did not address biological difference, especially women's reproductive capability, nor relationships in the private sphere, both of which were left legally untouched. Therefore, women continued to bear the burden of domestic work and reproduction, as they also served in the public workspace, alongside men. And even raising this issue of biological difference would jeopardize equal payment. In practice, "equal pay for equal work" was not

fully realized in the socialist era before women struggled to prove themselves able to “accomplish the higher paid work so that such works would not be distributed by gender” (Li & Liu, 2012). The lack of attention to gender issues in the private sphere from the constitutional level contributed to the oppression Chinese women suffered despite the overarching discourses declaring the feminist revolution to be in step with the socialist revolution.

Reproductive sexuality results in child birth. In China, state attention to people’s sexuality is often manifested in encouraging or discouraging reproduction. At the same time, there is no adequate official sex education in China (e.g., Li, Cottrell, & Ban, 2004; Watts, 2004; Fang, 2012). As scholars (e.g., Sturken & Cartwright, 2009) have argued, media discourse serves as a pedagogical tool for women and men to live their daily life. The media plays an important role in teaching audiences about how others live their lives, and how to live their own. Villagers told Yan (2013, p.13) that changes to their family ideal have been greatly affected by popular television drama and music. In China, what is allowed to be included in the popular media, however, cannot be pornographic, but is more likely to be content about courtship, relationship, and marriage. Love and marriage inevitably have to do with sex, but there is space to negotiate how explicit and in what ways sex is depicted or implied. This case study of regulation of sexuality in the media employs an approach to “unthink Eurocentrism” (Shohat & Stam, 1994) about the public and private spheres by concentrating on the contemporary Chinese context.

This project, in practice, would benefit Chinese women by analyzing whether there is a gender bias in regulation of media texts about sexuality, and if there is such unfairness, how it is manifested. Following the critical interpretive tradition, it posits that understanding the system could constitute a gaze back at the system and thereby provide scholarly foundation for possible changes.

Literature on Gender and Sexuality in China: Ruptures and Continuities from the Feudal to the Republic, Socialist, and Post-Socialist Eras

Scholarship on sexuality in ancient China can be divided into two main categories. The first includes the erotic, anecdotal stories that have been passed down, or historical records of individuals abandoned in sexual pleasure. This body of work is usually used to prove that the ancient Chinese were not asexual but rather had a variety of ways to enjoy sex. The second interprets the mainstream standards for sex in different dynasties. The result is a morally restrained mainstream Chinese society even as the two categories appear to contradict each other. However, by combining them, we can compose a picture in which the mainstream was regulated while there were secret spaces that allowed certain people to try to experience transgressive morality. This dissertation studies the spaces within and expelled from popular media text for people, especially women, to enjoy their agency within contemporary popular media culture.

One cannot investigate mainstream attitudes toward sex in Chinese history without reference to religion. During the two-thousand-year feudal period, different religions and philosophical strains, some of which might be called religious, were introduced to the people. Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and many other schools have become part of the traditional Chinese culture as a hybrid, including its conception of sexual moralities. Some of them have been more influential than others in certain historical periods, but altogether, the Chinese cultural heritage on sex has forever been in flux (Pan, 1994, 1995); common Chinese people's collective memory of China being a desexualized country is a more recent one.

During the Ming Dynasty, the dominant ideology, Confucianism, was reinterpreted by Zhu Xi¹ and Wang Yangming to emphasize the rationing and restricting of human desire. In Qing China, chastity was highly valued, and unchaste behavior would not escape punishment (Ng, 1987, p.69). Before the Republic of China (1912-1949), changing attitudes toward sexuality coalesced as a set of rules that saw reproduction as the primary goal of sex; women as men's means of achieving normal gender roles; men's sexual appetites as the standard for the quantity of sex; and sex between the elderly as inappropriate (Pan, 1994, 1995). Furthermore, changing standards allowed sexual practices but not discussion of sex, refused to accept pleasure as the standard for sex, and failed to respect romance. These rules corresponded to procreative marriage as the requirement of good sex (Rubin, 1993/2007), recognition of only men's sexuality and forcing such sexuality upon women (Rich, 1980), and deprivation of pleasure, which suppresses women's growing self-awareness (Lorde, 1985).

Developed from Chinese local culture, these rules share features with the heteronormativity of the Euro-American West, which scholars have been critiquing, while supporting polygamy in patriarchal feudal China. Although the ancient saints or philosophers are regarded as the sources for these rules, because the classical philosophies are necessarily vague to the contemporary reader², the construction and reproduction of these rules may have been influenced by contemporary norms and goals. Thus, it is necessary to analyze the contemporary economy of discourses about sexuality in relation to historical traditions.

¹ Here, Zhu is the last name and Xi is the first name. In Chinese, the given name comes after the family name. Even though this dissertation is written in English, I am following the Chinese order for all Chinese names, which means that the last names appear before the first names.

² Because recording thoughts back in the past have been very hard, their articles and sentences are too short to convey their sophisticated thoughts.

Attitudes toward sex were treated as part of “spiritual civilization” (*jingshen wenming*) during the Republic of China period, along with its struggle to achieve modernity (Pan, 1994, 1995). To prove its superiority to the past government (Friedman, 2005), socialist China established monogamy, acknowledged that women are men’s equals, and banned organized prostitution³. These actions set the Communist Party of China (CPC) not only as caring about women more than the feudal government was, but also as behaving with more integrity than the Kuomintang (KMT). These two functions take morality and economic status as interchangeable features. The CPC banned organized prostitution because those female prostitutes were oppressed women from the lower class who were either sold to prostitution or forced to take such work for their survival. In both conditions, the class standing was emphasized. Humiliation of these women turned into hatred toward the property owners of feudalism and capitalists in the Republic period. The capitalist KMT support was represented as being embodied by greed and promiscuity, as opposed to the austere CPC that puts the collective interest before that of each individual member and abstains from pleasurable sex. In sum, the political economic needs and the moral standards mutually support each other. Given that such reasoning linked sexual privilege to class advantage, it simplified the complicated relationship between class and sexuality.

Moving forward from the stereotypical binary representation of “comrades vs. enemy,” representation of sexuality in popular media has changed from annihilation in the Cultural

³The Soviet Union also banned prostitution upon its founding (Buckley, 1992, p.220).

Revolution period, to more sexual explicitness since Deng Xiaoping's Reform. In 1980's *Romance on Lushan Mountain* (*Lushan lian*), the two protagonists kissed on the big screen. Even though this was only a kiss on the cheeks⁴, this film gave rise to much awe and surprise. Along with the change of industrially produced domestic media texts, the Reform and Opening of China also invited foreign media products to flood in, some through piracy. This change in media culture accompanied Chinese society's turn from socialism to post-socialist neoliberalism; yet, the party-government, adhering to a binary of socialism versus capitalism, blamed this change on the morally corrupt capitalist culture and structure. The government regulated the bottom-up circulation of pirated videos with "harsh strikes" (*yanda*) aimed at "eliminating pornography and illegal publications" (*saohuang dafei*). Some of the porn videos were pirated from Hong Kong, the closest capitalist territory to use Chinese characters. State regulation of these media productions is part of the government's control of the bottom-up circulation of dissident information, including entertaining vulgar⁵ products like porn. Such curbing of

⁴Zhang Yu said in a television interview that she, who never had a relationship before, felt very awkward about the kissing scene and asked the director to clear the set (Pop Trends: *Romance*, 2008, December 20).

⁵In this dissertation, "vulgarity," "pornography," and "obscenity" repeatedly appear. In Chinese, "vulgarity" is *diosu*, "pornography" is *seqing*, and "obscenity" is *yinghui*. All of these terms fall into the sexual gray area that is considered indecent to mention. Legal documents raise the question of how to define these terms as well; "pornographic" and "obscene" are often used interchangeably. In order to facilitate my discussion, I offer here my operational definition of these terms. "Vulgarity" refers to media content that implies to sexuality for entertainment. It is connected to low taste, in contrast to the high taste that is detached from bodily pleasure but connected to grand undertakings and accomplishments. "Pornographic content" is usually audio-visual representation of sexuality or erotic but promiscuous sex. Such content usually allows the audiences to see or picture the actual sexual contact. "Obscenity" refers to explicit depictions of sexuality and abnormal sex that often offend the audiences. The main or even sole purpose of such content is to arouse the audience's sexual desire; while "pornographic content" is more like soft porn with less explicit representation of sexual behavior and, thus, some space left for imagination. "Vulgarity" is considered the least sexual of the three, and it is also used to incorporate all three kinds of media content.

information developed into online censorship with the advent of the Internet and the boom of online information initially not controlled by the government. On the other hand, because media institutions were once exclusively state-owned and gradually became market-oriented, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT⁶) has been struggling to harness the media not to work against the state's interests when pursuing the profit motive. With the Internet becoming more popular, the Chinese government not only enforced strict constraints on the information online, contrary to the US-led UNESCO standard of the "free flow of information," but also launched several actions to purify the media environment of vulgar content. Many news reports and scholarly works have been included in the latter policy, but such purification is treated by the public as an absurd move that further undermines the CPC's rationale for governance.

In the late Middle Ages in Europe, the onset of homophobia coincided with the rise of absolute government (Boswell, 1980, p. 38, p. 270). In the past decade in China, what does it mean for the government to impose stricter regulation on "vulgar information" in the media? Just as Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002, p. 34) asked questions about masculinity and femininity in China, we must always be ready to ask: Whose expressions of sexualities are restricted, and by whom? Whose purposes are served by this restriction? Are women and men treated the same in this process? Does class make a difference?

⁶ SARFT, short for State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, was renamed as SAPPRFT, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television, in 2013. However, its official website is still www.sarft.gov.cn. Since all three cases in this dissertation happened mainly before this change, I use SARFT to refer to this institute.

The cultural heritage of sex in China can be understood in two ways. The first is that outsiders cannot figure out what happens within the family. Like the idiom says, “Even an upright official finds it hard to settle a family quarrel” (*Qingguan nanduan jiawushi*). The family, usually the extended family (Parish, 1975), is the unit that seals and deals with its inner issues. This culture works to solve the practical problems. The second way, as Pan (1994, 1995) argues, is that China did not develop a binary system of public vs. private. The public attention to others’ sexual life was used for social control. The outrageous cases in which someone is principally wrong would enter the public discourse to warn people. For example, there were staged cases of an abandoned wife accusing her husband of leaving her behind to marry the minister’s daughter, popularly referred to as the Judge Bao and Qin Xiang-lian Case (Zhamei An). The details, circulated as gossip, served to regulate people’s everyday life, including that of powerful people. Following the socialist period’s surveillance of sexuality to enforce social order and the associated scarcity of sex-related content in the media, how does sexuality in the contemporary media serve specific needs of social control in an age of increasing awareness of individualism and the fading away of the extended-family structure?

Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Sexuality: The Constitution of the Public by Constructing the Private

Borrowing from both feminist theory and queer studies for this research is a natural call given both the living reality of Chinese women and the theoretical concerns of both feminism and queer studies. The daily realities of contemporary Chinese women are a constant illustration and validation of the concerns of feminism and queer studies, and applying these two fields in research likewise can illuminate these women’s struggles. Feminist and queer studies have much to contribute to the understanding of contemporary Chinese women’s experiences as well.

Heteropatriarchy, as Madhavi Mallapragada (2014) cites from Desai (2004), or patriarchal heteronormativity best describes the contemporary Chinese media discourse about gender and sexuality. However, we need to revisit the academic genealogy and the specific context in order to understand the mechanism of this structure in China.

Women's liberation is considered an accomplished revolution and a part of the socialist revolution (e.g. Dai, 2007, p. 4) because the feminist movement, as part of the class struggle, defined itself in the public working space and sexuality as a means to an end, namely, reproduction. When the country embraced a market economy and the neoliberal doctrine in Deng's plan, Chinese women lost a considerable portion of the equality they enjoyed in the previous socialist period. However, women's liberation is not a problem that can be solved by restoring or by clinging to an alternative socialism that refuses to look into what happens in the private space. The problem of gender in China, provoked by a neglect of the private sphere and manifested in women's double burden of operating in both the public workspace and the domestic circle, cannot be solved by avoiding the latter.

The theoretical call of feminism to take sexuality into consideration has its practical roots. Violations occurred globally and frequently in the private realms of family, reproduction, and sexuality (Correa & Petchesky, 1994), and China is no exception. In fulfillment of the credo that "the personal is political," the private realm is introduced into the public dialog, the flaws in the conceptualization of the "public vs. private" system must be taken into consideration. As Habermas (1991) admitted in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, making sure that the private stays private is a prerequisite for the success of the public sphere. Previous discussions of the public have neglected the personal factor of each individual as well. In short, the perfect public sphere would appear when people participating in the public sphere are either

homogenous enough in gender and class that these factors would not affect their discussion, or those with different gender and class attributes have been excluded from the public beforehand so that this “public” could be unvarying. To sum up, in this system, either the participants are homogenous in their views of the topic they are discussing, or the generalization of specific public spheres in history has stripped the public individuals off their private attributes and interests. In fact, Robbins (1993) pointed out that there has never been a Habermasian public sphere. Therefore, the public sphere is, at the same time, the means to an end—democracy—and an end—discussion of public affairs without regard for private matters.

We need to re-problematize the binary of the public vs. private. In other words, the public and the private mutually constitute each other. By hiding something into the private and sealing it with privacy, the public becomes the public. In such a process, there arises the privilege of defining and owning privacy (Fraser, 1997, p. 103). This privilege is not owned by homosexual people (eg. Warren, & Laslett, 1977; Warner, 1999) or women (e.g. Fraser, 1997; Bai, 2012), when they perform so-called non-good sex. Construction of this privilege, or of what should stay private, happens in regulating what should appear in the public discourse. As McLaughlin (1993) argues, the media is crucial in constructing the “public,” and such construction is relational; its inclusion could not be done without exclusion. Because we are problematizing the public vs. private dichotomy by returning to the grounded local text and context and to the pre-question of how the public is constructed, to some degree, we have circumvented the pitfall of applying a theory that has been developed in the West, but instead contribute to possible new understandings and reconstructions of the public vs. private theory. To put it in another way, the

question this dissertation asks is what is allowed to be shown in public⁷, or in popular media, about sexuality in contemporary China. Here the “public” is defined by exposure, not by common interests, or political attributes, if the political is understood in the traditional way, which is serious, macro, and not specifically gender related.

To combine queer studies with feminism enhances the theorization and lessons of the latter. Different from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) rights movement, queer studies focuses on non-conformative sexuality rather than the identity of sexual minorities. However, as Ho (2012, p. 7) points out, most of the scholars interested in queer theory focus their research on non-heterosexual people. This works against the political potential of queer theory (Cohen, 1997) to unite non-conformative groups. It also opposes the feature that distinguishes queer theory from LGBT studies: the emphasis on sexual behavior rather than sexual identities. Non-conformative sexual behavior is not exclusively performed by people demonized with identities that concern such behaviors; instead, there are a huge number of people who could not comply with the narrow range of normal sexual behavior, many of whom are the “normal ‘abnormal’ people” (Ho, P., 2012, p.7). In Rubin’s (1993/2007, p. 14) model of sex hierarchy, the normal, natural, healthy, holy sex, which is heterosexual, married, monogamous, reproductive, and domestic, is an ideal that very few could comply with. Therefore, many queer critiques could be helpful to feminist research.

Queer studies needs feminism as well. Much queer research, like many other works fighting for human rights, is based on the argument that “we/they are human too; therefore

⁷ Here the “public” is defined by exposure, not by common interests, or political attributes, if the political is understood in the traditional way, which is serious, macro, and not specifically gender related

we/they should enjoy the same rights.” However, without contextualizing the problem and analyzing the dominant ideology or discourse and its inner rationale, this research can only talk to its supporters but not convert those who are still hesitating about which side to take. Furthermore, such a strategy risks the danger of idealizing the LGBT group, and simplifying the oppressive system as an arrogant one, when in fact, the system is delicate and dynamic. The system is ready to offer another set of explanations to make up for the failing moments and cases that become the targets of dissidents. It is impossible to fight against an intersectional system with a radical theory that is not intersectional. In the Chinese context, heteronormativity, patriarchy, and class oppression are intertwined. Therefore, the analysis in this dissertation is intersectional and encompasses feminist, queer, global, and class critiques.

In the *Lushan Mountain* example, I noted that the kiss on the male protagonist’s cheek was a phenomenal breakthrough on the big screen. Since I have treated this kiss as denoting sexuality, it might have been clear to readers that in this dissertation, the definition of sexuality is broad. Discursively defined, sexuality includes not only the representation of actual sex, but of eroticism and desire as well. There are two main reasons to define sexuality in such a broad way. On the one hand, the narrow definition of sexuality as sexual intercourse is phallogentric. As Irigaray (1977) has pointed out, a “woman has sex organs just about everywhere” (p. 387). Women’s pleasure is diffuse. Therefore, for a project that aims to discover how discursive sexuality is regulated from a gendered perspective, it makes sense to define sexuality broadly to include erotic and less-hardcore representation. On the other hand, the regulation of sexual content is wielded based on the recognition that there is a continuum of how sexual the media content is. For example, kisses and sex-related puns could be categorized as sexual and therefore subject to restrictions. It is understandable to not allow porn in popular media in a country like

China that does not have a rating system. However, the goal of this dissertation is to understand why there are different levels of regulation of the less-direct sex content.

Previous Research on Censorship and Regulation of Sexual Content

As previously stated, gender equality policy in the People's Republic of China (PRC) has emphasized the public workspace, while in the private space, good conjugal sex aimed at reproduction has macro-level demographic significance. However, non-conformative sex acts are demonized, including premarital and extramarital sex, as well as homosexuality. There is also a lack of attention to pleasure and a profusion of science discourse, which emphasizes health and gender differences.

Much research addressing women's practical suffering and their relationship with the structural deficiencies refer to the law in the PRC. Ruskola (1993-1994) argues that modern Chinese legislation is no less moralistic by nature, although a Confucian morality⁸ of inequality has given way to a socialist ethic of radical equality (p. 2531). "Ironically," Ruskola observes, "it is the complete, or nearly complete, conflation of law with morality that makes law subject to abuse" (p. 2532). In actuality, law practitioners have to make compromises and analogs in order

⁸Ruskola (1993-1994) and Sigley (2006), along with Ng (1987) who studied rape cases and law in Qing China, agree that the past and/or current Chinese legal system is integrated with moral standards and that there is a historical tradition of this phenomenon. All of them have used "morality" to describe the idealized moral requirements of sexual conduct in China. This term is very close to sexual virtue. Sigley (2006) also uses "mores" when he states that, when China opened up to the West, people started to accept the more open sexual mores of the "West." In this dissertation, when indicating the sexual values cultivated customarily in real life, the term I use is "sexual mores." There are two other terms that to be explained along with "sexual morality" and "sexual mores": ethics and ethos. Ethics refers to, mostly, the way things should be done in order to respect the subjectivity of people. Sometimes, this term also implies a set of professionalized rules to achieve this goal. Ethos refers to the guiding belief of a community, nation, or society. When ethics and ethos are used after "sexual," they could refer to respecting people in their sexual conduct and what, in a society, is believed should be done regarding sex. However, because "(sexual) morality" and "sexual mores" have appeared in literatures closely related to this dissertation topic, these two terms appear much more often in the following texts.

to adjust to the reality in which many people are unable to live up to the moral ideal. The socialist ideal of the PRC is to reform criminals into moral beings, and to ensure automatic universal conformity to the law and to the morality that has become part of the law (p. 2539-2540).

From a historical perspective, Sigley (2006) explains the reasons the current Chinese government is applying laws and regulations, including “harsh strikes” (*yanda*), to regulate both people’s actual sexual behavior and the circulation of media products about sex (“the yellow industry,” or *huangse chanye*). First, during the confrontational period when the KMT and the CPC were both trying to prove their superiority to the other party, they both “stress[ed] that it was only their particular political organization that could rightly claim to occupy the moral high ground and uphold main stream morality, and, conversely, it was precisely the political opposition that was morally bankrupt and moribund” (p. 45-46). Second, the “elite culture in contemporary China remains closely tied to the transformative agenda of the Chinese ‘Enlightenment,’ such as that embodied in the 1919 May Fourth Tradition,” and the rationale in this “Enlightenment” process is that “cultural products should work towards continuously improving the moral substance of the target subject” (p. 47).

Sigley’s (2006) work bridged the morality integrated into the laws for practical acts and the use of the media for promoting a certain sexual morality. The government did this through media regulation. While not specifically addressing sexual content, Weber and Jia (2007a) offer a useful interpretation that when the Chinese media stepped into the market economy, by using “controlled commodification,” “the control modalities are subtler and subsumed under the grander and naturalized discourse of China’s ‘imagined community,’ which supports the transition to a socialist-market economy through the promise of economic benefit for China’s

citizenry” (p. 784). The CPC and the state, the nation, are interchangeable in this discourse. This is a very attractive plan. Focusing on the collective nature of controlling the media, Xie (2012) invites us to take a close look at the censorship system of the Chinese film industry, and argues that the film censors “utiliz[e] the nationalist sentiment within the Chinese public in the wake of globalization” so that “the Party [could] establish its image as the defender of national interest” (p. 142).

What is missing in these ambitious collective plans is that the individuals do not necessarily benefit from these promises. Nevertheless, different individuals are motivated to realize this plan, or used to decorate the country’s image of being modern, caring, and equal to, if not superior to, its rivals. Scholars (Wallis, 2006; Li, 2011) have demonstrated that women have been exploited for nationalist purposes. When it comes to sex-related media content, national interests again win over those of subgroups. Fu (2005) studies the portrayal, or representation, of sexual harassment, and finds that the media is still supposed to guide people’s opinions, even though it has evolved from a “propaganda machine into a state-market complex” (p. 56). Media is used to propagate civilized and progressive views on women, because women’s issues have become the focus of international attention (p. 52-53). That is why, even though migrant female workers are in greater danger of sexual harassment, the academic articles and news are all about how urban, modern women have suffered such despicable behavior learned from the “West.” In fact, sexual harassment existed before Deng’s reform, and does not happen only in cities to the “modern women.” However, these cases (Fu, 2005; Wallis, 2006; Li, H., 2011) are all about how the national image could benefit from certain media discourses or representation. Although national pride does serve to motivate domestic Chinese citizens, what is left understudied is how media regulation or censorship disciplines domestic people, and how women and gender are used

in such a process. Donald's (2010) work on Tang Wei and *Lust, Caution*, an Ang Lee film in which Tang appears explicitly nude and in sex scenes, reveals that Tang was made a "scapegoat for the disgust experienced by a masculinist political class while faced with female dissent and sexuality" (p. 46). Although this case study touches on the relationship between media regulation of sex-related content and gender issues, there is still a lack of systematic research on this topic.

Media regulation in China is a hot topic for both journalists and scholars. However, there are three limits I find in this body of literature. First, current literature on this topic is mostly about Internet censorship. Admittedly, Internet censorship evidences the CPC's effort to keep up with the development of media technology in enforcing ideological control, but historically speaking, control of the Internet has inherited a lot from the purification of the "yellow industry," because the participatory function of the Internet shares the bottom-up character of the piracy press. Also worth noticing is that the alternative information on the Internet that is censored out usually needs a little bit of effort to be accessed by audiences; therefore, in terms of its influence, the Internet has age, class, and educational limits.

Second, the primary concern of the literature about censorship is the political intentions of the CPC behind implementing such control (e.g., King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013). Compared with the overheated academic interest in the censorship of political media content and in the political-economic analysis of the structural change of media ownership in China (e.g., Zhao, & Guo, 2005), how such regulation affects women and gender morality is understudied. The political-economic focus—i.e., production and ownership—did not automatically make Chinese women's lives better, as Chinese socialist history has proven, by replacing the problem of gender with that of class. Noting the unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism (Hartmann, 1979) and the reality in China pointed out by Song Zhibiao (under the pseudonym Zhang Qiushui) that "it

has long been an open secret that the public intellectuals in mainland China is anti-authoritarianism, but not anti-patriarchy” (Jan. 2013), we observe that feminist progress cannot be treated as a mere additive to another social issue.

Last but not least, there is a tendency to study censorship institutionally, inclusively, and/or concentratively on one medium (e.g., Xie, 2012). However, such scholarly focus, again, puts women’s interests at the periphery, while focusing mainly on the political agenda. Bringing women back to the discussion of censorship is not only a problem of priority, it requires organizing by themes across different media forms (e.g., Molina-Guzmán, 2010) and a different understanding of censorship itself. As Hendershot (1998) very insightfully remarks:

Censorship is usually understood as prohibition: censorship forbids, obstructs, denies vision. It functions like a blindfold or a pair of scissors. This conception of censorship is misleading. In actuality, censorship does not just cut out images, sounds, or texts whose politics censors object to. The act of censorship is a social process through which the politics of class, race, gender, violence, and other potentially “problematic” issues are deconstructed and reconstructed, articulated and scotomized⁹. Censorship is a social process that both prohibits and produces meanings. (p.1)

Therefore, Hendershot uses “regulation” instead of “censorship” to articulate the idea that media censorship controls how things are represented and how meanings are produced. In this dissertation, I follow her understanding and use “regulation.”

⁹ Drawn from multiple online dictionaries, to “scotomize” means to form a mental blind spot about something, especially in an attempt to deny items of conflict. Here, Henderson means that censorship works to underplay certain things in the media text, in order not to incite social dissatisfaction or rioting.

Kuhn (1988) studies “censorship” of cinema in Britain from 1909 to 1925 in relation to sexuality. Theoretically Foucaultian, she argues against the “prohibition/institution” model, which understands censorship as “a practice through which certain subjects are forbidden expression in representation” (p. 2), and asserts that “censorship is something that takes place within certain organizations, especially in organizations with an explicit institutional remit to censor” (p. 3). Instead, Kuhn propose that we study both the text and the context and understand the institutional power relationally, through its practices (p. 4-8). This dissertation echoes Kuhn’s and Hendershot’s approach to censorship, in that it studies how regulation produces values and ideologies regarding gender, while it also borrows from other scholars (e.g., Sigley, 2006) to understand the rise of a regulative discourse by exploring newspaper articles.

To say that the Chinese government regulates media content with a political and ideological bias, including a possible gender bias that will be explored in this dissertation, is not to claim that China is the only country whose government does this. Britain (Kuhn, 1988), the United States (Hendershot, 1998), Hong Kong (Stockbridge, 1994; Wan, 2009), Australia (Stockbridge, 1994), and Japan (Allison, 2000) all have censorship laws against sex-related content. The establishment and standards for these countries’ regulative system of sexual media content are influenced by different social groups and their ideologies in certain historical contexts. Rating systems for film, contrary to the view of some scholars that it could change the moral requirements within the current censorship system in China (Sigley, 2006, p. 57), has not reduced the amount of sexual violence represented in Hong Kong films, while feminist influence on the censorship system has in fact done so (Stockbridge, 1994): films with rape scenes, rated Category III in Hong Kong for adult audiences, encountered huge difficulties in being imported into Australia because of the sexual violence. With the rationale for the rating system based on

age, to censor pornography against adults is more of a kind of governance than a means to protect children, who are vulnerable to pornography's influence. Wan's (2009) work demonstrates that in post-colonial Hong Kong, the indecency and obscenity acts also have a historical background of "forcing the rebellious youth in the 1960s to conformity" (p. 136) and of "intimidat[ing], monitor[ing] and tam[ing] every individual into an ideal citizen according to the standard of ruling elites" (p. 137), a goal not unlike that behind the censorship in mainland China. In this sense, this dissertation is an important complement to the aforementioned body of literature and contributes to the understanding of the relationship between censorship of sexuality in the media and gender issues on a contextualized base.

Method: Reasons for Choosing These Cases and the Approach to Studying Them

This dissertation chooses three cases to study the regulation of sex-related popular media content. The texts of these cases cut across two different forms of media, namely, television and film. *If You Are the One* (*Fei Cheng Wu Rao*, or *FCWR*) is a television dating show; *Dwelling Narrowness* is a television drama; and *Lost in Beijing* is a film.

These three cases were selected, first, because the content of the regulated media text in each case covers a different stage in a heteronormative life circle: courtship, romantic relationship, and finally procreative marriage. *FCWR*, as a dating show, represents the match-making, or pre-dating stage. In the context of both this show and Chinese culture, the dating choices are touted as serious ones: the participants are looking for a mate. *Dwelling Narrowness* includes premarital sex, extramarital affairs, and, to a lesser degree, sex within wedlock. *Lost in Beijing* tells a story that revolves around consensual sex within marriage, rape within and out of wedlock, and women's reproductive bodies. Because each regulated media text touches on one or multiple stages in the evolution of the heteronormative sexual experience, evolution, they can piece

together a whole picture of the discursively constructed and difficultly maintained procreative life cycle, while being recognizably distinct from each other in their content about sexuality.

The second reason for selecting these cases is that all three are highly popular. *FCWR*'s viewership was phenomenal; it owned the top audience rating for months before it was instructed to change, and its top rating was a new record for television shows. *Dwelling Narrowness* was an instant hit after it was released in Shanghai's local television market. It was frequently mentioned in discussions of television drama's audience rating rank, and reception data of other television dramas are often compared with that of *Dwelling Narrowness* to prove their popularity (Gou, 2009, December 29; *Wife's Nice Time*, 2010, April 03; *Du Lala's Audience*, 2010, July 29). *Lost in Beijing's* box office was close to 20 million RMB (*Lost in Beijing's Box Office*, 2008, January 3), although it was released for only a month before being officially banned in mainland China. The domestically produced movie that ranked tenth on the annual box office list got only 12 million (2007 Box Office, 2007, December 22); *Lost in Beijing* was excluded from any such list. Given that these media texts are also available online, there are various ways for audiences to access them. Their presence on multiple media platforms and the long term cumulative reception of media text on the Internet should render the overall reception even higher.

The third reason for selecting these cases over others is that the regulative actions against them vary from strict prohibition, as with *Lost in Beijing*, official notices instructing the show to change accordingly, as with *FCWR*, and discursive campaigns combined with censorship and editing done surreptitiously, as with *Dwelling Narrowness*. As a result, the three cases complement each other to allow us explicate the system's continuity of regulative actions. In the last section, incorporating literature that takes a Foucauldian approach to the study of media

ensorship/regulation and scholarly works on the definition and execution of laws about sexuality in China, I argue that the mechanism of the regulation system in China calls for research methods that cope with its manifestation. Only in this way can one see through the seemingly excessive regulative actions and explain how the system works.

For each case, the research materials comprise the regulated media texts themselves and newspaper articles about the regulation. I analyze the news reports for two reasons: First, in China, official policy and established laws are often too fantastical idealistic and therefore under-enforced. In reality, the power to regulate media discourses is realized in contingent notices, the interpretations offered by experts of legal studies in the news reports, and the “facts” written by journalists. This whole body of texts constructs and reproduces the meaning of the regulation in public, to inform the common citizens. The Chinese people have also developed a literacy with which to read between the lines of the news in order to discern what is really important. For example, during the Cultural Revolution, the list of names participating in conferences indicated, to the readers, who had lost and gained power in the Party. In recent years, such literacy has enabled readers to analyze whether a core leader of the CPC has fallen ill or been attacked. Before China’s current president, Xi Jinping, assumed power in 2012, he did not appear in public for over ten days, just before the Eighteenth National Congress of the CPC (e.g., Reuters, 2012, September 14). Back in 2006, Huang Ju, then member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, one of the nine most powerful men in the CPC, disappeared from the public eye for months. Similarly, in 2014, North Korea’s leader Kim Jong-un did not attend any public event for over twenty days. Because of the tradition of these governments, including the Chinese Party-government, to keep core decisions secret and offer public explanations only after the crisis has passed, it is not uncommon to see the foreign press

becomes a guesser that tries to explicate what has happened with little insider information and with just the usual mysterious signs. It would be too hasty and simplistic to generalize that socialist countries take on such opaque governing styles. Yet, it is clear that the governments, which have vast power but insist on withholding policy documents from the public, will produce citizens who turn to the information indirectly related to the documents they want to know, in order to interpret the direction of domestic politics and the meaning of governmental policy. Such skills become invaluable especially when it is difficult to supervise or influence the government's actions. This dissertation therefore resorts to relevant but indirect news reports about the regulation, because this is a method available to people outside academia if they commit to searching out and analyzing the facts told in the news. As a result, by using only those resources available to the public, I democratize the methodology of this research by allowing others to follow the same procedure to prove or disprove my findings. Second, practically speaking, it is difficult to get the policy documents secretly passed down to each level of the state-monitored media. However, I do not intend to unveil what is behind the curtain in the regulation process, since the regulation of media content in China is already so baroque and, sometimes, blatantly self-contradictory that it calls for serious research, even if just on the surface level. The research question of this project requires only the public texts, including experts' explanations and news reports about the regulative action, all of which are intended to be known by the Chinese people that they may discipline their behaviors accordingly. Thus, it makes sense to rely on these public sources to conduct my research.

Along with the news reports about the regulation, I also analyze the particular media text being regulated in each case. The media texts in these three cases cut across different media forms, including television and film; the production modes of these texts are different. To

understand how the regulative actions influence the media texts, I adopt different approaches to compare the approved texts and those marked as transgressive. *FCWR*, as a television dating show with two episodes aired every week, was instructed to change; therefore, the influence of the regulation is reflected in the differences between the episodes before and after the regulative notices. *Dwelling Narrowness* was edited into a shorter version for future broadcast, after its full version was made available at local television stations. As a result, the censorship's impact on the content of this television drama is reflected in the differences between the full version and the edited one. *Lost in Beijing*, according to the news, underwent at least five rounds of censorship. Its edited version was banned one month after public release in China, although it is still available on the Internet¹⁰. Without legal access to the edited version, I turn to the full version's scenes accused by the censors of inappropriateness in order to analyze what exactly has passed the bottom line of the regulative system. In short, comparing the disciplined and the transgressive media texts offers a window into the effect of governmental regulation on the media content.

Because the censoring process is not transparent and the standards for the regulation are vaguely stated, I have to use the indirect way to know how the media texts have been changed. Critiques from within the media industry have pointed out the subjectivity of and inconsistency in the censorship standards. Some people charge the Chinese government with being unpredictable and unreasonable. What they are critiquing, actually, is that the censorship system is exercising standards unclear to outsiders, including common Chinese citizens as well as people and institutions of other countries. Instead of blaming systematic failure and the lack of clear

¹⁰ *Lost in Beijing* was available on YouTube and Netflix until early 2014, when I was collecting research material. However, in summer, when I returned to Netflix to search for this film, I discovered that it has been changed from streamable video to DVD that account holders can request.

standards, I suggest that we design research methods that help us understand how the mechanism of the Chinese regulation system works. Specifically speaking, the opaque regulation of media content in China requires ways to elucidate the system. By comparing the texts that pass censorship and those marked as transgressive, I present and analyze how the regulation has modified the media text to allow it enter the public discourse in certain ways. The selected texts represent topics and lives from the private sphere; therefore, the method I have chosen allows me to explore how, exactly, private sex-related media content is modified to appear in public.

The media texts of the three cases are not only about sex. All of them display the internal migration that marks neoliberal China, rather than the Chinese diaspora (manifested more thoroughly in some cases than others). *FCWR* is a dating show produced by Jiangsu Television. Recorded in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, its participants come from different places in China. The sisters and their husband or cohabiting partner migrated from smaller cities to the big metropolis first for higher education and then for better job opportunities, education, and cultural environment. The migrant worker in *Lost in Beijing* seeks temporary residence in big cities for better pay. Emigration to other countries is still restricted to a small number of Chinese: in *Dwelling Narrowness*, the mistress of the government official arranges to go to the States only because an American helped her, suggesting that migration to the U.S. is still difficult and reserved for the privileged. At the same time, there are as many differences between urban and rural areas in China as between developed and underdeveloped countries. Some special areas even have preferable policies that allow them to attract more investment and a greater labor force (Ong, 2006). The capitalist forces exploit differences linked to different geographic locations. The population, as constituents of the labor force, seek better opportunities in different places; thus internal migration becomes inevitable. However, such migration becomes an obstacle for

establishing intimate relationships and for the cohabitation of members in a core family. This predicament of distances is manifested clearly in the first case, *FCWR*, and in the second case, *Dwelling Narrowness*. In *FCWR*, this problem is shown in deciding whether the women move to the city where the man works and join his family relations or vice versa. In *Dwelling Narrowness*, the parents of the sisters live far away from the big city, making it more difficult and expensive for them to visit their parents and for the elder sister to see her young daughter. In other words, the goal of migration is to take advantage of regional privileges and scarcities; thus, the existence of such migration confirms the reality of the favor some Chinese citizens enjoy simply because of their place of origin.

The media texts also touch on class issues in the increasingly economically polarized Chinese society. *FCWR*'s most notorious episodes involve a woman who allegedly chooses based on the men's economic status, and a man who shows off his wealth partly inherited from his parents. The attention these episodes attracted and the debates they triggered are evidence of the audience's concern with increasing class differences. *Dwelling Narrowness* showcases the tremendous class disparities between the government official, the capitalist entrepreneurs, the white-collar professionals, and the working-class housekeeper contracted to temporary employers. The living conditions of the boss and the employee of the massage parlor in *Lost in Beijing* are contrasted: the boss can live a luxury life in Beijing; while the masseuse's family lives in a slum-like building. These texts' representation of class issues in contemporary China allows me to analyze gender and class intersectionally. Because the Chinese government still claims socialism as its leading ideology while incorporating a market economy for the practical purpose of economic development, the internal contradiction between capitalism and socialism creates tension in the realization of such coexistence. Whether the censors have taken actions in

the regulation of media content to influence people over ideological matters is a question that my analysis can address. Moreover, *Lost in Beijing* provides the opportunity to study how representation of working class women can be sensitive for the censors, since the film is about the sex, body, and reproduction of female migrant workers.

The last body of resources includes some of the heterogeneous locations wherein other information necessary for understanding each case is found. For example, demographic information and statistical data. Online discussions offer a peephole into what audiences, who have access to the Internet, discuss about these media texts and the regulation imposed upon them. These discussions are drawn from publicly accessible blogs and other posts, some of which cited by the websites as exemplary opinions of the netizens.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter Two, I analyze the case of *If You Are the One (FCWR)* with newspaper articles about the regulation of television dating shows, including *FCWR*, and the episodes before and after the regulation. According with the macro-level promotion of Socialist Core Values, which tries to use morality to resolve class conflict brought by uneven social development, women become the focus of moral regulation. “Gold diggers” are criticized with little context or explanation for their actions. These women are used to clean the slate for the government and the media producers in the industry. The temporary resolution of this crisis for media practitioners was achieved through means that involve modifying media content that extols a country of the working class and maintains a public image of China as a desirable, powerful country. While regulation is, in principle, gender-blind, it failed to address the implicitly discriminative content and rules of the show and, in some ways, even aggravated gender inequality.

Chapter Three addresses the informal regulation of the television drama *Dwelling Narrowness*. News reports about the sex-related content in the show happened when there was a trigger for such debate: the sudden termination of this television drama at a youth channel. Yet the censoring and re-editing of this program happened before news about its cancellation circulated. The editors not only clipped scenes off the longer version but also modified and added some scenes and lines. These changes eulogized procreative marriage as loving in the face of economic hardship and mutually affectionate between the spouses. Depiction of the economic difficulties new city immigrants face, present in the original, is replaced by a critique of the moral discipline of the immigrants, which, due to the commodification of women's sexuality and the unambiguously empowered male gender, definitely means women. Without sensitivity to gender inequality or a clear standard for inappropriate sexual content, the regulation and editing of television dramas like *Dwelling Narrowness* provided a platform to smuggle gender discrimination and party-state nationalism, while suppressing class consciousness, into the mass media.

The last case about textual regulation, *Lost in Beijing*, constitutes Chapter Four. The whole process of censoring, editing, and finally banning the film stretched for almost a year. Censors and regulators require movie practitioners to get their approval before production, distribution, and releasing of the films; they are also enjoined to exclude certain kinds of content. However, regulatory actions are unpredictable, and the policy documents have only vague, rather than operational, definitions of the content that should not be included. The regulators themselves authored the notices they cited to justify other published documents. At the same time, both the regulators and the regulated did not express gender consciousness. The female director and actress suffered more public critique for producing works that are sexually

transgressive. Nonetheless, the film has the potential to inspire gender awareness; ironically, the prohibition against this film annihilated the version of the film previously approved by the regulators but preserved the full version of it circulating on websites banned in mainland China.

The conclusion summarizes all three cases and offers broader implications. The tension between ideological control and economic interests exists on macro and micro levels. On the macro level, the pursuit of financial gains must not intervene with or question the leadership of the Party. Media practitioners, artists, and media institutes are restricted from seeking wealth through influencing people in ways that would malign the Party's leadership. On the micro level, the procreative, heterosexual family stabilizes society. Women are thus expected to act morally and to love altruistically. Such gendered regulation pays excessive attention to disciplining women by constructing media representations claimed authentic by the regulators; these are, in fact, heavily embedded with values preferred by the privileged but not by women.

CHAPTER TWO

SINGLE GIRLS, STOP CHECKING OUT HIS POCKET AND LOOKS:

***IF YOU ARE THE ONE* MODIFIED AFTER STATE INTERVENTION**

Chapter Abstract

In this chapter, I analyze the regulation of *If You Are the One* (FCWR) by the state government via unpublicized but reported notices. The question I seek to answer is how the state's discursive and institutional regulation changed the dating show from class and gender perspectives. By examining the news reports, including investigative television reports, and FCWR's episodes before and after the regulative notices were issued, I argue that disposable women are used by both the Party and the television station to bear the consequences of the show's and the government's mistakes. The "gender-blind" government notices allowed using specific women or women in the show as a whole to take the blame from the government. The correct socialist morality is used to silence questions about class and gender, which are raised in these dating shows under the cover of entertainment. Such governmental actions left gender-embedded rules of the dating shows untouched and, implicitly, disciplined women more severely than men.

The Most Popular Show(s) Got Notices from SARFT

On June 2 and 8, 2010, SARFT sent out two notices to regulate the “hunlian jiaoyou lei jemu,” or match-making and dating shows.¹¹“Interestingly,” Hu observes, “these two notices are not posted on the website of SARFT, for public access” (Hu, 2012, p. 88). Around the time of these notices, the *People’s Daily* and other newspapers launched an intense wave of critiques of the dating shows. Among all of the shows being targeted, *FCWR* boasts the largest audience. Hu (p. 89) commented that it is rare to see such clearly targeted, well-planned, harsh, massive polemics directed toward media since Deng’s Reform and Opening up of China. Even though this is a single case, its magnitude and influence suggest that it reflects the concerns of the government, as represented by SARFT’s actions, and trends of popular culture as a contested area in the macro-level transitioning of China.

The notices issued by SARFT were a surprise for some people, because on April 1, 2010, Jiangsu Television reported that *FCWR* was positively acknowledged by SARFT. According to the *Beijing Times* (Xu, April 1, 2010), Gao Changli, the associate counsel of the Propaganda Administration Bureau in SARFT, openly praised the show at the *FCWR* colloquium in Beijing, which was attended by well-known television studies experts and scholars. Admitting that *FCWR* is widely applauded and controversial at the same time, Gao comforted Wang Peijie, the vice director of Jiangsu Television, “We are not against entertainment. If the show could make people happy, it is a good thing.” Since the controversial comment made about money fetishism

¹¹ According to people.com, which cited the Xinhua News Agency’s news release, SARFT issued three notices on June 2 and 8 of 2010 (Xinhua News Agency, 2010, Jun. 13). However, according to the *People’s Daily* I accessed through interlibrary loan at the University of Illinois, SARFT issued two notices on June 9, 2010 (Zhao, Liu, Pan & Zhu, 2010, Jun. 13).

by Ma Nuo, on *FCWR*, was aired on January 15, this acknowledgement seems to have expressed SARFT's positive attitude toward this show.

For others, these notices issued to dating shows including *FCWR* were to be expected, because the outspokenness of some participants¹² in the show triggered heated debate, both online and offline. The colloquium mentioned in the last paragraph is believed to have been a futile reaction to dispel the criticism of *FCWR* (Zhu, 2012). In that spring, rumors and unexpected exposes of *FCWR* mushroomed—about the gold diggers, rich second generations, participants who faked their occupation or even names, magazine models who took half-naked, erotic photos in the past, and others. All these anecdotes and scandals circulated as confirmed facts or hearsay.

Popular and controversial at the same time, *FCWR* enjoyed the highest audience rating among all dating shows regulated by these notices. Thus, the majority of the attention triggered by these notices focused on *FCWR*. There are news articles fretting about whether the host would be fired or whether the show would be canceled immediately (e.g., *Hosts of FCWR*, 2010, June 15; *Meng Fei Quits*, 2010, June 15; *SARFT Notified FCWR*, 2009, June 19). However, neither of the predictions proved to be true. As of 2014, the show remains on air, without any hint of being removed. The host, Meng Fei, continues to enjoy huge popularity on *FCWR* and other new shows. The outspoken co-host and human characteristics expert, Le Jia, left *FCWR* in late 2013, more than three years after the regulative notices were issued. With the fame brought to Le Jia by *FCWR*, he since published two books and launched his own television shows.

¹² The host of the show call the participants *jiabin*, which literally translates as “extinguished guests.”

There has been a considerable amount of scholarship about *FCWR*. Shei (2013), for example, compares *FCWR* and the British *Take Me Out*. The former is believed to have copied much of its form and rules from the latter, with some design changes customized to Chinese audiences. Shei applies discourse analysis to dissect both shows and concludes that *FCWR* is dedicated to representing serious matchmaking for marriage; while the British *Take Me Out* is much more casual. In *FCWR*, discussions of serious social phenomena are presented through the entertainment format so that they would be allowed in China. This passing is necessary because China is a country with limited space for political criticism, especially any directed toward the central government. Yet in comparing these two dating shows, Shei treats them as relatively stable entities rather than dynamic, changing programs. He that mentions *FCWR* has a host and two co-hosts, but *FCWR* has had only co-hosts since late June 2010, a little bit more than five months after its first episode aired. Furthermore, Shei explains how, in the Chinese political environment, the political discussions that are held in entertainment shows promote procreative marriage; however, how the show developed acquired such a feature, and the influence of governmental regulation thereon, are not part of his concern here.

Wu (2012) analyzes the articulation of gender position in *FCWR* by approaching the show as a contested public sphere in the post-socialist context. She argues that, although the setting of the show seems to suggest gender-equal matchmaking, the submissive, gentle, and reproduction-ready femininity is exalted in the show. But the female participants whose comments are given voice are those who appeared in the episodes broadcast before the regulative notices. Moreover, Hu focuses on the early episodes and the public sphere discussed is limited to that of the show; the influence of the regulative notices is not at all addressed.

Hu (2012) studies the effect of the *People's Daily's* rebuke of *FCWR*. This study is part of an Education Ministry's 2010 Humanity and Social Science Research Topic called "the Historical Change and Good Tradition of the Communist Party of China's (CPC) Media Criticism." As part of the government-sponsored project, Hu's research is devoted to understanding how effective the regulation is and how it could be better enforced. The standpoint of this project is, naturally, with the Party. And Hu does not distinguish between critiques and regulations. When a government is as powerful as the CPC, its criticism should not be equated with that made by a common citizen; the latter has limited practical impact, while the former, even if unofficial, has a formative effect on the media text. In this sense, the governmental critique should be categorized as discursive regulation in the form of media campaign, since regulation manifests itself in different forms, from stern warning to outright banning.

Opposing Hu's work, this chapter seeks to understand the media discourses about this regulation—not to learn how to regulate more successfully—and, specifically, to appreciate the its moral and gender aspects. This chapter aims to understand the meaning of the massive mediated discursive regulation of *FCWR*, stimulated by and planned around the government notices. Admittedly, my research could not speculate as to the motive of the government's regulation of the dating shows, including *FCWR*, or reveal the factual truth about whether this show is indeed doing something wrong, like faking the identities of the participants. Instead of judging the legitimacy and effect of the regulation, I study what exactly is changed about this show as a result of this regulative policy and what is promoted by the cluster of news discourses about this regulation. In order to resolve these questions, I will first introduce the social background for these dating shows with secondary sources, then offer evidence of the commercial gains of *FCWR* and explain its localized rules. After that, I will analyze the news

reports about these notices. The last section of this chapter enumerates the differences between the episodes before and immediately after the notices.¹³

Social Background of Leftover Women and Men: The Phantom of State Influence

Chinese society has witnessed enormous economic growth since Deng's reform and opening up in 1978. Along with these dramatic economic changes come social changes, including an increase in women's education and financial status. This accumulation of monetary, cultural, and social capital has been accompanied by the postponing of marriage. The old sayings are repeatedly used to urge the young and newly capitalized people: "A man should get married on coming of age, and so should a girl" (*nanda danghun, nvda dangjia*). This Chinese proverb holds that men and women should get married at the appropriate age, before they lose the ability to reproduce. However, with social changes, women and men are not getting married as early as before. Although the proverb juxtaposes men and women, making the injunction to marry appear gender-blind, literature on the contemporary late-marriage or never-marry problem addresses women and men independently, and media discourses on the issue have separate standards for each gender. These discourses hold that both men and women should get married before a certain age, but the age limits for women are much stricter than those for men.

Within the heteronormative limits, women are supposed to get married before a certain age. Their "failure" in choosing a suitable husband is framed as a problem caused jointly by women's improved education background, economic status, and determination to find a man

¹³ *IF* has changed its format several times. The latest change of rules happened in October 2012 (Li, 2012).

who, compared with them, is taller, older, and financially better off. Women who are not married by a certain age are stigmatized with names like *baiguojing* (Ho, 2012), or white-bone demon¹⁴, leftover women (Fincher, 2014), and loser dogs (Yamaguchi, 2006; Yang, 2013), imported into Taiwan from Japan and not widely recognized and used in mainland China. Although the three types of women just mentioned enjoy obvious education, professional, and class privilege, the names used to demonize them have circulated in media discourse and have been used to refer to women of different classes and from all walks of life. All young women, from migrant workers to Chinese expatriates, are urged to get married in order to avoid becoming leftover women (Niu, 2014). Fincher (2014) even finds that many women do not insist on adding their name to condo listings jointly sponsored with their husband, so that the men will marry them.¹⁵

While leftover women is constantly emphasized as a social phenomenon, sociologist Li Jianxin told journalists that the issue is specious, because these women, far from being “left over,” deliberately choose not to marry down. In an interview (Shi, 2010, March 8), he argues that, rather, the issue of leftover *men* problem is the true one, because, despite the men’s

¹⁴ A demon in the Journey to the West, used in the '90s to describe women who are white-collar (bai), backbone of the company (gu), and elite (jing).

¹⁵ Partly because of the exponentially increasing real estate cost, and partly driven by the idea of establishing a new home, it is common to have the man or his family offer a condo or down payment for it, and the women or her parents purchase a car for easy transportation. The appliances and the remodeling of the condo usually fall to the women. However, in order to acknowledge the man as the new core family’s head, his name is highly likely to appear on the housing ownership certificate, even if the condo was paid in full by the women’s family. Conversely, it is equally for a woman’s name to not appear on the certificate, even if she is jointly sponsoring the condo with her husband. Fincher (2014) interviews the leftover women and discovers that they are losing financial opportunities in order to get married before a certain age.

intention to marry, they could not find a wife; the failure to regularly satisfy their physiological demand,¹⁶ through marriage, would lead to social instability.¹⁷

It is rumored that the age of leftover women and men has been officially defined by the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF, or hereafter Women's Federation) in 2007 (Fincher, 2014, p. 3, p. 16, p. 19), and again in 2010 (Cao, December 17, 2010). According to the Chinese self-introduction of the Women's Federation on its website, womenofchina.cn, the group is "a collective social organization united by Chinese women of all ethnicities and walks of life, to fight for further liberation under CPC's lead" (*quanguo gezu gejie funv zai zhongguo gongchandang lingdaoxia wei zhengqu jinyibu jiefang er lianheqilai de shehuiqunzhong tuanti*). The functions of the organization, according to the introduction, include empowering Chinese women to make decisions and raise their voices in politics, protecting women and children's entitled legal rights, and other duties like mobilizing women to participate in socialist construction, and improving their quality of life. The Women's Federation takes on the duty of protecting children's rights despite not including children in the name of the organization. Thus, by default, taking care of children becomes women's responsibility. What is also implied in Women's Federation's duties is the image of an underprivileged group of people who not only

¹⁶ By physiological demand, Li is referring to sexual desire by scientifically naturalizing the legitimacy of abundant young male desire. This phenomenon does not happen only in China. Alisson (2000) critiqued the gendered and classed standard that permits certain desires while prohibiting other kinds. Another problem with this statement is that it classifies sex out of wedlock as non-normative, or non-existent, which is, unsurprisingly, a heteronormative comment that also fits the sex hierarchy of Rubin (1993/2007).

¹⁷ Although Li (Shi, 2010, March 8) has pointed out the overlooked leftover man problem, he fails to challenge the saying that men will be unsettled if they are not married, which admits men's sexual desire as instinctual, and sees their having a wife as a solution to the sexual problem.

try to help themselves but also actively contribute to the country's development. The Women's Federation's guidelines are "Four Words of *Zi*" (self), or *sizi*: self-esteem (*zizun*), confidence (*zixin*), independence (*zili*) and self-improvement (*zhiqiang*).¹⁸ All of these are driven by the women themselves. The neoliberal individualism hidden in these "Four Words of *Zi*" does not critique or question structural inequality, but sees gender discrimination as a temporary, minor problem inconsistent with the CPC's gender policy. Meanwhile, the Women's Federation mobilizes women to save themselves despite the handicaps, which the federation, like the "Four Words of *Zi*," does not treat as a structural problem.

Once every five years, the Women's Federation has a conference to elect its new leadership committee. After its eleventh National Congress of Women in 2013, president Xi Jinping urged that it try to engage more with women so that they, representing half the Chinese population, can contribute to the country's development (e.g., Wang, & Shen, 2013, November 1). Across the different levels of the People's Congress, however, members of the Women's Federation attend as representatives of a city or a province. That means, when the CPC needs women to contribute to the economy and conform to traditional morality for the good of every family, they are instructed as a whole, as represented by the Women's Federation; yet when some women rise to make proposals to the People's Congress, they are treated as members of a gender-blind group. Thus, the alliances women forge across other identity differences become undermined. In short, the Women's Federation may appear to be a collective organization united

¹⁸ *Sizi* was first proposed at the Fifth National Congress of Women by Kang Keqing, wife of Zhu De, one of the founding fathers of the PRC. She declared that women should have "self-esteem (*zizun*), self-cherishment (*zizai*, meaning to cherish and protect oneself), self-respect (*zizhong*, meaning to respect one's own personality and dignity) and self-improvement (*zhiqiang*)". The second and third *zi*, in Chinese, implies restraining one's sexual desire and conforming to abstinence; when translated into English, they look very similar to confidence and self-respect. Five years later, the *sizi* was revised into its current words.

from the bottom up, an image promoted by its busy English-version website interface that evokes that of the *New York Times*. Yet in fact, it is systematically situated at a position where it cannot critique the policies of the Party but may only encourage women to liberate themselves by individual struggle. It is *they* who bear the responsibility of their freedom.

Although the Women's Federation claims to be a collective organization under the CPC's lead rather than part of the government, it is the only partially official organization devoted to women's welfare. As a result, if it really defined the age of leftover women, as it was rumored to have, its actions are indeed contrary to its stated objective of promoting gender equality. Interviews explained that it is a rumor saying the Women's Federation made such definition. For the 2010 Report, Cao clarified that the Survey Result of Chinese Marriage and Courtship¹⁹ found that "over 90% of men thought women should get married before 27; while over half of the women thought men's best wedding age is 28 to 30"²⁰ (Cao, December 17, 2010). As to the definition in 2007, the Women's Federation did not define leftover women officially, but started using this age definition in the commentaries posted on its official website, "shortly after China's State Council issued an edict on strengthening the Population and Family Planning program to address 'unprecedented population pressures'" (Fincher, 2012). The edict mentioned here is the *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on*

¹⁹ Many scholars in China chose to translate the *hunlian* into "marriage and love"; however, "lian" actually denotes the affectionate relationship before marriage (Engagement is not yet common in China.). Therefore I use "courtship" rather than the broader word "love" here.

²⁰ This survey is also rendering the right to judge leftover women and men to the opposite gender. It is not to say that to ask each gender to define the age that makes themselves to be left-over is the right way to design questions. However, to make people judge others enhances the absence of individual agency and the social pressure as a proved fact, thus, in a sneaky way, defines the age of leftover by claiming it as a socially recognized fact. It could only bring forth more pressure to get married before that age in order to not assume the humiliating identity, thus create commercial benefits for related companies.

Fully Enhancing Population and Family Planning Program and Comprehensively Addressing Population Issues, announced on January 18, 2007. People could argue that the term did not originate from any official source, but it is evident that the Women's Federation used this word without trying to guide the readers against the discrimination toward women that is implied in such humiliating identities. The campaign Fincher mentions suggests that we should look into how the government's policy generates a cluster of media discourses in order to understand the mechanism that triggers discursive regulation.

Scholars studying population have long suspected governmental influence on young people's marriage age. Statistical data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China has shown that, compared with other East and Southeast Asian countries and regions including Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia (Malaysian Chinese), there is a key difference with the Chinese situation over the age of first marriage: "(T)he vast majority of women in China marry in a narrower age range than elsewhere, basically throughout their twenties" (Jones & Gubhaju, 2009, p. 240). Chinese men, on average, get married at an older age: "Trends for men in China are also moving toward later marriage at ages 25 to 34, though not at ages above 35" (p. 241). Although there is also a tendency to get married at an older age for both genders in China in recent decades, there are very few Chinese women and men who remain single or never-married after a certain age, which varies for each gender. Jones and Gubhaju suspect that the Chinese pattern "has something to do with the more active role of the state in social and family life" (p. 261). They propose that the difficulty for testing this hypothesis is mainly caused by the fact that Singapore and Chinese Malaysians have similar trends with different state governments. However, considering that both Singapore and Chinese Malaysians share, in part, Chinese traditional culture, and that culture flows more easily, on the

basis of discourses, than state policy, turning to the discourses about marriage might help to explain the Chinese pattern. Instead of trying to account for the cultural impact of media on people's willingness to get married, this chapter can only reveal whether there is a gendered aspect in the regulation of reality dating shows in China. However, this chapter can touch the tip of the iceberg for understanding the media discourses about seeking a marital partner, which are initiated by and revolve around government's regulative actions.

While whether and how the government influences people's decision to marry remain unknown, the matchmaking industry emerged after Deng's reform and opening up and has continued to prosper in the 21st century, on and off screen. After many years of arranged marriage introduced by matchmakers and/or the Party member, finding a husband or wife has again become a mediated process in a society of free love. In fact, the aforementioned 2010 Report on the Survey Result of Chinese Marriage and Courtship was collectively conducted by the Chinese Association of Marriage and Family Studies, a sector of the Women's Federation, the Committee of Match-Making Service Industries of the China Association of Social Workers, and Beijing Baihe Online Technology, a company that runs online matchmaking and offline suiting services. The institutional survey that is held as fact has been infiltrated by companies who benefit from the marriage industry.

The matchmaking industry has come a long way to reach its current state of power. It sprouted on different forms of media, while spreading in real life in interpersonal ways. From Deng's reform and opening up through the end of the 20th century, it was popular to find a match by posting an ad on the central seam of the newspapers or by engaging matchmaking companies to set up dates with qualified people (Hu, 2013, p. 30-31). Because of the high incidence of scams in these two platforms and the unwillingness of customers to pay the company for setting

up blind dates, since 2005, the parents of single men and women gathered in parks to form matchmaking corners in Shanghai, Beijing, Chengdu, Xiamen, Shenzhen, and other large districts (Sun, 2013; Tian, 2013, Jan 24). Sun documents that success rate of these corners has been low and argues that the parent participants' most pressing concern is not to find a future son or daughter-in-law but to satisfy their own social needs and pacify their anxiety. Thus, they can rest on the mantra that "at least they tried to help."

The first Chinese television matchmaking show, referred to in the West and elsewhere as a dating show, was *Dianshi Hongniang* or *Television Matchmaker*, aired by Shanxi Television station in 1988 (Jiang, 2011). An explosion of similar programs soon followed²¹.

None, however, has been as commercially successful as *If You Are the One*. Failing to bid on the copyright to produce the Chinese version of *Take Me Out* (Shi, Apr 29, 2010), *FCWR* revised the format of the show, which proved to be a savvy move²².

Commercial Interests of *FCWR*: Not Gender Equal by Design before State Intervention

FCWR has enjoyed a thriving following: since its first episode on January 15, 2010, it has owned one of the top two positions in audience rating. At the beginning of its just sixth episode, Meng Fei, the host of *FCWR*, announced that its audience rating had gained the top position in the last two weeks after many weeks in the hunt; specifically, its episodes from the weekend of

²¹ Beijing Television has shown *Jinwan Women Xiangshi*, or *We Meet Tonight*, since 1991 (Jiang, 2011; 23 Years of, 2014, May 19). Hunan Television had *Meigui Zhiyue*, or *Rose for Love*, a popular show that aired from 1998 to 2004 (Fang, 2010; Shanghai Oriental Television had *Xiangyue Xingqiliu*, or *Date on Saturday* since 1998; Hebei Television used to have *Xingxing Guangchang*, or *Square of Two Hearts*; Henan Television had *Sheilingni Xindong*, or *Who Took Your Heart*; Chengdu Television had *Xiangjiang Meigui*, or *Rose of Perfume River* (Guan, 1999). The shows broadcast since 1998 are said to be similar to *Feichang Nannv*, or *Love Game*, which has been produced in Taiwan since 1996 and is broadcast in mainland China by Phoenix Television.

²² *Genwo Yuehuiba*, the Chinese version of *Take Me Out* produced and copyrighted by Hunan Television, was not widely recognized among the plethora of such shows produced by local television stations.

March 27 and 28, 2010, were 2.82%, topping the list (Provincial Satellite Television, 2010), after winning that position for weeks. As reported in CSM Infosys audience-rating data, until April 11, 2010, *FCWR*'s average rating was 2.3%, with a single-episode high of over 4.0% (Sun, Q., 2011). According to CSM Infosys's audience-rating data package of 34 cities, *FCWR*'s episode of May 16, 2010, achieved a 4.23% rating, which surpassed the previous all-time best of 4.15% owned by *Happy Boys* and *Happy Girls*, two of the most popular reality shows of their time (Sun, Z., 2010).

A closer look at the audience rating data reveals its overemphasis on city dwellers, who tend to be middle or upper class and have more money for consumption. CSM, the audience rating company that gathers data for mainland China and Hong Kong, is jointly owned by CTR Marketing Research and Kantar Media Group. The former company's full name is CVSC-TNS Research, owned by China International Television Cooperation (CITVC). Among its 102 subsidiary companies, many are partly or fully owned by and named under China Central Television (CCTV) and encompass entertainment, digital, animation, and international broadcast branches. The other company jointly own CSM is Kantar, a market research company based in London. CSM, which boasts data from one state-level, 25 provincial, and 149 city-based network, is most interested in audiences based in cities—especially provincial capitals—and direct-controlled municipalities, including Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing. According to NetEase Interactive Entertainment's report (Which Provincial Satellite, 2011). CSM has five measuring packages: city diary card, city recorder, provincial diary card, provincial recorder, and national recorder. The data from provincial networks contain both city and rural information, while city data, as its name indicates, reflects only the screening choices of city audiences. The city data can be compiled from a 25-city package, which includes 25

provincial capitals and independently administered municipalities; a 35-city package, which includes 31 provincial capitals and 4 other cities that are customizable; and a 71-city package, which selects 71 large- and medium-size cities and is recognized by the National Statistics Bureau. *FCWR*'s data was obtained through a 34-city package customized according to Jiangsu Television's own request. This package, as noted above, focuses on the largest and provincial cities (Sun, Q., 2011), attracting high advertisement fees prices but systematically excluding rural audiences.

The urban popularity of *FCWR* made it a valued commodity for advertisers, who doubled fees after May 1, 2010, about three and a half months after the first episode aired. According to NetEase Entertainment, which cites *Legal Evening News* (2010), this increase came in part because *FCWR*'s audience rating surpassed that of Hunan Television's signature show, *Happy Camp*. The estimated price of a five-second advertisement increased from 28,000 RMB (\$4,400) to 42,000 RMB (\$6,667); ten-second ads increased from 53,000 RMB (\$8,413) to 79,500 RMB (\$12,619); and 15-second ads increased from 77,000 RMB (\$12,222) to 115,500 RMB (\$18,333).

As previous communications research (e.g., Smythe, 1981) has pointed out, audiences, such as those of *FCWR*, become valuable commodities sold to advertisement agencies. However, this study asks how the television text itself is designed to attract such a high proportion of audiences in the cities (by ways the television producers chose to measure). Before the state power intervened, the localized design of *FCWR* more closely represented the commercial needs of the provincial satellite television – Jiangsu Television. But its commercially successful localization did not guarantee gender equality on the show. The notices and media campaign in June 2010 on the heels of its popularity boom, changed *FCWR*; to properly assess the differences

caused by the regulation, the structure and characteristics of the original 36 episodes should be examined.

Expert who stands for science, and host who stands for objectivity.

FCWR has similar rules to the British *Take Me Out*. In each episode, 24 women appear on stage standing in a line. Each of the women has a light, topped with her assigned number, in front of her; she can later turn off this light to signal uninterest in the male participant. During the episode, about four men visit the stage one by one; each of them undergoes three rounds. In each round, the host throws out some questions to the man and the women, and moderates the questions the participants raise to the member of the other gender. If the man has more than two lights shining—i.e., two women interested—at the end of the third round, he can invite up to two of these women and the “hearty girl,” whom he chose based on first impression right after his own introduction and before the women have the first chance to shut off their lights, to go to the other side of the stage. The man can then review the women’s answer to one of the ten questions they submitted when registering for this show and ask them a follow-up question. After this, this man may choose to bring with him one of the “lighted” women or may try to persuade his “hearty girl” to change her mind, if she has shut off her light. If either she or all of the remaining women reject him, he must leave the stage alone. If only one of the women remains “lighted,” the host invites the man to agree to match with her; if he accepts, he leaves the stage with her.

Unlike *Take Me Out*, *FCWR* has an atmosphere of serious dating, with the ultimate aim of marriage rather than merely a temporary relationship, as Shei (2013) has pointed out. *FCWR* (*If You Are the One*) is named for an idiom usually used in classified ads, including matchmaking ones, and means, “If you are not serious, do not bother contacting me.” Even with this name, the host did not initially introduce the show as one for serious dating. In the first

episode, Meng Fei announces *FCWR* as a dating game that does not guarantee love but offers an opportunity (*Zhi tigong jihui, bu baoban aiqing*). He also casts *FCWR* as a dating show with several stages that the participants need to go through in order to win a date. In its sixth episode, its self-definition changes to “a new school of dating show.” By the time the government notices were issued, *FCWR* had become so well-known that its host no longer bothered to indicate what kind of show it was.

The design of the show, unlike its changing self-definition, corresponds more to the seriousness implied in its name. Unlike *Take Me Out*, *FCWR* has always had a host and a co-host. The co-host, Le Jia, is an expert who devised the metric “disposition color” (*xingge secai*) to classify people by four different disposition types, each of which is labeled with a color. The host introduces him as someone who can help the women and men on stage to better know themselves and their potential match, so that they can choose someone with whom they will be compatible in the long run. Although Le Jia’s “disposition color” theory is based on his own insight, rather than on an objectively measurable science, *FCWR* still invited him to help the participants fit into the marriage-oriented hetero-normativity, citing his “theory” as a guarantee of more success in match-making. Le Jia originally would ask the participant, usually the man, one question from some psychological test, in order to help the other side, usually the women, to decide whether this person is a relatively good match. As the show progressed, he has begun to ask questions and comment more frequently and to raise questions without being prompted. He has become indispensable to the part of the show that separates *FCWR* from the much more light-hearted dating shows, like the Chinese version of *Take Me Out*.

A stage to display the beauty of women and the wealth of men?

At the beginning of each episode, the 24 women come from the side of the stage with lights, walk to the very end of the 12 lights on each side, and stop at their own light. The route they follow each time is the longest possible, given that they have to come out from their side, rather than the side with an elevator, from which the host and the men enter the stage. The men and women are separated backstage. Le Jia, the expert-host, is the only one sitting in the middle before the host and participants emerge. The women on display are only visually introduced to the man, while the man, once he arrives on stage, must declare his name, age, and place of origin. The “hearty girl” choice he makes is an operationalized way to model “love at first sight,” and, if he is popular enough to go through three passes, he is offered the opportunity to invite his hearty girl out, even if she has shut her light. Although in later episodes some men have managed to learn more about the women on stage through their blog or weibo page, the design of the show is aimed at facilitating a speedy but reliable match by having the men select women from their looks, including their body, outfit, posture, and gaze. In the second episode, the first male participant, Zhao Chen, chooses Ma Nuo, a model and later an infamous gold-digger on the show, as his “hearty girl.” Ma Nuo eventually shuts off her light, before Zhao has passed all three stages and gained the power of selection. After Ma Nuo is invited to come out and stand between the two “lighted” women, the host asks her if she ever thought that Zhao would make her his “hearty girl,” to which she admits, “I thought he might” and smiles confidently. Zhao proceeds to ask all three women a question, then tries to persuade Ma Nuo to change her mind by explaining that he chose her for her inner qualities (*neizai qizhi*), which, in actuality, she has yet to exhibit. Le Jia comments sarcastically, “Anyone can tell the reason you chose her,” meaning her appearance. As this case illustrates, the “hearty girl” design promotes appearance-based selection because the visual display is the only information immediately given. Although the

men's insistence on conquering the "heartly girl" who has already rejected them, like with Zhao and Ma Nuo, is often regarded as unreasonable, superficial, and even laughable, the fact remains that, if the women have been on the stage for only a short time or have not yet been able to actively engage in the onstage conversation, their profiles are confined to what can be seen. For this reason, the women with better looks have a much better chance to be chosen as the "heartly girl." They become the standard-bearers for the other women and, in effect, the "goddesses" of the show.

The other information required of the women by the show is their answers to ten questions. If the man can successfully advance through the three rounds and get the power to choose among the women who like him, he can request to see the women's answers to one of the ten questions. The ten "personal profile" questions include:

1. Financial status
2. Bust, cial status, uest to see the women's answers
3. Previous relationships and/or marriage information
4. Whether she wants to have kid(s)
5. Family background
6. Whether she would mind living with her parents-in-law
7. How to manage their familying with her parents-i
8. The reason her last relationship ended
9. Education
10. The type of man she dislikes

The selected questions reflect what is considered important information of the women that the man wants to know. Two of the questions are about her previous relationships (nos. 3

and 8), and another one is about the kind of man she could not tolerate (no. 10); two are about her upbringing (nos. 5 and 9); one is about her body (no. 2) and one is about reproduction (no. 4). The other three questions are about her own wealth and whether she would like to merge into the man's family of origin. The information that the show assumes the men prefer is emphasizes physical attractiveness and the woman's willingness not to form a new core family but to abandon hers and be absorbed into his.

In later episodes, the personal profile that the man could choose to know changes, but not necessarily to the woman's advantage. Before the government notices were issued, "life photo" was added to the database. Although the men had never, to this point, asked to know the woman's body measurements, they began requesting to see the "life photo" once it became available. This suggests two things: that the men have always wanted to know body measurements but refrained from asking, and that they refrained from asking because it might make them look bad. Among the other changes, "How to manage their family's income when married" was taken off the list, while "her views about consumption" was added, indicating that *FCWR* thought the men would indeed care more about the women's subjectivity—but only in her spending the family's money, not in managing it, whereby which she would have agency. Also added was the option to learn "whether she would mind to get property notarization." If the woman has more property before marriage, she is not likely to refuse such notarization. The unspoken information here is that the man might care about this, because he is likely to be wealthier than the woman. The woman is supposed to be financially independent—her income or financial status information was subject to exposure—and not covet sharing the man's money. In addition, "whether she would mind to live with her parents-in-law" was modified to "whether she would live with parents," rendering the question gender-blind and setting her parents level

with his. Undercutting these gestures of respect, however, the list now included “her ability to do housework,” connoting a passive domesticity and obedience to the family’s needs over her own.

Taken together, the modifications were the same as, or more burdensome than, the previous iterations. Far from opening up new perspectives or metrics, they kept or even escalated the focus on the women’s attractiveness while also highlighting a potential increase in her workload and impressing the standard that she should merge into the man’s family of origin without planning to take half of the money he earned before marriage. Even though there was increased space for the women to offer alternative, gender-equal answers, the structure of the show accentuated the man-husband’s role as the provider, and the woman-wife as the beautiful caretaker and willing forsaker of her own background to join the man’s family without draining their finances for self-indulgent reasons.

Men, on the other hand, first declare their name, age, and hometown and then, in three videos follow, illustrate their daily life, describe their ideal girlfriend type (or what kind of relationship he is looking for) and previous relationships, and share his friends’ and relatives’ comments on him. The three clips (which the show calls Video Cassette Recordings, or VCR) are relatively short in the earlier episodes, but contain information about monthly income, housing, and car ownership. In the first episode, the fifth man introduces his income and property information in his second clip, revealing that he earns about 10,000 RMB (\$1,600) per month and owns a car and three condos in Shanghai. In the March 14 episode, Liu Yunchao is unveiled as a “rich second generation,” or *fuerdai*, who owns a restaurant and BMW convertibles. Midway through his section, the host of *FCWR* asks that the big screen on stage show the total deposit Liu has in his savings account: 6,000,000 RMB (about \$9,700,000). Later, he is criticized for flaunting his wealth, which was amassed with the benefit of a substantial

startup gift from his parents. However, the blame is not his alone; after all, it is the host and the producers who go out of their way to produce the clips and broadcast his savings on the screen.

Women given power to choose?

FCWR, by design, celebrates the popularity of men. Since its first episode, there has been a prize (a two-people travel package to a foreign romantic destination like Hokkaido²³ in Japan or Hawaii in the US) promised to the successful match if the man keeps all 24 lights²⁴ before his first clip is shown. He can also get a 100-RMB (\$16.28) dating fund for every light he still has after his third clip. Therefore, the women's choices are converted into monetary rewards supposed to help them develop their relationship. The hosts have emphasized many times that it is a challenge for the men to come to the stage and be judged and commented on by the 24 "beautiful girls" (24 wei meilide nvsheng) on the other side. In the first episode, in explaining the rules of the show, Meng Fei, the host, asks the women what they would do if Jin Chengwu, a famous, good-looking actor; Xiao Shenyang, a comedian known for his feminine character in a Spring Festival Gala performance; or he himself were on the stage for them to choose. The host scores zero lights and jokes that if his wife sees this at home, she might have mixed feelings. In the eighth episode broadcast on February 26th, Le Jia, the co-host, comes to the stage from the male participants' elevator and gets 20 lights. He explains as his reason for doing this that he wanted to know how the men feel before coming to the stage and finds, "It feels like waiting to be executed by shooting."

²³ In the film *If You Are the One*, directed by Feng Xiaogang, the protagonists take a romantic trip to Hokkaido, where the woman reciprocates the man's affection.

²⁴ The required number of lights was reduced to 22 after the 34th episode, broadcast on June 12th, 2010, right after the regulative notices were issued. The host announces that the reason for this change is that in no previous episode has the man earned the prize.

Before the power to choose shifts from the women to the man on stage, the comments and critiques present a certain degree of women's subjectivity and their awareness of gender equality. Shei (2013) has pointed out that the women in *FCWR* are much more active in giving their comments. They raise their hands to show the host that they want to say something. Some outspoken women might even interrupt the host and the man mid-speech to make their opinion heard. While the women's bodies are displayed for judgment, the men's bodies are inspected as well. One of the women in the early episodes, Hu Yuanjun, openly looks for an attractive man. When a model, Liu Cheng, appears on the show, the women, including Hu, show great interest in him. Sometimes the women harshly critique the man's outfit and posture. In the fourth episode, the fifth man's "hearty girl" mocks that he looks like a hoodlum, because he always puts his hands in his pants pocket, and reminds him to pay attention to his self-image. Other women voice their agreement, stating, for example, "Your attention to your appearance shows your respect for others." There are even online tips of how to win a woman from *FCWR*, which Le Jia quotes in the episode aired on April 4: no weird outfits, unnecessary stage properties, or excessive posing. While the bodies of the women on *FCWR* are disciplined in a Foucaultian sense, the women exploit the power given them to pick on the men in a similar way, although the men's need to meet that standard lasts only for as long as they appear on stage. In the 34th episode, the female participant Zhang Enning notes this in her complaint about the first man's outfit: "I feel that we, the female participants, spent a long time putting on all this make up, to meet the male participants. But he dressed like this. I do not see his respect to us." The host tries to ease the tension by wisecracking, "Maybe he spent two hours to get this look," to which Zhan retorts, "Then I am more dissatisfied." The co-host tries to help the man's case by offering, "Maybe he wants to show you the real him." It is noteworthy that, rather than join Zhan's protest

by questioning the need for makeup, the hosts lend a hand to the man, seemingly in his camp. More noteworthy, however, is that Zhang, a woman chosen as the “hearty girl” many times for her beauty, has turned the tables on the male participants by redirecting the unfair, superficial they regularly apply back to them. When they make comments and exercise choice, *FCWR*’s women are granted a certain degree of subjectivity, independence, and authority. But their comments have raised more criticism than praise; the overall accepted representation of women on the show is still as submissive, beautiful, caring, and traditional (Wu, 2012).

Regulators Want Television to Represent the True Reality

Although the controversial comments that triggered heated online debates first appear in the third episode of *FCWR*, aired in mid-winter, concentrated critique toward this show appeared only after and around the time the regulative notices were issued, near the dawn of summer. Even though the exact wording of the notices was kept secret from those who most need to know, the website of the *People’s Daily*, people.com, posted a news report²⁵ that reproduces the content of the notices in conference-memo-style language. The article emphasizes in its title that dating shows “should not contain any personal assault, include sex-related discussions, or display money fetishism” (SARFT Issued 3 Notices, 2010, Jun 13). It affirms the positive function of the newly created dating shows, with *FCWR* the first one mentioned, for “offering chances for men

²⁵ According to people.com, this news report was originally published in the *People’s Daily*; however, no article with that title and a June 2010 publication date can be found there. Among all the articles searchable in the newspaper article database of cnki.net, none has the same name or the same information. However, I was unable to get the domestic version of the *People’s Daily*. The library archive of this newspaper offers only issues printed before 2008. In its online database, only paid patrons can access the scanned newspapers. I paid the fees, but was never given access to the copies. The contact email on that website is nonexistent; I also tried to contact them by correcting the mail address, but received no reply. If there is indeed such an article published in the domestic version of the *People’s Daily* in June 2010, I have failed to find it. However, it remains true that people.com has published the article I cite here. This website is owned by the *People’s Daily* and claims that the article is from that newspaper.

and women at the appropriate age for marriage to know each other and date, which realizes television's duty to guide and serve." However, "overly pursuing audience rating induces these television stations to include money fetishism, vanity, and an unhealthy, sex-related, incorrect view of marriage and love to be broadcast in a laissez-faire manner." All of these are "deviant from the socialist core-value system, against SARFT's requirement that television and radio purify the socio-cultural environment and shun circulation of vulgarity in media content, which harms the image of television and radio." It goes on to give complete instructions on how to repair the dating shows, to make them "good" again: to "guarantee the quality"²⁶ of the participants, the host(s), the topics, and the content, to perform serious self-censorship, and to broadcast on tape delay. These six requirements are termed the "six passes that the shows should guard" (*guo liu guan*).

A correct socialist morality: vaguely defined but clearly against commercial indecency.

The main idea of these requirements was for *FCWR* to mix the reality it presents, and helps create, with principles of state-sanctioned morality by avoiding topics and conversations that are controversial enough to attract audiences' attention. Accordingly, the participants of the dating shows should not hold unapproved or non-mainstream values and should not verbally assault others on the show as a gimmick to boost their own media exposure. And while no

²⁶ Specifically speaking, the article demands that the participants and hosts pass a certain standard, a "pass," to ensure that no participants with a fake identity or profession are booked; that they are representative of all professions, fields, and layers of society; and that they behave decorously rather than being interested in attacking others during their appearance. At the same time, the host should be virtuous, educated, of noble morality, and publicly reputable.

specific names of participants or episodes are mentioned in this article, given that there were “mediated notorious gold diggers²⁷” in the episodes that preceded the regulative notices, it would not be hard for readers to connect these new standards to the previous transgressors. By equating “correct” and “mainstream” values, without explaining these complex concepts in detail, the regulators compel readers to draw from other pieces in the media discourse to understand what the instructions mean. While there is no way to disprove the correctness of the regulator’s claims, their vagueness allows two possible interpretations: they are either the right thing to do or an arbitrary exercise of power, over which the common Chinese citizens have little influence. This kind of targetless accusation of transgressive behavior also avoids exposing specific dating shows, participants, or people in charge; therefore, it warns a group of shows, as well as the people and institutions connected to them, but still allows those who have deviated from the direction shown in this article to hide themselves among their fellows and hence have their face, or *mianzi*, protected.

The standard for hosts of the dating shows demands proper manners and a positive, uncontroversial public image. However, this paragraph in the report on the notices is significantly shorter than that about the participants, suggesting that the most serious problem is about the participants, each of whom could easily be replaced because no particular one of them is indispensable to the show. Meanwhile, this paragraph also does not specifically define the manners, values, education, or positive image the notices insist on. Such indefiniteness in the text

²⁷ The “gold diggers”, or “bajjinnv” in Chinese, refers to the women who want to marry a wealthy man and share their money as the wives. However, such marriage choices cannot be separated from the social facts that women are still discriminated against in the job market because their time is expected to be occupied by domestic work and maternity leave. While marriage is an institutionalized partnership of men and women, women are carefully disciplined discursively to not evaluate the men’s monetary qualifications.

leaves a lot of space for audience interpretation, and for television producers to find excuses to shrug off responsibilities, potentially displacing blames onto the participants, and most likely the female ones.

Taking on the perspective of the audience, we might join them in asking to know what the “correct” values are that these shows must practice. The “Six Passes” article pinpoints the “wrongdoings” that are “against the “Socialist Core Value System”” and reaffirms that the SARFT units of different levels and the broadcasting stations should adhere to the same value system. This information suggests a correlation between the “correct values” and the “Socialist Core Value System” that was officially proposed at the 6th Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee (To Grasp Construction, 2011), held October 2006. Per the proposal, the core value system is constituted of “Marxism as the guiding thought, socialism with Chinese characteristics as the common dream, national spirit with nationalism as the core, the contemporary spirit of reform and innovation as the center, and the socialist conception of honor and shame” (Dai, & Tian, 2007). This system brings together Marxism, Deng’s proposal, nationalist ethics, economic development, and the “8 honors and 8 shames”²⁸ proposed by President Hu at the same plenary session. The Socialist Core Value System was mentioned again at the 6th Plenary Session of the 17th Central Committee, in October 2011, this time elevated to a position of grave importance. The decision made at this conference proclaimed this value system as “the soul for rejuvenating

²⁸The “Eight Honors and Eight shames” are as follows: Love the country, do it no harm; serve the people, never betray them; follow science, discard ignorance; be diligent, not indolent; be united and help each other, make no gains at others’ expenses; be honest and trustworthy, do not sacrifice ethics for profit; be disciplined and law-abiding, not chaotic and lawless; live plainly, work hard, do not wallow in luxuries and pleasures.

the nation, the core of the advanced socialist culture, and the determining factor for the direction to develop socialism with Chinese characteristics” (To Grasp Construction, 2011).

It is not unexpected to see that the value system incorporated the previous leading thoughts of the CPC while averring the importance of socialist culture, in accord with the CPC’s tradition. Propaganda has played a crucial role in helping the party to gain nationwide support; the Cultural Revolution was about ingraining a new culture of the proletariat; and the notion of a “spiritual civilization” (*jingshen wenming*) was paired with that of the material civilization in Deng’s reform. What is new here, however, is the government’s valuation of Chinese socialist culture above the Chinese economy, a view largely absent from the official discourse since Deng’s reforms. When first defined, the value system was juxtaposed with economic and scientific nationalism, but later in 2011, after the notices regulating *FCWR* were issued, the CPC linked cultural and economic socialism by making the former master over the latter. It did so by characterizing the core value system as the essence (*jingshui*) of cultural socialism and, thus, the guiding principle behind economic socialist development. It is implausible to argue that the CPC proposed the socialist value system as a reaction to the dating shows (as they were before the governmental regulation), or that the shows in any way instigated socialist culture’s sudden supremacy. However, the downgrading of economic development in favor of cultural reconstruction suggests that the CPC has shifted its priority from actual economic growth to perceived growth and to conditioning people’s attitudes. A reasserted socialism, the thinking seems to go, would recruit public loyalty and dispel awareness of, or at least sensitivity to, the escalating gap between rich and poor.

The article about the six passes delegated censorship duty to the major leaders of the television stations that produce and broadcast the dating shows. They are not allowed to use

yuanshengtai, or authenticity, as an excuse to broadcast “wrong” opinions or “inappropriate behavior,” which, as noted, has served as a platform for media hype. However, the requirements for guarding the “pass of content” include keeping the show realistic, rather than enlisting controversial participants or staging their performances for maximal sensationalism. These requirements seems to contradict each other, since one requires realism while the other forbids realism as an excuse for misbehavior. However, unsaid in these statements is what kind of reality is allowed or even preferred in reality shows, only that some forms are expelled as non-real. In a June 2010 interview with *Network News Broadcast (xinwen lianbo)*, Tan Lin, head of the Women’s Study Institute of the Women’s Federation, charged that these dating shows misrepresented (*waiqu*) women, men, and their relationships (News Broadcast on June, 2010). In *Focus Interview (Focus Interview Attacks, 2010)*, Lu Shizhen, vice president of China Youth and Children Research Association, claimed that the money obsession that colors these dating shows is not true. A pedestrian on the street, interviewed in this program, named love (*ganqing*) the foremost factor in searching for a mate, also citing the person’s morality (*renpin*) and personality. Lu Shizhen, a sociologist specializing in children and youth studies, reported that the money-centric standard for selecting a mate pushed by *FCWR* runs counter to the results of her longtime research on youth and marriage. With these statements, the media—both directly and unofficially controlled by the central government and the CPC—is claiming that the people, unlike the participants in the dating shows, value love over materialism in a marital partner and that the dating shows, originating from provincial satellite television networks, are faking participants’ performances and attitudes to incite conversation and boost ratings. In other words, news and investigative news, quasi-organs of the ruling Party, are considered more real than so-

called reality shows; and party-government pursuits are treated as morally nobler²⁹ than those of subjects and companies with individual commercial interests. The CPC is discursively constructed as a Party that represents the basic interests of the majority of people, the advanced means of production, and the superior culture, as indicated in the “Three Representatives” and the CPC’s previous allegations. The CPC, in media discourses, contorts “how the Party should be” into “how the Party is” and therefore stands invincible atop the moral high ground. At the same time, capitalist entities, such as the individuals, companies and organizations in the market economy, are constructed as evil beings that should be repurposed to realize the noble goals of socialist development. Such a binary opposition of socialist government and capitalist freewheelers still persists in the media discourse, even as government organizations (e.g., the Women’s Federation, a self-claimed collective organization which is in fact compliant with the Party and supports its policies) and institutions (e.g., China Central Television) have been deeply entangled with capitalized entities in practice (e.g., survey, commercial cooperation, etc.).

Experts who do not disagree with each other.

Each news article has either one or both of the following two resources from the interviewees to support the argument that the governmental regulation is correct. The first kind is the interview of common people, who supposedly represent the uncorrupted opinion of the majority citizenry. The second kind is comments made by “experts,” including government spokespeople, scholars, and professional social workers. Most of the news articles, and all of the

²⁹ The “moral nobility” describes altruistic living: those impelled by good intentions to help others improve their lives. However, in the context in which this word is used, it also means that a person is not involved in promiscuous sex, but instead lives a restrained private life.

government mouthpiece television programs, offer only information that supports the governmental regulation, hoping to shape popular opinion accordingly.

In *Focus Interview (Focus Interview Attacks, 2010)*, some pedestrians asserted that the current dating shows are not representative of reality and are disliked by most. The interviewees agreed with the experts that the dating shows seems more like performances than authentic matchmaking. Finally, they affirmed that they, unlike dating show participants, value love and personality over money. Some news articles even put the people's alleged views in their titles: for example, "Audiences Criticize Vulgar³⁰ 'Television Dating Show' Rivals" (Zhou, Li, & Cao, 2010, Jun 13). These commoners, as audiences of the show, never spoke against the CPC's decision, or, if they did, their comments were cut during in the editing process.

The people-on-the-street interviews represent the general public, massed and undifferentiated. Meanwhile, people from specific associations stand for a particular kind of people. For example, ministers or the publicity ministry of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions vouch for the views of those in their respective groups. One frequent interviewee on the subject of the regulations was the Women's Federation. In one such interview, the person in charge of publicity for the Women's Federation pointed out:

"Some love and dating shows hype up vulgarity and wrong values and attitudes toward love and marriage. They rely on diminishing women's image and using unhealthy language to earn a higher audience rating. Their behavior has triggered mass attention in

³⁰ Vulgar content, according to baike.baidu.com, refers to the low-culture content that makes people dispirited, in contrast to to the high-culture content that cultivates people's taste and fills them with positive ideas. Vulgar content often describes content that is related to sex. This implies that sex is thought to move people to surrender themselves to pleasure, as drugs might. In fact, pornography (*huang*), gambling (*du*), and drugs (*du*) have been fused together to form a new word, *Huangdudu*, to describe the state whereby person would lose themselves in wasteful pleasure and disengage from normal daily activities.

the society, and is disgusting in the eyes of the women. SARFT's recent documents rectified these shows. This move purifies our sociocultural environment and effectively constructs a healthy, uplifting media culture, and copes with the demands and hopes of all the women." (Zhao, Liu, Pan, & Zhu, 2010, Jun 12)

This anonymous person can more rightly claim to speak on behalf of all women because of his or her position in the Women's Federation. However, all that this person says, as quoted in the article, backs the government. This is symptomatic of the larger trend whereby a limited number of selected interviewees and spokespeople from state-level organizations purported to embody many, and all, without exception, supported the regulation. President Jiang required the CPC to represent the progressive course of China's advanced culture and to represent the fundamental interests, and not strictly the economic needs, of the majority. According to the image manufactured by the Party, the people's interests and that of the government are completely aligned.

Like the anonymous people who claimed to represent the larger public, the experts quoted in these articles and news programs never criticized the government's regulation. Echoing the "people-on-the-street," the head of the Women's Study Institute of the Women's Federation points out that the dating shows misrepresented both genders and their relationship patterns (News Broadcast on June, 2010). The vice president of the China Youth & Children Research Association found the dating show to be at odds with her research results, and asserted that material wealth could not stabilize a marriage (*Focus Interview Attacks*, 2010). An article in the *People's Daily* by Zhao, Liu, Pan, and Zhu (2010, Jun 11) contains comments only from experts in television and the social sciences, including the dean of the Research Department of the Television Artists Association, doctors from the Graduate School of Journalism and

Communication and the Institute of Literature in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and an associate professor from the School of Chinese Language and Literature of Beijing Normal University. Expectedly, these experts, who range across institutions and professional backgrounds, apply their knowledge to back the regulation, in effect, giving the side credibility. The news reports, in another word, do not try to achieve objectivity by acquiring opinions from at least two sides, but function to promote the government's argument as the unalloyed truth. According to the government regulators, all people, irrespective of education or wealth, want television shows to present a positive morality, to truly represent their life, and not engage in the commercially driven distortion of the unmarried and exaggeration of money fetishism in matchmaking.

It would not have been a problem for experts to posit these claims if they had explicated their logic or offered concrete evidence from their research reports. However, they did neither. Instead of giving evidence, the experts merely reiterate the Party guidelines: Television's purpose lies in inspiring the nation and uplifting its morality. In fact, their statements are near-verbatim recitations of the content of the notices, as a report in the *People's Daily* makes clear:

Li Shouzheng, the minister of publicity and education of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, said that the television industry should realize its social responsibilities[. . .] The workers need entertainment programs to enrich their spiritual and cultural life, but what they need are healthy, positive, and pleasing shows for both body and mind, not vulgar shows that meet people's low taste[. . .] Zhang Dexiang, head of the Research Department of the Chinese Television Artists Association, said that it is understandable that television, as a powerful form of media, seeks to increase its audience rating and market gains; the key is not to just entertain people and violate the

basic ethics and values for a higher audience rating. Dr. Ma Zhongjun from the Communication University of China said that audience rating is not the only standard to evaluate the program or a grand excuse to lower the show's taste and use vulgar, fake content to meet the psychological needs of a small number of audiences. (Zhao, Liu, Pan, & Zhu, 2010, June 13)

Because the quotes are one-sided and offer no coherent backing evidence, they do little to buttress the specific argument. But justifying the claims seemed beside the point: the mere presence of experts was a ploy to legitimize a moral-truth regulation of the television texts. Without evidence that could be disproved, the news articles often go into infinite referral; they support the argument of the government with the same arguments offered by the government or even unverifiable hearsay rather than traceable evidence. For example, *Focus Interview (Focus Interview Attacks, 2010)* includes a short clip of Luo Yufeng, the *FCWR* participant, to support expert Lu Shizhen's argument that some shows do set up plants to heighten the drama. Before Zhu's comment, the program shows a video clip of Luo Yufeng claiming that there are performers designated to make the show more sensational. Since Yufeng, also known as Sister Feng (Sister Phoenix), is widely known for being outspoken on her standards for choosing a mate and for overestimating herself, it is quite interesting to see her being quoted by CCTV as evidence that the reality shows have designed the participants' onstage performances. But accompanying this is no detail, no specificity, mere sensationalism by a notorious sensationalist. Once again, no evidence against the show's authenticity can be adduced.

The news articles do not provide enough detailed contextual information for readers to form a finely honed impression of whether the reality is what the Party claims to be, since they include nothing from an alternative perspective, but only information in agreement with the

Party. As a result, the audience/readers have to devote extra effort to digging out and piecing together related information from the media discourses, if not the scholarly ones, to know whether the arguments of the regulators are true. Whether this is the case remains opaque. But what is utterly clear is whom the government blames for this debased state of things: the women participants.

Gender-blind mouthpiece.

By subjecting other news programs to analysis, we can conclude that the regulators are indeed requiring a specific kind of reality to be shown in these reality shows, and the particulars of that reality enter clearer focus. As I have mentioned, the different news-media texts complement each other to construct media discourses about the whole event. The temporarily stabilized media discourse about this regulation is not determined by the party's regulative documents' straightforward intentions; however, the other media texts about the regulation do fill in many of the gaps left unattended by the government mouthpiece media. Gender specification is one of those blurred gaps.

For example, the “six passes” article (2010, Jun 13) criticizes the spurt of fake identities and manufactured media hype, among other misbehaviors, in a gender-blind manner. Whenever gender is mentioned, it is presented impartially as “men and women” or “male and female” (nannv),³¹ with no one gender specifically pointed out. However, the June 11 episode of *Topics in Focus* (*jaodian fangtan*), an investigative news program shown after the prime-time Network News Broadcast (*xinwen lianbo*) and the Weather Forecast (*tianqi yubao*) of CCTV channel one,

³¹ There is a dual-gender word in Chinese that means men and women, or male and female: *nannv*. This word always puts “men” before “women,” so in this article, by using this convenient word, the author naturally puts “men” in front of “women.”

details and delineates the charges by quoting the news spokesman of SARFT, Zhu Hong: “As to the choice of female participants, they need to make sure they are not married. One should never fake the identity of the participants” (*Focus Interview Attacks*, 2010). In Zhou’s formulation, the men are greedy profiteers who, through ignorance or willful indifference, try to cash in by casting women participants who are themselves lying, greedy reprobates.

Despite the lack of convincing evidence, Zhu goes on to critique faking identities in these shows. As he speaks, his words become slippery. He asserts that the young men and women should be single, but begins his statement by noting only the *nvjiabin*, or female participant. The first word of the sentence is spoken immediately after the Sister Phoenix’s clip described above, which is a sign that his words were clipped in the editing process. Therefore, while male and female participants are seemingly treated as equals when it comes to their faults, there is a strong signal, whether given by Zhu or by the program’s editors, that the blame truly should be directed toward the women.

Earlier in this program, Zhu gives three examples of premarital money worship before announcing the name of the show from which these examples are drawn. In the first example, a man stipulates that he would marry into the woman’s extended family only if she had 3 million RMB (about \$500,000); but although neither *Topics in Focus*, baidu.com, nor google.com could find the source of this scene comes from. The second and third examples both come from *FCWR*. In the second example, a male participant asks to hold a woman’s hands; she retorts that her hands are only for her boyfriend or husband to hold, and any other interested party must pay 200,000 RMB (about \$30,000). This is a scene from the 20th episode, and the woman is Zhu Zhenfang.. For Zhenfang’s example, there is little discussion about the extremely conservative stance expressed in her statements: She does not want her body to be touched by a man whom

she has just met. The crazy amount of money becomes the center of attention. In the third example is about a woman, when asked by a man whether she would ride a bike with him, a woman answers that she would rather “cry in a BMW.” This is drawn from the 15th episode, and the words, which belong to Ma Nuo, are cited with little context. Only local newspapers of the city where *FCWR*’s television studio is based explain the context of this incident. In an interview with *Jinling Evening News*, Liu Yuzhe, the publicity planner of Jiangsu Television, explains that Ma Nuo quoted that sentence from the internet before it was amplified online and by some media and thereby became a notorious example of women’s alleged money fetishism (Interpreting “Gold Digger,” 2010). Liu then adds that the hosts of *FCWR* criticized these wrong thoughts, thus correctly guiding the topic. However, instead of explaining her comments as a refusal of a man in whom she is not interested, this explanation effectively removed the responsibility from the producers. Ma Nuo continued being blamed. Even as the focus of that news story is that Ma Nuo did not invent that sentence, and thus the sentiment was not original, this defense does not excuse her from setting money as the leading criterion for marriage.

Other country’s News reports of Ma Nuo’s comment in *FCWR* also do not explain the situation in a contextualized way from Ma Nuo’s perspective. For instance, the *Washington Post* (Richburg, 2010, Jul 5th) reports that a 24-year-old model, without mentioning her name, rejected an unemployed single man in a cruel manner. *Time* (Bergman, 2010, Jun 30th) quotes Ma Nuo’s rebuff of her suitor, but does not mention that she is only the “hearty girl” of that man, meaning that his interest in her is not necessarily reciprocated. In this case, it decidedly is not: She straightforwardly rejects him many times, but he insists on trying to win her heart. The use of “suitor” distracts from the contextual fact that Ma uses this comment to reject a man she does not like but who persists in pursuing her. Admittedly, there are many ways to refuse an admirer,

and Ma's approach would hurt people's feelings. However, it is interesting to see that when her rejection was broadcast online, all the news reports disregard her subjectivity, rush to nail her a "gold digger," and attack her harshly. Whether they have assumed that Ma Nuo's motive is to win more public exposure by being infamous or not, these news reports do not explain the context from Ma's perspective or offer enough information, of which some decidedly exists, to make it possible for readers to hesitate in tagging her a gold digger. The news reports serve to protect the television station's interest (by stoking public speculation) or to use the regulation as an example of the rising class conflict in China and of the government's creeping control over the cultural arena; left unprotected are these publicity-soaked women, who for the television producers are disposable, mere tokens used to signify a group of people or indicate a phenomenon. The limited amount of female subjectivity in their choosing a serious date is submerged in the overwhelming discursive critique of the way these women exploit their power on the stage.

A Morally Noble and Politically Correct Dating Show

Closer to the party and the lower class.

SARFT's notices were issued on June 2 and 8; the episode of *FCWR* broadcast on June 27 introduces a new co-host: Huang Han, a doctor of philosophy in social psychology and professor in the CPC Jiangsu Provincial Committee Party School, which trains CPC officials before they get promoted. Given that the date she recorded her first *FCWR* would have been even earlier than the date the episode aired, it is clear that her invitation to join the show came very close on the heels on the notices' issuance. Unlike Le Jia, she has a certified degree in social sciences, and speaks much more gently than Le. Some articles deemed Huang Han the fire extinguisher for *FCWR* (Li, 2010, July 19), because embodies who the CPC is and what the CPC

wants. Having her is like getting an imperial envoy from the Party monitoring the on-stage performance of *FCWR*.

Hiring CPC insiders is just the first step of keeping up with the Party. *FCWR* also started to host special episodes. The 45th episode of *FCWR*, broadcast on July 18, 2009, focuses on migrant workers, followed by the 46th episode on the same topic. In these two episodes, all the women and men are new to the show. In the opening of the 45th episode, Meng Fei remarks that many migrant workers who competed join the show asked for two registration sheets, in order to keep one as a souvenir. He adds that according to the data furnished by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, there are about 100,000,000 new generation migrant workers, and 80,000,000 are single, the amount of which is equal to the total population of Germany. However, despite the great demand for matchmaking and the rareness of the opportunity to appear on the show, *FCWR* has hosted only two shows to feature migrant workers, and, as if to quarantine them, these shows exclude members of any other social class. The women on stage have only about ten men exclusively of the same class to choose from. While the middle-class city participants have the opportunity for hypergamy, although criticized and stigmatized as “gold diggers”, the migrant workers are systematically deprived of the chance to marry up by the design of the show.

Men’s income and wealth: don’t ask; don’t tell.

Men’s income and property information are a constant feature of *FCWR*’s first 31 episodes, broadcast beginning January 15. This is equally true of the 32nd episode, shown June 5. But just one day later, in the 33rd episode, all such information disappears from the clips; only the man’s position and profession are told. Over those two days came a significant incident that would shape *FCWR*’s presentation through the present day: the issuing of the first SARFT

notice. Beyond the immediately visible effect of eliminating reports of the men's wealth, future episodes allowed the men even greater liberty to be cagy about their wealth. In pre-notice episodes the women never directly inquire into the men's financial situation, because the clips offer such information by default. But after the regulative notices, they expressly cannot ask for such information without incurring rebuke, because the SARFT openly opposes money fetishism. Therefore, the financial status of the men can only be detected indirectly. For example, in the 40th episode (July 3rd, 2010), the first male participant narrates the story of his business ownership: He started as a salesman, was eventually promoted to commodity manager, started his own business, went broke and worked as a construction worker, restarted, and now finally owns a suitcase shop. While his income is not exposed in the clip, the women can safely guess his financial status after so much about his business experience and persistence is learned. In the 60th episode (broadcast on September 12, 2009), the first male, Xian Junchen, states in the clip that he works at an advertisement company and also invested in a spa club. Only when he started his own business, he tells us, did he start to realize how hard it is to earn money. In the past, he would receive 20,000 to 30,000 RMB (\$3,000-\$4,850) at the Spring Festival, as a gift from the senior generation. He regretted spending 7,000 RMB (\$1,130) to buy a QQ live chat number in the past, and he has realized that squandering his parents' money would only provoke people's scorn. Unlike Liu Yunchao, who was attacked both in and out of the show for flaunting his wealth as a rich second generation, Xian does not disclose his earnings or savings or exhibit his cars. Instead, Xian offers a mini-documentary of his career that covers the ripening of his views of money and hard work and describes his growth into a self-made man. From the large sums of money he invested and squandered in the past, it is easy for the women to infer his family's affluence and that he, too, is well-off. However, his attitude and industry positively influence the

women's and hosts' impression of him, with Lee Jia praising him for being independent.³²

Although the hosts also ask him whether he is totally self-sufficient now, no one is reproaching him for, possibly, receiving his initial funding from the family because he repeatedly intones his preference to rely on himself however much his family persists in wanting to support him. As this case demonstrates, when wealth is achieved honorably and as part of one's self-cultivation, it is embraced. *FCWR*'s censors do not deplore wealth, per se, but wealth unearned or ungrounded in a person's own experiences or actions; the show thereby unveils a bit of what is meant by the "core value system" that, per the notices, should be the governing reality in Chinese daily life.

Revelations about the women's finances, however, remains unchanged from the early episode set. In the women's personal profile recorded ahead of the show for the men to check after the three passes, "financial status" remains the first factor listed. All that has changed about the economic status of the participants is detailed income information has been systematically removed from just the men's clips, where it may instead be communicated by somewhat subtler means through a short biography. What has not been changed are the standards and expectations underlying the gender roles on the show: the man must be the responsible provider, and the woman must be financially independent—lest she be tempted to mismanage the family's funds—and also the family caretaker. In other words, the regulatory notices did make the show more sensitive to class differences between men and to women's hypergamy, but did nothing to

³² Interestingly, Le Jia here tells the short story of the snails. He said that the little snail asked him why the earthworms do not have the shell. The mother snail said, because they could drill into the earth, and the earth would protect them. Then, the little snail asked why the caterpillars do not have shells. The mother snails said it is because they could turn into butterfly, and the sky would protect them. Then, she added, "We do not depend on the sky or the earth; we rely on ourselves." *Dwelling Narrowness*, a 2009 television drama which was controversial for its content in high housing price and sex-related content and will be analyzed in the third chapter, included this story in its longer version; while later on, in the short version, this story is cut out by the censors. However, when Le Jia used this story in this episode, it did not raise any questions from SARFT.

increase gender equality or systematically challenge gender stereotypes and may in fact have made them worse.

Be a girl, and do not judge the man by his appearance.

In the episodes before the SARFT notices were , the women in *FCWR* are highly active in expressing their opinions, to make themselves understood not only by the man on stage but by audiences as well, among whom there might be a match. In their hands, they grasp the power to shut off their own lights, and together, they could force a man to leave the stage before he gets to choose which woman to take away.

SARFT's notices mandate that the dating shows exclude any personal attacks (SARFT Issued 3 Notices, 2010, June 13). Yet both the online tips for men to win a woman on the show and the host's suggestions to and prompting of the men liberate men's tongues to speak as they please, in effect redirecting what SARFT critiques about the show—the personal commentary—toward the women. As a result, the women in the episodes after the notices were issued are less straight-forward in their remarks than the men. In the second and sixth episodes, Liu Cheng, a model, participates as a participant. With the first appearance, he seeks to find a match but fails; with the second, he seeks the woman who has been consoling him via QQ (a live chat platform). In the second episode, he receives loud applause when he appears on stage. The notices not yet announced, the women on stage comment on his appearance without reservation. Yang Wenjun admits, “He has dimples, so do I. I think he is very cute.” Hu Yuanjun, who openly declares that she is looking for a flower-like man, concludes, “He is the flower-like man that is popular now. The masculine man is outdated”; she later adds, “You will find confidence in me (because I am not as good-looking as you are).” Zhao Liang asks him, “Are your eyelids inner double-folded? I like men with inner double-folded eyelids and high nose. ” Wang Pu said, “I have nothing to say

other than the title of a film: *Feichang Wanmei* (Perfect).³³ The only negative comment comes from Zhang Xiaoxia, who carps, “He has diamond ear nails. I don’t think this is manly.” Some of the women shut off their light—reject him—for his other characteristics, those less immediately visible. But judging by the voice of the majority of the women, his looks are more a benefit than a detraction for him in the competition. In the sixth episode, Liu returns to the show to identify the woman who has been talking to him via QQ and cheering him up since his last appearance. Although he insists his only interest is in finding this girl, whose QQ name is *Wanzi* (meatball), many women who did not participate in episode 2 still leave their lights on—offer themselves to him—in the hope that he would give up his intention and choose them. In both episodes, and even though not all the women like him, Liu Cheng’s looks are the source of his popularity among the women, and the women, sometimes saucily, are unafraid to voice this.

However, in the episodes after the SARFT notices were issued, the women on *FCWR* continue to acknowledge the men’s appearance but no longer vocalize obvious interest in him for his looks. For the first of his two appearances—namely, the US special of October 9, 2011, and one shown on November 18 of the same year—the male participant Yang Kai is subject to this shift. Yang scores a first impression of 19 lights with just five shutdowns; the man preceding him, has just scored a perfect 24. Zuo Teng Ai (Aiko Sato), a Japanese woman participant noted for her outspokenness and her conservative perspective on family roles, defends her rejection by citing that she is waiting for a man in his thirties, adding, “I think he is very handsome, but he would not choose me anyway.” Ye Wanting turns off her light, explaining, “I am not in the good-looks club. When I see a handsome man, I’m sorry. I really want to have you as my friend,

³³This film’s Chinese name means perfect, while its official English title is *Sophie’s Revenge*.

but not my boyfriend.” Zheng Yanling gibes that he talks like a playboy. Li Mengfei, no. 24, guesses that Yang might work for an investment bank or as a salesman. The women’s comments on Yang’s looks have not been central to the onstage conversation thus far. The host then shows Yang’s first clip, which covers his basic information, including his position on Wall Street, which confirms Li Mengfei’s supposition. Although Yang fails to take his “hearty girl” home in this episode, he later received the most votes in a post-episode Internet election to select a non-winner to be given a second chance. Upon his return, female participant no. 13 adjudges him “too handsome. I don’t feel safe (that he would belong to me).” No. 16 worries, “His thoughts are too deep. I can’t manage it.” When the host asks him why he thinks he won the revote, he declares, “Good looks is the most useless thing for a man. I think it is because of my Wall Street background.” Although Yang is good-looking, he does not recognize this as an asset in his appearance on the show. And this attitude is confirmed by the women, who do not, in either episode, dwell on Yang’s looks as they once moon over Liu Cheng’s. However, when Yang returned, the female participants’ comments are more diversified: some women are not into men’s good looks, and their comments got preserved. Yet, the hosts did not restrain from implying judgments about Yang’s looks. It seems that women are much more strictly disciplined to not overemphasize men’s looks with women themselves being desiring subjects.

The men, like the women, are situated in *FCWR* to be judged by appearance before they can display their intangible qualities like disposition, profession, values, and family background. But unlike the men’s, the women’s comments about and judgments of those men’s looks, previously tolerated by the hosts as men and gentlemen, are condemned as personal assaults in the SARFT notices and implicitly, albeit tightly, regulated thereafter. In contrast, the men’s first impression of the women, or *yanyuan*, is systematically settled as part of the rules of the show:

The men do not have to justify why they prefer one woman over the rest at first sight; while the women are charged to explain why they turn off their lights before learning anything about the men beyond their name, age, place of origin, and, of course, appearance.

Conclusion

As a phenomenally successful and controversial reality dating show, *FCWR* has incited vast and heated news coverage, the scale of which only the aforementioned *Super Girl* could match. In its mission of forming heterosexual couples, *FCWR* positions women and men differently. Although both the men and women are granted a certain degree of agency under the fixed rules, *FCWR* is factory-set to brew media spectacles for publicity and profit, and, it has been charged, the gender gap is often mined for this end. Meanwhile, the government, represented by SARFT, claims to promote an asexual, gender-blind realism that re-affirms the correctness of the Party, as a corrective to the commercialized, dissolute provincial media institutions. But the ensuing regulations have not made the show, and other shows like it, more gender-equal; in fact, the gap may even have widened. Since the regulations were announced, the women have been exploited as disposable resources and receptacle for the criticism the Party has leveled at the programmers, and women's economic dependence on men has been encoded in the revised qualifications.

Men are supposed to be the providers of their families. They are expected to work hard to take this role. The unstable class structure definitely has created more difficulties for men to be economically successful. However, men are distracted from such structural failure of CPC's inability to offer upward class mobility for all, and directed to scrutinize women's pure intention to marry them, despite their financial status. The morality of women not using their marriage to

move up the class ladder is strictly monitored, and harshly criticized once such intention is exposed.

As a result, Neither the hypergamy passes nor the women's gaze back at the men's bodies—both of which, it must be noted, are the prerogative of urban middle- and upper-class women—are acceptable to the state-controlled media discourses. At the same time, while the middle class women are carefully monitored for taking such actions, lower working class women, such as the migrant workers, are systematically deprived the opportunity to marry up, and constantly praised for not being picky about men in all aspects. And while the objectification of men has likewise been discouraged, their space to judge women on their looks without admitting so remains open to them. For women, this option, under the guise of reducing the “personal attacks” that supposedly marked the early episodes, has been closed off nearly entirely. Their voices, the regulations implicitly demand, must be quieted.

CHAPTER THREE

REAL ESTATE AND SEX IN THE CITY: WOMEN'S SEXUALITY AND HOUSING IN *DWELLING NARROWNESS*

Chapter Abstract

In this chapter, I analyze the newspaper reports about regulation of *Dwelling Narrowness*, and compare the two versions of this television drama, to tease out the power relations influence and implied in the regulation of sexually-explicit television shows. I try to answer the following questions. Did the censors responded to the online debates about the sexual scenes in the television drama? What exactly has the censors change about the drama in representation of sexuality and morality? How does the censors change the television drama in terms of gender equality?

I found out that the newspaper articles served to ease audiences/netizens at the time of the sudden termination of broadcasting this television drama in the Youth Channel, but no further editing was done after and as a response to audiences' comments. With no established standard to protect children from inappropriate content, the media institutes act according to different cases. On the other hand, there is a hierarchy of representation of sexuality: sex within marriage is on top; pre-marital sex aiming to get married comes second; while extra-marital affairs and adultery are the immoral and the most despised. The editing done to the story sealed women in a moral position of wife and mother, and emphasized that love and caring are essential and only exist within the wedlock or relationships working towards marriage, The financial difficulties the characters face are underplayed. The scriptwriter and director of *Dwelling Narrowness* provided the censors with extra scenes to choose from when they adjusting the story. The re-censored version of the story supports of the normative heterosexual pro-creative marriage, and promotes

blind trust to the government rather than supervising its actions by ways like online discussions. In another word, the regulation and adjusting of television drama, like *Dwelling Narrowness*, shows tends to bind stable procreative marriage with harmonious society, and divert people's attention from the financial difficulties to moral disciplining of women.

What Is the Sex That Should Not Be Seen?

There is no rating system in China. State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) has divisions to censor television and film respectively³⁴. Unlike their counterparts in the US, by the time the television dramas in China are broadcasted, they are already fully produced. As a result, it is possible to censor the television drama at each step of its production. From the script to the final product to be aired, the television dramas have to get approval from SARFT. Therefore, unlike the reality television shows discussed in Chapter Two, whose production mode denies centralized pre-production censorship, the content of the television dramas has always been carefully monitored.

However, sometimes the dramas already broadcasted are in the danger of being taken off the air for re-censoring, or even banning. This chapter analyzes the case of *Dwelling Narrowness*, or *Woju*, a controversial television drama taken off the air and censored for the second time after broadcasted. The story is about two sisters from a little town trying to settle in a big city, after they finished college education. The elder sister, Haiping, lived a frugal life in order to save for the down payment to mortgage a condo, a necessity for her core family. However, municipal reconstruction and unexpected legal accusations constantly created new

³⁴This chapter discusses a case of regulation of television drama. The next chapter will dig into another case about film censorship and prohibition.

problems for her family to realize their dream. The younger sister, Haizao, has a stable relationship. However, her boss intentionally sent to contact a government official, Song Siming, for the company's benefits, because Song showed interests in her. When Haiping is in trouble, Haizao is willing to help her but is not able to do so by herself; therefore, she turned to her boyfriend for financial support. While her boyfriend refused to help by sacrificing their own wedding deposit, the government official offer to lend her the money. Because of this favor, Haiping was not able to reject Song's proposal to have sexual relationship. She tried to escape from Song but her elder sister's family trouble made her to return to Song for help. Thus, she becomes increasingly dragged into the affair with Song. In the end, Haizao, however, lost her unborn child and her uterus in an accident. She went to the US but returned the money Song took as bribe to the government. In contrast, Haiping, the elder sister, managed to secure a new property and a budding career in teaching Chinese to the foreigners, a job initially introduced to her by Song. The corrupted governmental official, Song, died in a car accident when rushing to see Haizao while being chased by the discipline inspectors of the Communist Party of China (CPC).

Dwelling Narrowness passed each stage of censorship before it was broadcasted at major local terrestrial television stations. As Hung (2011) recorded, this show enjoyed exceptionally high audience rating immediately after it was first shown in June and July, 2009, in Shanghai; its online video version was highly popular as well. However, when it was broadcasted again for the second round at Beijing Television's Youth Channel, it was suddenly cancelled after ten episodes. The newspaper reported many reasons for this retrieval: the video tape has some problem so that this channel had to cancel it (SARFT Denies "Banning", 2009, November 26); there are too many sexual scenes, especially for youth channel (e.g. SARFT Criticizes *Dwelling*,

2009, December 10; SARFT: Satellite Television's, 2009, December 11; SARFT Officer Criticizes, 2009, December 12); some lines are discriminating against Hepatitis B patients (Luo, 2009, December 02); and the story is negatively affecting the image of the real estate companies' image and their lobby influenced the retrieval (SARFT Officer Criticizes, 2009, December 12). If *Dwelling Narrowness* was banned soon after the retrieval, it would be the second television drama which suffered such heavy loss, after *Meteor Garden*, or *Liuxing Huayuan*, was banned in 2002 for "(giving) young viewers "unrealistic ideas about relations between people and society" (McDonald, 2009, March 13). *Meteor Garden*, or *Liuxing Huayuan*, adapted from a Japanese manga series, is about a poor girl accidentally won the heart of a billionaire's son's heart, was pursued by that boy, and eventually happily married him.

Dwelling Narrowness tells a story of many topics. It is about the dramatically increased housing price in the big cities, the government's corruption and power leasing, and young women's struggle to immigrate into places with more professional opportunities, better cultural environment and medical care. Is this show cancelled because of political, economic, or moral reasons? Under the centralized censorship without a written law, what does this case reveal to us about the guidelines used by the censors? Specifically speaking, how are the reported sexually explicit scenes edited? Is such editing and news discourse gendered? *Dwelling Narrowness* was collaboratively produced by Huayi Brothers and Shanghai Media Group (SMG), both of which are large media conglomerates. Unlike content produced by small companies or groups, this show is still widely available online. I could not have compared the two versions of the television drama if one or neither version is fully prohibited.. In the following parts of this chapter, I will review the scholarly works on *Dwelling Narrowness* and related issues, and introduce the social background for the story of the show. After that, I will analyze the news

discourses concerning the cancellation and editing of this television drama, before comparing the differences between the two versions of the show.

It Is Not Easy to Live in Chang'An: Structural Inequality and Women's Sex Capital as a Means of Struggle

In Tang Dynasty, a poet, Bai Juyi went to, Chang'An, the capital of China, to look for career opportunities. He presented his poems to a then famous poet, Gu Kuang, in the hope of being praised and referred by him. Gu took a look at Bai's given name, which means "live easily", and joked, "Juyi, Juyi. The rice in Chang'An is expensive. It is by no means easy to live here." What he did not expect is that Bai became a poet much more well-known than he was. Bai was so popular that it was a joke that he could not settle in Chang'An. However, in circumstances when the price of real estate is formidable in big cities like Beijing or Shanghai in recent years, it becomes bloody difficult for even talented people to settle, since the housing price has been increasing exponentially. This trend started around 2000. The housing price in first-tier cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou started earlier, followed by the second-tier cities, like the provincial capitals. According to Wang, "the housing prices hit a historic high of 25 percent (in 2009)" (2010, April 02). This trend did not seem to stop in most cities even now: "(There) was an increase of 10.7% as compared to the same period of the previous year (2012). Out of the 100 cities, 93 had y-o-y house price hikes" (China Property Boom, 2013 December 12). Yu, from *China Daily*, reported that, "According to the Beijing Municipal Statistics Bureau, the city's average annual income in 2008 was 44,715 yuan at a time urban apartments were selling at an average price of 15,581 yuan per sq m." (2010, January 04) This means the commercially sold condos in the cities, especially the big metropolitans, have become too pricy for middle class, let alone lower class.

Unlike the U.S, most affordable apartments are leased to the tenant by private owners. The tenants only have very limited rights in terms of furnishing or decorating the condo they rent. China is also different from the US. in terms of the location of prestigious universities. The top and key universities and colleges are mostly based in first or second-tier cities. For example, Peking University, Tsinghua University, China Renmin University, and 25 other key universities are located in Beijing. Shanghai has 10 key universities. While Jiangsu, the province with the largest number of key universities, only have 13 institute of higher education. The big metropolis are not only economic centers, but also of cultural importance. This means most students who scored high in the college entrance exam will migrate to the big cities for higher education. After graduation, many of them would stay for the job opportunities and better infrastructure, like the sisters did in *Dwelling Narrowness*. When Haizao was nostalgic while lying on the bed in Haiping's crowded narrow studio home, Haiping explains to her why people like them want to settle in the big cities (Episode one in both versions):

Haiping: Well. Is there any large museum in your home?

Haizao: Nope.

Suchun (Haiping's boyfriend and later husband): Is there any concert in your home?

Haizao: No.

Haiping: Is there a Centennial Pearl Tower³⁵ in your home?

Haizao: No.

³⁵The name of the tower is another sign that indicates Jiangcheng, the city to which Haiping and Haizao tried to migrant, is a pseudonym for Shanghai, because there is a Oriental Pearl Tower in Shanghai.

Suchun: Is there any Isetan Shopping Mall?

Haizao: No.

Haiping: Then why are you still thinking about home? As to the old classmates and best friends, you will have new friends when you stay longer. That is not a problem.

The unbalanced location of resources in big cities created huge immigration in search of higher education. Just like Haiping, Suchun, and Haizao, many college graduates dreaming to settle in these big cities faces harsh challenges from reality. Lian Si (2009) records the college graduates' cramped living conditions in Beijing. "Ant Clans," as Lian terms them, are college graduates between 22 and 29 years old. They could not find a decent white-collar job, and their monthly income is less than 2000 RMB (\$326) on average. As a result, they have to live in the half-rural, half-urban area at the outskirts of the city, or even nearby villages. Each individual's living space is no more than several square meters: "There are cases in which the male dorm has female residents. For example, one studio of less than 20 square meters has four men and a couple living in it" (Lai & Tang, 2009, November 18).

For women in lower class in immigration status as men, there are always other ways to obtain cultural and monetary capital. Pei (2013) recorded how the women in Shanghai, as subjects, use their sexual power to gain both bodily pleasure and accumulate various kinds of capital. Using the concept of "sexual capital", proposed by Martin and George (2006), Pei helped us to recognize that some sexually active women are climbing up the class ladder with their sexual power. Different from the market theory that sees commodification of women's sexuality, Martin, George, and Pei applauded for women's subjectivity manifested in their initiative usage of their sexual power. However, women's ability to cope with the social requirements could not

negate the fact that the social inequality made such choices not as selective options but compulsory ones for them.

When seeking opportunities to use sexual capital to get other kinds of capitals, these women may get involved in a multi-lateral relationship. In China, there are two kinds of identities for women having sex with a man who is married or in a committed relationship: “the little third”, or “xiaosan”, and “concubine mistress”, or “ernai”. Although both of these identities are diminishing these women, the society created separate identifications for them. According to Zhang Weiwei, “the little third” (is) comparatively independent economically, wants love from the man; while the “concubine mistress” is financially dependent on the man and is less emotionally involved in the relationship (2010, August 11). Hung categorized Haizao as Song’s “little third” (2011, p.166). However, in the show, Haizao has been vacillating between these two identities. She was offered monetary gifts and properties, but did try to marry Song after she got pregnant. I will explain more when analyzing the details of the show later in this chapter.

Dwelling Narrowness touched on both the rapid rise of housing price, and the women’s moral dilemma of using sexuality to exchange for economic and cultural capital. As a result, it triggered heated discussion on both topics. How such a controversial television drama was carefully crafted to reach audiences is a question Hung (2011) seeks to answer. She studied the case of *Dwelling Narrowness* to understand how the state and the market strive to control popular consciousness. She teased out the subtle mechanisms utilized by the government and, especially, the producer, director, and script writer of this television drama to air such a realistic and cruel story without creating revolutionary consciousness among audiences. Hung does not distinguish between the two versions of the television drama or dig into the struggle of the female characters of *Dwelling Narrowness*. Targeting the hardcore political economic motive to

control popular culture, she does not take a gender perspective or approach the television drama as a dynamic media text.

Hung argues, due to how Song legitimizes taking bribery in the story, audiences might have started to enjoy *Dwelling Narrowness* “less as an anticorruption serial than as a mafia drama” halfway through it (2011, p. 183); however, we cannot deny that the story covers the defeat and death of Song as a corrupted official and therefore carries many of the features of the anticorruption genre. In this sense, it can be loosely classified as an anticorruption television drama. Bai Ruoyun (2007) noticed that anticorruption television dramas are subject to strict “pre-shooting review and post-production censorship” and that “(c)ensorship can be intense especially when the Party-state’s image is at stake” (p. 160). To earn commercial benefits, the producers must also comply with the state government’s requirement for maintaining and glorifying its public image. In the case of *Dwelling Narrowness*, did the mafia-like plot poked the sensitive nerves of the censors of SARFT? In Chinese condition that principally request pro-CPC, pro-economic-development, and pro-gender-equal media discourse to guide social consciousness, analyze this case would allow us to peep into the delicate unsaid preferences of the censors, who manipulates what we could watch through popular media until today.

The Basic Story of *Dwelling Narrowness*

Before we look into the discussion about this drama, we need to go over the story. Although there are two versions of it, the basic structure of the story remains the same.

Guo Haiping and Guo Haizao are sisters from a teacher’s family in a small town. Haiping is the elder sister. After she graduated from a prestigious university in Jiangzhou, a global metropolitan city, she tried to settle there, and persuaded her mother to allow her more dependent little sister to join her for higher education as well. Haizao managed to score high enough to go

to the same university. However, Haiping failed to mortgage a spacious apartment, even after her little sister graduated. Haizao temporarily lived in Haiping and her husband's, Suchun, rented studio, a 10-square-meter room with shared bath and kitchen. Luckily, Haizao found a job, after giving up finding a position related to her undergraduate major, and met Xiaobei, her later boyfriend soon after that.

The elder sister, Haiping, got pregnant after her sister left, so she launched her apartment-hunting process. Failing to get a more spacious apartment, her baby girl was brought to her parents' home not long after she was born. While Haizao moved in with Xiaobei and enjoyed her time with him, Haiping was struggling to save for her house: she timed the length of calls to her daughter; she biked to work instead of taking bus; she blamed her husband for wasting one RMB (\$0.15); and she tried to avoid paying cash gift to her new college. Even after all of this, she still cannot save enough money for the down payment. Afraid that her daughter will not be close to her after not living with her for many years, Haiping decided to borrow money from her and Suchun's parents as well as from her little sister to buy a condo.

Haizao, on the other hand, was required by her boss to attend dinners³⁶ with government officials, where she met Song Siming, the secretary of the mayor of Jiangzhou. Haizao's boss notices that Song showed special interest in her, so he started to create opportunities for them to

³⁶ In China, as Haiping explained to her U.S. student in the re-censored version, there are dinner parties at which the people of lower rank or those who seek to make a deal with others at the table will propose directly to that person, and get drink with them to make those people happy. Young women are usually asked to attend those parties to entertain the powerful people at dinner. Using women's sexual appeal in such environments are not legally forbidden. In some cases, the women were raped or killed in the follow-up activities. The government-related media condemns the extreme cases that caused women's death, but the informal "escort requirements" continued to exist,

meet. In episode 19 of the 35-episodes version and 18 of the 33-episodes version, we find that Haizao looks like Song's first love, a girl who died at an early age.

Back at home, Haizao asked Xiaobei to lend money to her elder sister to buy an apartment. After originally agreeing to Haizao's proposal, Xiaobei later refused to lend Haiping the money from his saving for their own wedding and house. In the meantime, the housing problem became more urgent for Haiping. Their neighborhood was about to be demolished and relocated to the outer area of Jiangzhou. When Song invited Haizao to accompany him on an errand, he noticed Haizao looked depressed. After he managed to make Haizao confess her concern about money for her elder sister, he offered to lend 60,000 RMB without interest or time limit, and asked Haizao to treat him as her big brother. While Haiping started to search for new apartments with this money, the relation between Song and Haizao began to turn ambiguous. Song's daughter joked that he was already old, and he started to worry about his age, as well as think about Haizao. When he went out to look for her, he found out she was asked to accompany other businessmen in karaoke. Furiously, he rescued Haizao from the situation and sent her home. Haizao sensed that Song might have other unsaid demands from this action, so she started to avoid meeting him. Song was angry that Haizao's boss used her to entertain other men, so he stopped helping him in bidding the land for real estate construction. Haizao's boss, Chen, guessed where the problem lied, so he asked Haizao to contact Song again. Haizao wanted to return Song's favor so that she could no longer feel indebted, so she tried to borrow money from Xiaobei, and he agreed. After Haizao returned Song's money, she went back to her relationship with Xiaobei without worrying about Song.

However, the happy resolution did not last long. After paying the down payment, Suchun confessed to Haiping that the 60,000 he gave her was not borrowed from his parents but from an

usurious loaner. Haiping complained to Haizao about this unexpected new debt. In order to help her elder sister, Haizao went to Song to borrow money. Song not only agreed to lend her 60,000 RMB whenever she needs it, but also offered a Chinese tutoring opportunity to Haiping so that she could earn extra money with this part time job. While Haizao saved her elder sister, she was once again indebted to Song for an amount of money she could not return. One night, when Song was drunk and aroused, he took Haizao to a suburban house where he tried to have sex with her. Haizao resisted at the beginning, so Song paused, gaze into her eyes, then closed her eyes to make it happen. When it was over, Song sent her home. Haizao fled to the bathroom to wash herself thoroughly. Her period also came early. Haizao felt guilty when facing Xiaobei, but she was also relieved, because she thought she had returned the favor. Soon Song sent the money to Haizao. When Suchun returned this money to the loaner through an intermediate person, the audience finds out for the first time that the usurious loaner is Song's wife. Therefore, Suchun actually used the money Haizao borrowed from Song to return Song's wife's usury; while in the meantime, because of this favor, Song got what he wanted from Haizao. Because Haizao's menstrual blood stained the cushion of Song's passenger seat, Song thought he took Haizao's virginity. This becomes the one of the reasons Song wants to take care of Haizao and becomes jealous for her relationship with Xiaobei. Later in the story, by piecing scattered information together, we learn that Mrs. Song³⁷ was not a virgin when she married Song. Her father was of high rank in the military, and their marriage was the result of Song's effort and her father's recognition of Song. It remains unclear whether his father-in-law's position and connections, or

³⁷ Mrs. Song's family name is Jiang. However, the audiences could only get to know this at her father's funeral, which shows his name as Jiang Guihai. Most of the time, she is called as Mrs. Song (Song taitai). Her identity is thus dependent on his husband.

guanxi in Chinese, but Song's repeated suggest that he treasures Haizao's virginity and thus developed a sense of ownership towards her.

After Haiping received her first month's salary as a Chinese tutor, she wanted to thank the person who offered her the opportunity. When Haizao hesitated whether to contact Song or not, she received a call from him. When they met, Song learned that Haiping was looking for an apartment for temporary stay, before they could move into the new condo in less than a year. Song offered an apartment to Haizao. Then, after dinner, Song took her to the same house again and had sex with her again. Haiping became suspicious of the relationship between Haizao and the friend of hers that could lend money, offer a job, and lease an apartment for free. She warned Haizao, but Haizao lied. After seeing the apartment, Suchun began to doubt the reason why Haizao suddenly turned into such an able person, but Haiping found it hard to resist hosting her parents and daughter in such a wonderful apartment during Spring Festival and thus chose to turn a blind eye and accept the offer.

While Song's family life and sex with Mrs. Song turned boring, his relationship with Haizao developed steadily. He gave a card to Haizao for her to purchase new clothes. Haizao bought coats for both herself and Haiping, which made it hard for her to conceal her relationship with Song. Haiping tried to persuade her little sister to stop contacting Song, but instead was forced to lie to Xiaobei for her, saying that she gave these clothes to Haizao.

Haizao ran an errand to Wuxi to solve a dispute. Song got her hotel address from her boss and went to surprise Haizao. He solved the dispute with just several calls. At night, Xiaobei called Haizao when Song was aside provoking her. On the second day, when the dispute was finally settled, Haizao admitted to Song that she likes him.

Suchun brought home money he earned from part-time work. Haiping also accepted another tutoring job teaching a Japanese boy. Because of the heavy tutoring load, she refused to work overtime in her company. After several times, the manager moved her desk right next to the washroom, in order to force her to quit her job. Haizao wanted to help her, but when she complained to Xiaobei, the only answer she got was to give in and not to disobey the boss again. Song called and gave her a useful advice. In the end, Haiping became a full-time Chinese tutor, while Haizao agreed to accompany Song to his reunion. What Song and Haizao did not know is that this reunion is set up especially for Song by the anti-graft investigators to investigate his social relations, because they were already suspicious that Song might be corrupt.

When Haizao was with Song in the hotel, Xiaobei called. Song, out of jealousy, picked it up and implied that Haizao was living with him. When Song returned from the reunion, his wife already knew about his affair from their shared friends. Song told her it was a purely physical relationship. In order to protect her marriage, Mrs. Song told Haizao and Song that they both see their relationship as nothing than sexual pleasure. Out of rage, Song called and met Haizao in his house, and clarified their mutual misunderstanding. When they left, they ran into Xiaobei, who ran away with a broken heart; however, after staying up for a whole night, he went back to Haizao, exhausted, begging her not to leave. Haizao's parents also persuaded her to stop seeing Song and be loyal to Xiaobei. As a result, Haizao made up her mind to leave Song, and stopped contacting him.

Yet, no matter how hard Haizao and Xiaobei tried, Haizao's previous betrayal continues to ruin their mutual trust and their relationship. Xiaobei became very irritable when he thought about Haizao with Song. He even raped Haizao once. Both of them had been careful not to mention Song in order to keep their relationship like before. Haiping's family moved from the

apartment Song lent to them, and started to look for new jobs, only to be constantly rejected. When her tutoring job started to turn more profitable, Suchun was suddenly arrested for leaking confidential information to peer institutions, and could possibly be sentenced for several years in jail. Xiaobei tried to help, but he has limited resources. Haiping's American student learned of the case, and told Song about it. Song arranged a famous lawyer to help Haiping and settled the case by facilitating the merging of the two institutes. Suchun was not only found innocent; he was even promoted, because others thought the reason he could get out of trouble is because he was the little brother of the mayor's wife. When Haizao and Haiping wanted to celebrate, Xiaobei discovered that Haizao still saved a text from Song, asking her to go back to him rather than marry Xiaobei. That was the last straw that made Xiaobei break up with Haizao and leave.

Depressed and lost, Haizao wandered in the street, and went to Song's office without realizing it. Song confessed to Haizao that he, indeed, was the person who helped her family. Out of gratitude, Haizao became his concubine mistress. She moved into Song's apartment, and started to use his money lavishly, as Song requested. Although Haizao no longer has to worry about money, she felt lonely, boring, and jealous of Song's family life. Song tried to keep Haizao where she is. After Haizao got pregnant, Song also felt his career might be in danger, so he promised to leave the city with her and the baby. However, when he solved what he thought was a temporary problem, he ate his words: he refused to leave or divorce his wife, but only offered monetary support for Haizao and the unborn child.

Song's crisis results from a reconstruction project. The neighborhood where Haiping used to live would be wiped out. All the real estate owners would be compensated monetarily. However, not all of the families accept the offer as a fair one. Grandma Li lived in this area with her son, daughter-in-law, and grandson. She refused to move unless the real estate company

could compensate them with a spacious apartment and enough money for her son's family to live in the future, because they had a very low-paying job. Her son is hired as a cashier at and security guard of an internet café. Her daughter-in-law, Ms. Xu, replaces her mother in the factory before she has even finished primary school education. Working as hourly house worker for better-off families, she was only allowed to take home the left-overs as her pay rise. Grandma Li's family becomes the "nail household" for this demolition project. Even after all the other families move and the electricity and water are cut out, under Grandma Li's lead, her family still rejects the agreement. This project is entrusted to Haizao's boss by Song. He also strong-arms the city bank into lending money to this small company, which he then gets to go public in Hong Kong. However, Haizao's boss, Chen Sifu, is not able to get Grandma Li to move, even after she broke her legs and was paralyzed in bed. As a result, he produces the idea of forcefully demolishing the condo. He thought as long as they could knock out a hole on the wall, the condo would be inhabitable, thus they will be forced to leave. Yet, he did not foresee that grandma Li would crawl out of bed to call for help, and die buried in the ruins. Because of grandma Li's death, her family received a big apartment as compensation, and 20,000 RMB to keep their mouth shut on the reason of her death. The party's investigation gradually went more public. Mrs. Song was invited to assist the anti-graft investigation. In order to return the money they took from the government, she sold her mother's and brother's houses, and gave Song all that she had earned from usury. However, when she discovered that Song handed over half of that amount to Haizao, she became furious. She went to ask for the money back from Haizao but lost control after seeing their luxurious life. In a fight, Haizao's protruding belly knocked the edge of a table, and she lost not only her unborn child, but also her uterus in the operation. The man of Haizao's boss were arrested again, so Chen Sifu and Song suspected that Li's family might be

holding some critical evidence. When he sneaked into their new apartment to steal the evidence, he was arrested by the policemen who had been waiting for him. When attending the meeting that announced the punishment to the head of the city bank, Song was notified of Haizao's critical condition. He rushed to the hospital, followed by the anti-graft investigation group. Halfway to the hospital, he received a call that Haizao lost both the baby and her ability to reproduce. In despair, Song let go of the steering wheel, crashed into a truck, and died. Haizao left for United States, with the help of Song's friend – Haiping's student, and asked Haiping to return the money Song gave her to the government.

For both the 35-episode and 33 episode versions, the bone structure of *Dwelling Narrowness* has not been changed. What are the differences between the two versions? How are the sexual scenes and lines changed? Is there any content that has nothing to do with sex been deleted or altered? In the following section, I will explore these questions by comparing the two versions.

Vulgar Content? Public Critique and Local Regulation

Dwelling Narrowness was first aired in June and July of 2009 in Shanghai. Shanghai is also the prototype of the Jiangzhou, the city in this television drama where the story happened. Enjoying exceptionally high audience rating, 7% for the final episode (Lin, 2009, August 10), it also caused heated debates about morality and relationship choices when facing financial and legal difficulties. *Dwelling Narrowness* presented an easy way for women or their family to exchange for monetary and real estate benefits, both of which allowed them to secure a decent living space in the metropolitan area.

The director, Teng Huatao, and the script writer, a Singapore based cyber-writer called Liu Liu, were surprised by audiences' reaction to the characters of the *Dwelling Narrowness*. In

an online survey conducted by Tencent.com in November of 2009, when asked which character they would love if they were Haizao, the netizens chose Song (171298 votes³⁸) over Xiaobei (89222 votes), while Suchun got the least votes (14899), with even less votes than the answer “none” (26177) (Heated Discussion on, 2009). The people who voted against Xiaobei thought he was too selfish; Haizao would not have accepted Song’s money if Xiaobei had agreed to lend her sister the money in the first place (gabrielyu, 2009, November 20). Netizen Hebingling’s response represents many online comments that preferred Song to Xiaobei. She insisted that Song was responsible to the family; while he also loved Haizao passionately and tenderly: “Even though they did not have a happy ending, the process is sweet and satisfactory” (Hebingling, 2009, November 19). The script writer, Liu Liu, said in an interview that, many people wanted her to change the ending into a happy one, but she refused to do so,

“They have true love – this is audiences’ response to me. What is true love? True love means when you do not have the clothes, jewelry, house, etc., you still love this person. Would Haizao do this to Song? You know the answer is no, even if you think with your foot fingers. How could Song attract Haizao if he is not able to give Haizao all these benefits?³⁹” (Yang, 2009, November 17)

³⁸ I accidentally voted to Song by just one click. So by the time I checked the survey result, Song actually got 171297 votes.

³⁹ She tried to guide the audiences’ interpretation here. Such comments also help to explain that she did not intend to promote affairs like the one Haizao and Song had. However, her clarification is in accord with the standard for love which is anti-material. She is describing how love should be. Such definition of love is also promoted by the censors, as we could see from the modifications done from in the second-round censorship. I will explain more in later part of this chapter.

Liu Liu explained that she wants to show there is something good in the bad guys and something bad in the good ones. She also said that she supported Haiping's hard work and choices, and specifically pointed out that there are people criticizing Song at the online forums.

Dwelling Narrowness was first broadcast in Shanghai only. On the second round, the satellite television stations began to show it state wide, showing the 33-episode version. The Film and Television Channel of Beijing Television Station finished broadcasting it on November 15th, 2009. On the second day, the 16th, the Shanghai based Dragon Television, owned by SMG, the producer of *Dwelling Narrowness*, began to show the short version of it on prime time. On November the 18th, the Youth Channel of Beijing Television started to show two episodes of it at 10 pm every night. However, after only ten episodes, this channel suddenly took it off the air, and replaced it with *Jade Phoenix*, or *Feicui Fenghuang*. There are many unofficial stories about the reason for the sudden termination. Beijing Television explained three days after the cancellation that this was the need of unified programming⁴⁰ (Gou & Liu, 2009, November 26). According to other news reports, the reason was because the video tape had some problem that could not be fixed (SARFT Denies Banning, 2009, November 26). Because *Dwelling Narrowness* had previously raised heated debate online for its "bone bareness" (sexually explicit) lines, as Hung (2011) described, there were rumors that SARFT banned it. Liu Liu was surprised to know *Dwelling Narrowness* was shown on the Youth Channel, "Did they show it? Why did they show it on this channel? It is totally inappropriate!" (Suspicious Removal of, 2009, November 27) She also responded to the critique that *Dwelling Narrowness* has some sexual

⁴⁰ Unified programming means that all the shows of the same television station have to

pun, saying that, “I am just writing about real life. What you get from my story is not my business. I am sorry to the innocent audiences.” (Gou & Liu, 2009, November 26) The deputy director general of the SARFT’s Television Drama Department, Wang Weiping, and chairman of the Listening and Watching Center, Jin Wenxiong, told the journalists that SARFT had never banned *Dwelling Narrowness* (Xu, 2009, November 26; SARFT Denies Banning, 2009, November 26; Xu, 2009, November 26; Suspicious Removal of; 2009, November 27). Staff of the chief editor’s office of Dragon Television, based in Shanghai, told *Shanghai Morning Post* that the version they showed had been approved by SARFT; it is a 33-episode version⁴¹, two episodes shorter than the previous 35-episode version that had been broadcast by local televisions and had been circulating online ever since (SARFT Denies "Banning", 2009, November 26). However, both the 33-episode and 33-episode versions could be found on the domestic Chinese websites, like Youku.com and Tudou.com, although it takes some effort to find the real full version⁴². Given that there is no rating system in China, all television dramas are tailored to, supposedly, not offend any specific audience group. Many different television stations also divided into different channels. Some of these channels are named after the content, like Film (and Television) Channel, News Channel, and Sports Channel. Some of them are named after target audiences, like Women (and Children’s) Channel, Youth Channel, etc. It seems appropriate to not show *Dwelling Narrowness* on Youth Channel because of its realistic

⁴¹ Some news reports even said that the version that was shown on television was the 33-episode version; while the 35-episode version was available online but had never been shown to the television audiences (SARFT Denies Banning, 2009, November 26). Yet, the videos circulating online now are only the 33-episode and 33-episode version. It is likely that the 30-episode version is a mistake.

⁴² The websites’ official version is always the 33-episode one. Some of the claimed “full versions” are actually the shorter version, but there are playlists of the 35-episode version of this program which are uploaded by individual netizens, and have not been removed.

representation of the adults' life. However, it is possible that teenagers and children can get access to *Dwelling Narrowness* from other television channels, when not supervised by their parents, or from the internet by using their personal computer. Therefore, removing *Dwelling Narrowness* from the Youth Channel would not necessarily prevent youth from watching the show; instead, it only allowed the provider of such content, the Youth Channel of Beijing Television, to claim that they tried not to let certain audiences have access to television dramas inappropriate for them. Furthermore, the content of *Dwelling Narrowness* was not modified since the Youth Channel's sudden cancellation. This television drama serial was edited into a shorter version before this incidence.

In the next section, I will compare these two versions more closely. However, it is helpful to realize the fact that *Dwelling Narrowness*'s sexual puns have not yielded any discussion on establishing a rating system or standardize the rules for inappropriate content of the television. Whether to establish a rating system or not has never appeared in the news or commentaries. *Dwelling Narrowness* is seen as an exception. The newspaper articles delivered necessary information about the occurrence of this termination and comments from related people. However, all the reports only reported the most urgent problem and their solutions, but did not touch on structural failures, such as the absence of a rating system, SARFT's mistaken approval of such a vulgar television drama for public broadcasting. None of these bottom-up discussions had practical influence to change the television drama. The sexual puns and scenes mentioned in the news stories were deleted in the 33-episode version Beijing Television and Dragon Television showed in November. What was inappropriate to show the youth, as Liu Liu commented, was widely available through other sources. The 35-episode version is still available online. The availability of the full version was never the concern of the censors.

According to *Oriental Morning Post* – a Shanghai based newspaper, on December the 1st, SARFT denied banning or re-censoring *Dwelling Narrowness*, and told the press that SARFT had only required deleting the lines in it that discriminated against Hepatitis B patients, when rebroadcasting it in the future (Luo, 2009, December 02). The lines mentioned appeared in the first episode. When Haizao went to Haiping’s little studio to eat, she grabbed chicken drum stick in the soup without washing her hands first; therefore Haiping educated her, “Eating without washing your hands! If you get Hepatitis B because of this, nobody would hire you!” I could not confirm whether *Dwelling Narrowness* has a second 30-episode version that deleted these lines. However, the 33-episode version circulating on different well-known websites all include these lines. Given the assumed omnipotence of SARFT, it is hard to believe that censors gave orders to ban such content. It is more likely a gesture that claims that SARFT took actions towards *Dwelling Narrowness*, but the focus of their attention lies in the discriminative lines rather than the following situations, as people suspected: the outrageous housing price represented in the drama, and the moral concerns of how *Dwelling Narrowness* might guide its audiences in romantic choices.

However, audiences’ concerns about the high housing price took its form in disbelieving the sincerity of the people critiquing *Dwelling Narrowness*. On December 9th, 2009, Li Jingsheng, the chief of the Department of Teleplay Administration of SARFT, criticized *Dwelling Narrowness* for attracting public attention through “dirty jokes, governmental issues, and sexual topics” (SARFT Criticizes Dwelling, 2009, December 10; SARFT: Satellite Television's, 2009, December 11; SARFT Officer Criticizes, 2009, December 12). He said this at the annual convention of the Television Production Committee of China Radio Film and Television Association. At that convention, six television dramas were awarded “the Most

Influential Television Drama of 2009”. Three of them tell stories about a CPC’s special agent, soldier or general. All of these “influential television dramas” have high audience ratings, but none of them triggered online debate that could possibly lead to negative evaluation of the government or favor of immoral private life choices. They are all “main theme⁴³”, or Zhuxuanlv, dramas, meaning that they correspond to the main focus of the party-state, and promote positive ideas and dreams.

Since Li is an administrator in SARFT, his comments were seen, in the news stories, as both his own opinion, and ideas that could potentially lead to SARFT actions. However, the netizens took Li’s comments personally, thinking that the reason he openly criticized *Dwelling Narrowness* is because he is one of the corrupt, promiscuous officials. According to *City Sun*, the netizens conducted a cyber-hunt (Renrou Sousuo, originally translated as human flesh search) against Li, and exposed online that he has “two luxury houses” (The Department Chief, 2009, December 16). However, one of the houses mention, located in Beijing, actually belongs to Gong Li⁴⁴, a well-known actress; the search engine also shows the other one belongs to some movie stars, rather than Li (It is Actually, 2009, December 15; The Department Chief, 2009, December 16). What drives the circulation of this “rumor” is audiences’ dissatisfaction towards Li’s comments on *Dwelling Narrowness*. A netizens posted online, saying, “The almost pornographic

⁴³ Wang Danyan from SARFT said at the same conference Li attended that the television drama this year are mostly telling realistic stories or narrate the important revolutionary history, and the main theme dramas are of great quality for all the people to learn from (SARFT Criticizes Dwelling, 2009, December 10). There is no official definition of “main theme”; however, the exemplary television dramas are all about the CPC’s and early KMT’s revolutionary histories, the development of a grand, respectful family, the hidden history of CPC spy as heroes, and so on.

⁴⁴ Gong Li was recognized by multiple film awards and audiences in and out of China for her performances in *Red Corghum*, *Ju Dou*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, *Farewell My Concubine*, *To Live*, *The Emperor and the Assassin*, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *Miami Vice*, *Hannibal Rising*, *Coming Home*, etc.

advertisements are allowed on screen, and the fake drugs and goods appear everywhere, but they do not allow a television drama reflecting the difficulties experienced by common people to be shown on TV? This is totally bureaucratic!” (The Department Chief, 2009, December 16).

Even if we do not assume the hypocrisy of SARFT, we could still understand the reason why SARFT’s reaction to *Dwelling Narrowness* was considered self-contradictory in the online discussions. Although one of the co-producers’ stock, Huayi Brothers, was suspended on December 27th, 2009 (Wang, 2009, December 11); other than the retrieval of the drama at the Youth Channel of Beijing Television, *Dwelling Narrowness* was neither banned nor further cut.

The story is said to be adapted from the well-known “Chen Liangyu” case, because the story is close to that case, and the license plate of Song is “Jiang A00029”, which is similar to that of the former secretary of Chen, and later district chief of the Baoshan district of Shanghai. However, the mysterious adaptation did not affect any of the people involved in producing *Dwelling Narrowness*. In June 2013, SARFT approved the project of shooting a film version *Dwelling Narrowness* (Wang, 2013, June 12). However, the media companies producing this film version are no longer Huayi Brothers and Shanghai Media Group (SMG), but Dreams of the Dragon Pictures Co, Ltd from Zhejiang province, which is also the second largest investor of *Cloud Atlas*, a Hollywood film adapted from a best seller fiction, and Beijing Houge Brand Media Co. Ltd. The story was dramatically changed as well, in order to make it more humorous and entertaining. As Hung (2012) pointed out, Chinese media is struggling to pursue commercial benefits but carefully balancing entertainment and ideology in the content. The evidence I have mentioned above shows that, despite the transgressive topics, scenes, lines, and so on, this television drama was not banned or restricted for young audiences. The meaningful editing that has been done to *Dwelling Narrowness* had already been finished before the termination of

broadcasting it at the Youth Channel, or the department chief's critique to it. This is why we need to analyze the differences between the 33-episode and 35-episode versions of *Dwelling Narrowness*, in order to know what is permitted to be shown to and prohibited from television drama audiences.

What Is Vulgar about Sex? The “Sexual” Content Edited Out from *Dwelling Narrowness*

This section offers my analysis of the differences between the 33-episode and 35-episode versions of *Dwelling Narrowness*. The 33-episode version was retrieved from YouKu.com, a Chinese video website. The 35-episode version was retrieved from YouTube. The “Full Version” (*Wanzhengban*) of *Dwelling Narrowness* is also available on YouKu and other Chinese websites, uploaded by individual users. I played both versions simultaneously and recorded the differences. What I provide in this section is an interpretation of the differences caused by the SARFT censors. While the edited version of *Dwelling Narrowness* is shorter than the full version not only removed scenes, but also added and changed some lines, captions, and scenes. Since China is well known for instructing the content of its media (e.g. Harwit & Clark, 2001; Kalathil & Boas, 2001; Chan, 2007), it is safe to say that the SARFT censors values media content's function to guide Chinese people (Hu, 2008) and emphasized appropriate modification of the texts. I cannot decipher the standard SARFT censors are using to evaluate what should be kept and what should be edited out; however, from the differences between the two versions of *Dwelling Narrowness*, we can surmise what kind of content is considered acceptable, by the censors, to be broadcast to undifferentiated audiences. Specifically speaking, I seek to answer the following questions in this part. What kind of sex is considered inappropriate for the general audiences? Is there a gendered perspective that makes the edited version more patriarchal? Is

there a state-national agenda accentuated in the shorter version, thus making the sexual content a camouflage for unsaid political and economic reasons of editing?

Abnormal sex could be done but should not be seen.

In the story of *Dwelling Narrowness*, four couples within main characters had sex: Haiping and Suchun; Song and his wife Mrs. Song; Haizao and Xiaobei; Song and Haizao. Among these four couples, Haiping and Suchun got married in the story, and Song and Mrs. Song married before the story began; while Haizao and Xiaobei co-habited before they finally broke up. Song and Haizao's sex are both out of wed-lock and multi-lateral, given that they are either married or in a stable relationship.

For both versions, sex within wed-lock are not cut out, whether before or after sex, although there is not much bodily pleasurable sex between the couples, except Haizao and Suchun in the early stage of their marriage. This reads like Haizao and Suchun had sex with each other. Before Haiping and Suchun got married, they cohabited, just like Haizao and Xiaobei did later on. In the first episode of both versions, Haizao found condoms in the drawer of their night stand. Suchun pretended to be surprised, saying that it might be something left by the landlord. This suggests that they had protected sex before they got married. However, no sexual scene was shown. After they got married, their sexual satisfaction was indirectly shown. In episode 1, Suchun and Haiping enjoyed their time together after Haizao found a job, and moved out of their little studio. Suchun said, "What a crazy night. It is been so long that I am not used to it now." Haiping laid one of her arm on Suchun's chest, and smiled satisfactorily. Although both of them are in bed with only a quilt covering their body (Haiping's chest was covered while Suchun's was not.), this scene was preserved for both versions. They, as married couple, could be shown

sexually satisfied, which also partly contributes to the story, indicating how the limit of living space curb the satisfaction of bodily desire.

Song and his wife, as a married couple, are shown attempting to have sex but failing several times in their daily life. For example, in episode 14 of both versions, Mrs. Song tried to caress Song in bed, indicating that she wants sex that night. However, Song refused. Mrs. Song gave up and said, “I am only doing this because we haven’t done it in months. I felt guilty for you. If you don’t want it, fine.” Several episodes later, when Song had demands, and started kissing Mrs. Song’s body down into the quilt, Mrs. Song gasped. Song get out from the quilt, and asked what happened. Mrs. Song said their daughter is taking a quiz tomorrow, but she could not remember where she put their daughter’s assignments. Then Song lost interest in continuing. In both scenes, Song and Mrs. Song could not meet each other’s bodily desire. Song only initiate when he wants it; while sex for Mrs. Song becomes, or claims to be, a woman who is not driven by desire, but by responsibility, both to her husband and her daughter.

While Haiping and Suchun’s marriage features some mutually satisfactory sexual scenes, Song and Mrs. Song’s life does not. Other than the failed attempts, in the only other sex-related scene, Song raped his wife. In episode 29 of the full version and episode 28 of the shorter version, Mrs. Song wanted to divorce Song, so he forced himself on her, because he does not want a divorce. Mrs. Song cried and punched him, “You are so dirty!” However this scene is not deleted, even though it represents sexual violence within marriage.

Nor was the scene in which Song raped Haizao cut out. In episode 12 of the full version and 11 of the shorter version, Haizao had no other way but to ask Song for the 60,000 RMB to return the usury Suchun borrowed, after she returned Song’s 60,000 RMB with part of Xiaobei’s deposit. Because she borrowed such a large amount of money (in her mind) but could not return

it, she knew she has to return the debt in some other ways. Song was half-drunk when he took Haizao to his secret house. He stripped off her clothes and pushed her to the ground, wanting to have sex with her by force. Haizao resisted, and created some degree of difficulty to hinder his action. As a result, Song paused, forced Haizao to shut her eyes, then, continued. In both scenes, how the women, Mrs. Song and Haizao, resisted sexual intercourse, and how the man, Song, forced the women to give up to his power, are included in both versions.

Compared to rape scenes preserved in both versions, what is cut out in the shorter one? It seems that erotic scenes, where women's sexual bodies became the focus of audiences' gaze, were on top of the list to be cut out. Immediately following the scene Song had sex with Haizao for the first time by force, partially facilitated by the benefits he gave Haizao, the screen is divided into three in the full version, and two in the 33-episode version. What these two versions have in common are the smaller screens showing what Xiaobei and Mrs. Song were doing at the same time respectively. However, the shorter version does not have the divided screen showing Haizao's facial expression during the intercourse; while the full version does. Haizao was shown from above the chest, without any clothing. While the scene in which Song is lying over Haizao, and ripping off her clothes, is preserved; this scene, shown in contrast to Mrs. Song and Xiaobei's innocence to Song and Haizao's relation, is completely cut out from the shorter version. Haizao confessed, later on, that she felt guilty when facing Xiaobei, because he was kind and caring to her, but she committed adultery with Song on the floor in such a chilly day and caught a cold. However, without the scene showing Haizao's facial expression, what is left in the short version could not indicate Haizao as a subject of adultery. She was forced, or, in another way, she could not fight against Song because of the money he promised her. Even

though cutting that scene might make the story line and the character's reflection more confusing, that scene is still edited out.

Haizao's facial expression during the intercourse could be seen as both erotic, or proof of her willingness to get involved in this relationship, if her moaning and gaze to the other side are read as compliant. Whether the reason is the former or the later, from comparison of the two versions, we could see that Haizao could not be too erotic, or to initiate sexual bodily interactions with Song. A well-known scene, later used in the news reports as evidence that *Dwelling Narrowness* had too much sexual content, was already modified in the 33-episode version that was broadcast by the satellite television stations in December 2009. In episode 15 of the full version and 14 of the shorter one, Xiaobei called Haizao to tell her that he was suspicious of the relation between Haiping and her American student, Mark. Haizao was running an errand, with Song right next to her on the bed. Out of jealousy, Song started to give oral sex to Haizao. In the full version, Song ducked under the sheets. Audiences could see Haizao's facial expression changed as Song continued working under the quilt. She could not help but moan. Xiaobei asked her what is wrong. She lied that she ran into the counter, and finished the conversation abruptly. Then, she accused Song of being possessive. In the 33-episode version, Haizao's moaning was saved, but what happened on her side of the line could not be seen. Only Xiaobei's face and setting are visible to audiences. Although when Haizao's weird sound alone in the shorter version could be very confusing – Haizao could have really knocked into something – the visual scenes are still cut out. There is another option of editing this part: the censor could request cutting out the moaning sound all together. Then, what is left in the short version would be that: Xiaobei told Haizao about his concern of her elder sister, while Haizao is impatient and afraid he would know about Song and notice that she is not alone, so she finished the conversation bluntly.

In this case, this part would not contain any sexual content. However, this is not what the 33-episode version has for audiences. From the fact that scenes including Haizao's facial expression when bodily aroused are cut out, we can hypothesize that faces of a women during sex, whether forced or in sexual pleasure, are considered inappropriate to be shown to general television audiences. When her moaning is separated from her facial expression, the sound she made could be disguised as non-sexual both to Xiaobei and audiences.

Not only Haizao's aroused facial expression could be excised, so could the scene showing that she initiated intercoursed or seduced Song. For example, in episode 13 of both versions, Haizao and Song are shown flirting with and kissing each other. However, that Haizao was turned on, took off her clothes, and kissed Song back was cut out in the shorter version. In episode 15 of the full version and 14 of the shorter one, when Song flirted with Haizao over the phone, asking about the local weather and if she is naked, she will catch a cold. Haizao replied, "I am totally naked, no clothing at all." All of these have been cut, and replaced with a scene that appear later in the full version: Haiping on a bus, thinking about what Haizao told her, "I think I kind of like him. It is exciting to be with him." Then, it turned out that Song visited the hotel Haizao was living to surprise her. The scenes of them kissing out of surprise and joy were cut out.

In some cases, Haizao initiates sexual contact right after Song offers some benefits to her. In episode 17 of the full version and 16 of the short version, Haizao called Song to ask how she could help Haiping to quit her job but still gets her annual bonus. Song told Haizao that she could fake her medical condition, then Haiping asked Song to call the doctor and arrange the note. In return, she offered to "reward him at night". This offer is cut out. Later on, the full version showed the unmade bed and Haizao feeding Song with fruits while lying on his lap. The

short version does not show the bed or that Haizao is on Song's lap, which may lead audiences to believe Haizao was only lying on the sofa, talking to Song. Also deleted is the part in this scene where Haizao told Song that, "Debt of gratitude, I return with my body (Renqingzhai, wo rouchang la)." By editing these lines out, Haizao is represented less as a woman who learned how to use her body to trade for benefits, but more like a recipient of the benefits that Song offered to her – i.e. from active agent to passive recipient. The 33-episode version also weakens the impression that Haizao became a woman who knows that she could use her relationship with Song, when she could not escape from it. At the same time, because she, or her body, is the indicator of sexual pleasure, her naked body or facial expression during sex could not be shown on the screen. When Song and Haizao had sex for the first time, her clothes are stripped off while Song remained fully dressed up: during the whole process visible to audiences, Song had only torn off his tie, but Haizao was shown topless from above her chest in the full version. When she is sexually aroused, she took off her own clothes (episode 13) and kissed Song, rather than disrobing Song. As a result, when sexually explicit scenes are cut out, Haizao's part becomes the first to be cut out. Song is involved in this sexual relationship, but his body is never bared even when Haizao is half or fully dressed. His desire is shown in his conversation with Haizao, or in his act of approaching her. His sexual behaviors are prevalent in this television drama and have pushed the storyline forward, his desire not visually presented with his aroused body. He is the only one in the story that worries whether he is too old and not as sexually competent; most of the time, he represents power. Therefore, Haizao's body becomes the lodestone of censorship; while Song's sexual body, in the shorter version, is connected to power and force—not a subject of protest for the censors, who are demonstrably more concerned about the show's sexual explicitness.

Further evidence that all the scenes are edited to be less erotic is that some lines are moved from their most relevant context, which reappeared in posterior scenes and episodes in both versions. For instance, Haizao told Song that she would repay her debt with her body (episode 17 of the full version and 16 of the shorter one) after Song said it is not good that Haizao takes for granted every favor he could do for her. In the shorter version, this sentence was deleted from this scene, which could make audiences imagine what they have done in the room before this conversation. However, later on in Song's memory, this sentence of Haizao appeared in both versions. Although it is the same sentence, it is detached from its immediate context, therefore what Haizao did to "return the debt with her body" refers more vaguely to their relationship, but not to any concrete sexual intercourse.

The abnormal sex, which should not be seen, is the sexually explicit intercourse between Song and Haizao. Deleting related scenes leads directly to cutting off more of Haizao's aroused body, while Song's sexuality is expressed in words, rather than through his body. Sexual violence is not categorized as vulgar and is preserved in the re-edited version.

The Premarital relationship between Xiaobei and Haizao: more gratitude, less sexual passion.

Although not amoral, Xiaobei and Haizao's premarital relationship, which aspires to official marriage but has been interrupted by Haizao's affair with and Song, is modified to involve less romance so that it would not give people goosebumps.⁴⁵ For example, in episode 26 of the full version and 25 of the short one, when Xiaobei finally loses hope in his relationship

⁴⁵ When lines or scenes are cheesy, it is said to "give people goosebumps" (Rouma).

with Haizao, he leaves their apartment without telling her. Haizao mourns their lost love in that room. The full version only shows Haizao touching the possessions she and Xiaobei shared in their room, and she is very sad. In the episode-33 version, when Haizao is shown remembering her time with Xiaobei, the screen also displays scenes of their happy past. As the background music plays on and on, three scenes from previous episodes are inserted into the current storyline. All of these scenes are added to this part of the shorter version as well.

However, two of them are cut from the shorter version in previous episodes, when they are to be part of the main action; therefore, they only visually occur here in Haizao's memory. In the first scene, originally included at the beginning of the fourth episode of the full version, Haizao and Xiaobei are fertilizing the flowers on the balcony. Xiaobei holds an egg, then puts it into the pot after Haizao adds some artificial fertilizer. Xiaobei coos, "Guo Haizao, you care much more about the flowers than me. When would you look after me so attentively?" Haizao responds, "I take care of them because they blossom. Could you? Show me if you can." Xiaobei murmurs, smiling and acting like a blooming flower, "Guo Haizao, Guo Haizao, Guo Haizao!" He goes on to perform the official Qing palace greeting to the higher-ranked royal concubines, "I can do more than blossom; I can greet you as well! Haizao, Haizao!" Haizao laughs, "You big petunia flower!" Then she jumps onto Xiaobei, and he carries her into the room, as they begin to discuss their plan for that day. In the shorter version, the balcony is edited out, but Xiaobei's "blossom" scene pops up in Haizao's reminiscences of her time with Xiaobei.

The other scene appears in the fifth episode of the full version. Haizao is watering the flowers on the balcony. Xiaobei carries a badminton racket like a rifle and approaches Haizao from behind. He pokes Haizao's lower back and warns, "Robbery (dajie)! Raise your hands. Bend down slowly (Geiwo guaiguaide paxia)!" Haizao knows that the robber is Xiaobei

playacting, so she bends over. Xiaobei smacks her bottom and says seriously, “Give me your fucking money, not yourself (Laozi jiecai bujiese)!” Haizao retorts, “I’ve only got my body, but no money (Cai meiyou, se daoshi youyidui ne). Could you get something other than money (Yaobu ni huange jiefu)?” Xiaobei chides her, “You little evil spirit (Xiao yaojing)! If a hoodlum meets you, he would be doomed (Yaoshi nage liumang yujian ni, na zhenshi mingzhong buxing a)!” Haizao turns around and knocks his head, declaring, “You are that very hoodlum! Go cook for me!” In Haizao’s memory scene in the short version, this sequence reappears without the sound, like a short dumb show, with background music. Without the lines spoken in the full version, the sexual joke in which Haizao, the woman, manages to get the upper hand over Xiaobei, the man, by being sexually initiating, is suppressed, replaced by an display that is intimate and playful but also uncontroversial.

Intimate acts and fondling jokes—without bodily exposure—are cut from the edited version, but scenes in which Xiaobei talks about sex indirectly are kept in both versions. In episode 6 of both versions, Xiaobei complains that Haizao’s boss required her to accompany him to dinner with important clients and governmental officials. He said that he planned to “aiai” (make love) tonight but had to get a rain check because of Haizao’s overtime work. Sex, when iterated without sexual context or profane words, is preserved.

While sexual passion expressed in intimate interactions are edited out of Xiaobei and Haizao’s relationship, the shorter version adds some scenes that are not included in the full version to show familial affection between them. In episode 25 of the short version, after their breakup and Xiaobei’s sudden departure, Haizao remembers the happy times they shared. As noted earlier, two of the four scenes inserted into the 33-episode version do not appear in this version; the muted, tailored, and de-contextualized encompassment of these scenes removes the

potential poignancy from them. Before these two scenes, Haizao also recalls how Xiaobei bought her one scoop of Häagen Daz strawberry ice cream, which is so expensive (25 RMB, or \$ 4.07 per scoop) that it was luxurious for them to enjoy it. After the two modified scenes, the short version also adds a scene in which Xiaobei cries upon discovering the affair with Song but confesses that he nevertheless does not want to break up with her. This is the only recollected scene that has sound. Xiaobei declares, “My son is Beckenbauer.⁴⁶ My grandson is Beckham. Come on, you are the mother of my son, and grandma of my grandson. Please forgive me, Haizao. Haizao, please forgive me. I didn’t mean what I said. Please do not break up with me.” Mixing this scene with sound in the stream of Haizao’s memories emphasizes Xiaobei’s wish to marry Haizao and pass on his bloodline through her. This signifies a reliable future for her that she regrets destroying it by adultery. In episode 34 of the full version and 32 of the shorter one, Haizao meet Xiaobei and his new girlfriend on the street. Haizao overhears Xiaobei proclaiming, joyfully, that his son will be Beckenbauer, and his grandson will be Beckham. Then Haizao wails, knowing that she has lost her chance to have a normal, happy family with a reliable man like Xiaobei. The future Xiaobei envisions for himself and his spouse is one that includes only his male descendants, while the spouse, or any replaceable woman, appears and is respected for reproducing within wedlock. Moreover, such a future is represented as desirable, and Haizao deeply regrets wasting it. When Haizao overhears Xiaobei talking about his future son and grandson with his new girlfriend, she thinks “she lost her eyeball of the fish”; this alludes to an earlier anecdote that she tells her older sister. While eating, Haizao relates a story in which a

⁴⁶ Xiaobei’s family name is Bei. “Beckenbauer” is translated into Chinese as “Beikenbaoer,” and Beckham is “Beikehanmu”; therefore, in declaring that he wants to name his son and grandson after them, Xiaobei is still able to pass on his last name.

married man gives his ex-girlfriend fish meat, but reserves the eyeball of the whole fish for his wife at the table, because he thinks the eyeballs are the most delicious part of the fish. When Haizao tells Haiping this story, Haiping emphasizes that the fish, the material base, is absolutely necessary. What the eyeballs stand for is the wife herself, a person to whom the husband gives what he thinks is the best, rather than what society values the most. In this sense, Xiaobei and Song both treat their wives in the same way. In episode 31 of the full version and 29 of the short version, the censored version edits out Song's philosophy of how to treat the wife (and her children) and the concubine(s) (and her kids). Haizao thinks that Song loves only his wife because he determined not to divorce her and marry Haizao. To this, Song tells a story about a rich man who bequeathed his business, money, and property to the children of his wife, rather than those of his concubine, because his wife has responsibility to the family. Song wants to follow this man's example and give Haizao and her child freedom and wealth, rather than forcing her to share the danger of his career and familial responsibility as his wife. What binds the husband and wife together is not sexual passion, but matrimonial duty.

In *Dwelling Narrowness's* story, the importance of familial responsibilities is accentuated through the addition of scenes of Xiaobei taking care of Haizao. Although they cohabited before marriage, their relationship is respected more highly than that between Haizao and Song, since Xiaobei and Haizao were planning to get married as single man and woman. In line with this, the shorter version embellishes their relationship with additional caring scenes. When Haizao mourns her happy time with Xiaobei, the 33-episode version has three visual and one visual-audial scenes glamorizing their relationship. In episode 12 of the full version and 11 of the shorter version, when Haizao returns raped from Song's house, she has a fever, and her period arrives right after intercourse. The short version adds 20 seconds of Xiaobei using the

thermometer to measure Haizao's body temperature, then bending down and reporting to Haizao, "38.9 degrees (Celsius)!" His caring attendance to Haizao right after she was raped—or, in her perspective, committed adultery—is highlighted by extending the scene.

In short, as the shorter versions make clear, sex between two single people in a stable relationship who plan to marry is praised over extramarital affairs like that between Haizao and Song. Marriage and premarital relationships involve both sex and mutual caring, but the sexual aspect is underplayed in premarital cohabitations. The re-edited version adds scenes to emphasize warmth and affection between premarital partners. And when sex is exhibited, that which occurs between happily married spouses like Haiping and Suchun is the least edited. Their sexual satisfaction and the half-naked bodies of both husband and wife are shown. Still, lines that involve children, like Suchun's joke that Haiping will "talk to the little boy about condoms" are cut out.

Song and Haizao shall not contaminate the word "love."

While the caring between Xiaobei and Haizao is highlighted in the second version, scenes of Song's sponsorship of Haizao are completely eliminated. The only exception to this is how he uses his power to help her and her older sister, but the inclusion is less a product of censors' approval than of the severe plot discontinuities that would result from its removal. In episode 31 of the full version and 29 of the short version, after Haizao becomes pregnant and Song asks her to keep the child, he returns to the spacious apartment he had lent to Haiping's family before moving Haizao there. He brings home what Haizao wants to eat on that day, chestnut, before she even asks for it. He also purchases cake; ice cream; plum candy (which helps to stop nausea); vitamins for pregnant women; spicy food, on the chance she prefers that flavor because she is having a baby girl; and a radiation protection suit, to keep her from electromagnetic radiation.

The existence of this scene makes Song seem more like a warm, caring, and responsible husband-like lover—rather than one who offers only money and shelter for Haizao—with tender plans for their child. Even though such delicate care is bound up with Haizao’s reproductive ability, rather than her wisdom, career, or other things that are irrelevant to her sexually appealing body, such an attentive man as husband is desirable in normative marriage. Haizao herself seeks such a man, and has been asking Song to divorce his wife and marry her; it is only after Song commits risky career decisions that his attitude toward this question shifts in Haizao’s favor.

By deleting the touching moments of Song and Haizao’s life after she moves in and officially becomes his concubine, their relationship lacks the details that allows space for audiences to interpret it as one of genuine love. In fact, Song’s pronouncement about love in the full version is wiped out. These deleted scenes fall into two categories. The first category involves his pleading and cajoling Haizao to declare her love for him. The second category involves Song’s theory about how a man should treat a woman if he loves her.

Examples of the first category are scattered throughout Song and Haizao’s relationship. In episode 13 of the full version and 12 of the shorter one, Song and Haizao have sex after she visits Song to thank him for introducing Haiping to the Chinese-tutoring part-time job. The shorter version shows Haizao getting dressed in the bathroom; in the full version, they were shown lying on the bed, half-naked. As Haizao stares emotionlessly at the ceiling, Song gazes at her and asks, “Say you love me.” Receiving no response from Haizao, he caresses her cheeks and adds, “You will say that one day.” In episode 13 of the full version and 12 of the short version, the deleted scene shows that Song calls Haizao and asked her if she misses him. In episode 18 of both versions, Song differentiates himself from the other guys, who “act like they

love their lovers but in fact only have sex with them (tamen he qingren zhishi fengchangzuoxi).” Later on in the same setting, the shorter version removes Song’s plea, “I sincerely ask you to be my lover (*airen*).”⁴⁷ Here, the Chinese *airen* is a word people use to refer to their married spouse rather than their extramarital lover.

In episode 19 of both versions, Mrs. Song manages to drive a wedge between Haizao and Song by telling each that the other person does not love him or her but only wants sex. After this, Song and Haizao meet in Song’s house. In the full version, Song hugs Haizao and tries to calm her down, and he then declares, “I’m sorry, but I do love you.” The shorter version retains Song’s pledge to protect Haizao forever and what his earlier comment that he cannot not love her. However, the sentence wherein he positively affirms his love to Haizao is cut out. For an audience watching *Dwelling Narrowness* on television, it would be hard to notice the awkwardly re-edited episodes. An astute online viewer, however, might notice that right after Song declares that he would take care of her for life, there is a one-tenth-of-a-second blink of the caption reading “but I do love you.” In grammar, there is no difference between the double negative sentence and the positive sentence. However, contextually speaking, that a person responded with a double negative sentence does not certify that he or she has confirmed the required thing but has only disclaimed the negative. Song’s statement “It is not possible that I don’t love you” is more indirect, and possibly evasive, than its affirmative counterpart “I’m sorry but I do love

⁴⁷ There are two Chinese words for “lover”: *qingren* has the same meaning as *lover* in English, and refers to someone who has a romantic, sexual, and usually secret relationship with a person; *airen*, which is composed of the characters *ai*, or “love,” and *ren*, or “person,” is a gender-blind word referring to one’s spouse, and was widely used in the Socialist era.

you.” For this reason, it is more acceptable to Party censors and therefore preserved in the short version.

In episode 26 of the full version and 25 of the shorter one, about six minutes of the 35-episode version are removed. In these six minutes, Song asks Haizao to start looking for new houses and purchase one if she likes. After this, they have sex, shown as they kiss and head to the bed together. Song demands that Haizao declare that she loves him, and she does. The next morning, Haizao regrets she has become an official concubine mistress. Song asks her to stop speaking of herself that way, and calls her his “Achilles’ heel.” It is clear that Song’s persistence is designed to elicit confirmation from Haizao that she loves him, but such an entreaty is excluded from the shorter version. Allowed there instead is Song’s claim of ownership over Haizao and his boast that he matured Haizao from “a pure little girl” into a woman. Prohibited is his effort to exalt their relationship to one of love. Because love has been used to justify the unbalanced power relations within marriage, such a sacred word and the emotion it stands for cannot be associated with Song and Haizao, who have committed adultery.

Song is also not allowed tarnish the fruits of love, the children, because of his aberrant relationship. In episode 30 of the full version and 29 of the shorter one, Song returns home despairing about his career, because he suspects that the Party has investigating him. Haizao then reveals that she is pregnant. In both versions, Song demands that Haizao keep the child, but Haizao still has doubts that a child might prevent her from leaving him, should she have to do that in the future. In the full version, Song continues to persuade Haizao, offering that, although he had promised Haizao everything but marriage, with the arrival of this child, he could give up his career, leave with them, and finally marry her. He looks into Haizao’s eyes and declares, “If one loves another person, he would make her give birth to his baby. We will water this flower

with our blood. Then, we will never be apart.” In this case, Song’s declaration of love to Haizao invokes the child as proof of its sincerity. However, the child’s illegitimacy and Song’s extramarital affair with Haizao renders their love a “knock-off.” Although they, as sexual partners, are reproducing, the marital status of Song and the impossibility of a pre-pregnancy marriage certificate, or even an immediate planned wedding before the birth of the child, identify their relationship as deviant and “unloving,” unlike that shared by married couples. As a result, this scene, just like others in which Song professes his love to Haizao, did not appear in the shorter version.

The second kind of scene is always connected to materialistic offers that Song makes to Haizao. In episode 17 of the full version and 16 of the short one, Song gives Haizao an envelope full of cash, after she has surrendered and become his concubine mistress. The short version omits Song’s theory about the correct way for a man, particularly one of means, to treat a woman: “I know this seems lame, but if a man loves a woman, he must make her live a materially sufficient life. There is nothing I can give to you other than this. Please do not turn it down.” It also eliminates Haizao’s claim that her affection for Song is non-monetary: “I have never thought about getting anything in return for being with you.” However, the short version does keep Haizao’s admission that, while she does not need his money, she would accept it if he felt like the money would be safe in her hands. Both of them profess that they truly love the other one, but their ways of showing love are different. Song manifests his love by giving Haizao abundant money, because he cannot marry her. Haizao rejects this explicit monetary offer to prove that she loves Song himself rather than his money, despite her already having accepted living in the apartment he offered. In episode 33 of the full version and 31 of the shorter one, Song reiterates his theory of taking care of both Haizao and her child for life by offering money.

He gives Haizao a large amount of cash and tells her to entrust it to Haiping, in the instance that he is hit by a car or becomes chronically ill and could not continue supporting her. Haizao thinks his concern lies with the child and so is blind to his possible true motive: he is in danger of imprisonment for corruption. This scene of Song donating his money to realize his promise to Haizao and their unborn child satisfies the standard of a responsible husband figure in marriage; therefore, his deeds are highly regarded, as evidenced in online comments that Song is a man more responsible and generous than Xiaobei or Suchun (e.g. gabrielyu, 2009, November 20). The shorter version removes this touching scene, focusing instead on Song's paternalism toward Haizao's teenage daughter. In the last episode of both versions, Song is critically hurt in a car accident after he lets go of the steering wheel upon hearing that Haizao has lost both her child and her uterus. The short version adds a narrative voice over and caption that say, "Tingting (his daughter's nickname), Dad is sorry to you. Although my last choice was cowardly, it was my instinctual decision out of desperation. Dad could not accompany you when you grow up, but you must remember your dad's lesson, and do not repeat my mistake." Redirecting the outflow of Song's caring from his unborn baby carried by his concubine mistress to his daughter and adding his apology and words of comfort and guidance, the shorter version channels love to the children born within wedlock and an honest government, in which government officials do not commit the same mistakes Song did, and implicitly, to an morally integral normative marriage.

In the full version, Song's theory Song about the duty of a man to provide a material base for the woman he loves is also reiterated by Haiping. These lines and their accompanying narrative voices are all removed from the shorter version. In episode 10 of both versions, Haiping quarrels with Suchun over borrowing money for the downpayment on their new

apartment. When Haizao tries to assuage her down, she responds with her own theory about how a man should love a woman:

“What is love? Do you know what love is? Love is the trick men use to make women marry them. They tell you, ‘I give you my heart, so I will belong to you forever.’ He says this because the only thing he has is sweet nothings. What use there is to say something like this? If you are really capable, if a man loves a woman, say nothing but offer a stack of cash. Make her feel safe. Then, give her a condo. If you hurt this woman, her body would have somewhere to go to, even if her heart is broken. That’s a man. That’s what a man should do. Otherwise, why do you get married? If you could not even feed your family (hai chibubao), why marry a woman? To make her suffer together? You call it love if you endure hardship together? Then, I would rather not have such love.”

Later in the same episode, when Xiaobei refuses to lend Haiping 20,000 RMB (\$3,255) to cover their downpayment on the condo, the two versions differ on what comes next. In the full version, Haizao recalls what her older sister told her about love and money, agrees with Haiping, and sighs, “It is true. For only 20,000 yuan,⁴⁸ Xiaobei showed his true colors (Cai ququ jiwankuai, Xiaobei jiu luchule tade zhenmianmu).” In the short version, both her recollection and her siding with Haiping’s opinion are cut out. In episode 11 of the full version and 10 of the shorter one, after Haizao witnesses Haiping and Suchun quarreling over one yuan (\$0.16) and

⁴⁸ Haizao does not indicate the actual amount of money in her Chinese lines. Instead, she says, it is just *jiwankuai*. “*Kuai* corresponds to “bucks” in US English. *Jiwan* refers to a number from 10,000 to 100,000. Therefore, it is not clear how much money she was talking about. The amount she refers to might be 20,000 yuan, which is what Haiping has asked to borrow, or 80,000 yuan, the total amount of Xiaobei’s savings, which is how much Haizao requires from him.

Xiaobei buying a flower for one yuan, she wonders if Xiaobei's one yuan would become her sister's one yuan in the future. The shorter version deletes the narration that remarks, "When a man wants to coax a woman to go into the tomb (marriage⁴⁹), he always disguises it with some flowers. Because you would not fear it if it is camouflaged." This philosophy of love links money and real estate, bought with money, with love, as its indispensable condition. Both Song and Haiping have been educating Haizao in this theory. Song does so because he positions Haizao not as his wife or future wife, but as someone of whom he takes care. He has benefited from the real estate development of this city and therefore praises this system, but his full-version comments about the unavoidable poverty bred by such development are cut out from the shorter one (episode 11 of full version and 10 of the shorter one). And Haiping, once an aspiring new immigrant to the metropolis, has hardened into a cynical calculator of gains and losses, because increases in housing prices in the city are drastic and unreasonable. She blames the unequal economic development that downgrades her living condition to that of the working class like Grandma Li's family, but she can do nothing to change the structure. What she can do to improve her lot is to put her faith in hypergamy, which, as an impossible wish, creates tension in her core family; even many of her complaints disappear in the short version. The re-edited version disallows lines that connect money with marriage or highlight concubine relationships, thus indirectly discourages gaining wealth through hypergamy or through being someone's mistress. Furthermore, love is constructed as a kind of affection toward another person despite his (or her, but mostly his) economic and political status. In other words, love is contrary to one's financial status, and in *Dwelling Narrowness's* case, anti-wealth. For example, in episode 31 of

⁴⁹ Here, the "tomb" refers to marriage, because "marriage is the tomb of love."

the full version and 29 of the shorter one, when Suchun and Haiping discuss Haizao's sudden pregnancy out of wedlock, Haiping declares that she would not disapprove if Haizao truly loved Song, but she would not love him if he is uncorrupt or not a government official. In this scene, Haizao refuses to define her relationship with Song as founded on love. Only when detached from the man's wealth, Haizao asserts, can such affection fall into the category of love. Haizao and Song's relationship violate this definition from both sides; thus they can have practical sexual relations, but they cannot claim or admit to love each other, even if they say so.

A story with less active, less critical women.

Changes between the two versions made to scenes depicting sexuality, marriage, and love demonstrate that there is an axiom of what constitutes a moral, valued, sexual relationship: it must occur within wedlock, be reproductive, and feature familial responsibility and caring rather than sexual passion (although the latter is included if the other standards are met). If such editing is not gendered enough, further modifications made in less-sexual scenes offer much more concrete evidence.

In episode 7 of the full version, Haizao's boss orders her to stop what she is doing and visit Song, but she refuses. As a result, her boss is forced to visit Song by himself. In episode 6 of the shorter version, her boss goes directly to visit Song without asking Haizao and incurring her rejection. The immediate context of this deleted scene is that Song has taken Haizao away from a dinner with other businessmen to which her boss had asked her to accompany him, and Haizao realizes that Song might have feelings for her; she therefore has begun avoiding him, even at work. Removing the scene of Haizao's rejection of her boss's entreaty stripped away yet another layer of agency.

In episode 10 of the full version, Aunt Xu quits her job as an hourly paid housekeeper for a family. When Grandma Li complains that she has given up too easily particularly in light of the punishing job market, Aunt Xu rebuts her mother-in-law's complaint: "I've never disliked your son for earning so little. Yet, you despise me for such reason." In episode 6 of the shorter version, Aunt Xu's rejoinder to Grandma Li, her deflection of the blame from herself to men of supposedly equal status, is removed.

In episode 19 of the full version and 18 of the shorter one, when Song brings Haizao to his college reunion, his former classmate, who is also his wife's best friend, remarks that everyone is having his second honeymoon with a young woman. Then, she turns to her husband at the table and admonishes, "You dare think about it." In the shorter version, this saucy, assertive comment of hers is eliminated. This version also adds a scene in which, later during the reunion, the men gather in the game room. One man chides Mr. Fan, Sun Li's husband, for bringing his wife to the reunion, to which Fan answers that if Sun had not come, neither would have their once campus queen. He goes on to ask Huaiping what he now thinks about the back-then beauty, and Huaiping waxes sentimental that time could age such a pretty girl so dramatically. The man who challenged Mr. Fan observes, "Of course! Constant dripping wears away a stone. How could you expect an adorable girl still be like that after 20 years! Look at yourself! It is a welcoming gesture for her to come in the first place. Back then, you couldn't even peep at her if you did not have a ladder." They laughed. The man continues to warn Mr. Fan, asking him not to let his wife to gossip about the reunion, because it would destroy the social harmony (hexie shehui). The camera turns to Song when this man says this. The organizer agrees: "You jackass. You shouldn't ambush us like this. We should punish you to drink more. You are obviously not in the same trench with us. Brothers, shall we ... kick him out?" They all

stand up and pretend to carry him by the limbs and throw him out. In a “realistic” way, the scriptwriter represents the highly gendered and morally vague norms of the dinner party in China (even if the setting is a reunion). These scenes are not removed but added to the re-censored version; therefore, such a norm is not withheld from view, but even encouraged to be visible.

While this new scene in the shorter version does mention the male aging process, it does so only in the context of pointing out the unflattering fact of *women’s* aging. More gender-biased changes crop up Sun Li’s conversation with Mrs. Song. In episode 21 of the full version and 20 of the shorter one, Sun Li and Mrs. Song meet and talk about Song’s reunion. In the full version, Sun Li complains that the former campus queen did not reject the man, Mrs. Huang, who was nobody back in school; however, Huang now started to pick on her sagging breasts. Mrs. Song and Sun Li lament that, without plastic surgery, it is not possible for women’s breasts to always look like those of teenage girls. They satirically comment on men’s “thing,” which is not made up of fat and would not stand up unless filled with blood. They laugh, “It is not fair to ask us to not become saggy while their thing is just hanging over there all day.” Sun goes on to speculate that Mr. Huang might be dissatisfied because his former classmates are with young girls, while he could only manage a “withering woman.” Mrs. Song sigh that a man could always find a woman with young breasts and closes the dialog with the remark that once men are privileged enough to have choices, they attempt to make up for their youth, which they did not have time to enjoy. How the women commented on aging issues were cut out with lines that included breasts and penises. Sun Li’s lines about the women lowering her standard while the men picked on her were all cut out. Similarly, in episode 22 of the full version (episode 21 of the shorter version) Sun Li’s comment was partially cut out. She told Mrs. Song that they should try to punish their adultery husbands by leaving them; otherwise, “they would thought they can be a

playboy outside the family, then come back to the harbor we maintained”. All the lines within the quote were removed. In episode 30 of the full version (episode 28 of the shorter version) Sun Li advised Mrs. Song not to divorce Song, because it would benefit him more than her. The shorter version eliminated Sun’s comments: “Well, we keep rejecting the divorce. We keep saying no. When he is too old to stay sexually active, we will see if he would come back home or not.” One of *People’s Daily’s* commentary could help to explain why Sun Li and Mrs. Song’s conversation was partly cut out. It published a commentary that sees the values in *Dae Janggeum* (*Jewel in the Palace*) is more correct than that of *Zhenhuan Zhuan* (*Empresses in the Palace*) (Tao, 2013, September 19). *Dae Janggeum* is a Korean television drama about how a woman survived in the cruel environment in the palace. No matter how others set her up, she always cling to her integrate morality, and has always been kind to people, even those who hurt her. *Zhenhuan Zhuan* is a popular Chinese television drama adapted from an online fiction. Zhenhuan, the female protagonist, married to the emperor as his lower rank concubine empress. Inevitably entangled in the conflicts and traps in the palace, he gradually learned to ambush other women while making herself look not only innocent but gentle, caring, and understanding in the emperor’s eyes. Tao criticizes that Zhenhuan is battling evil with darker evil, and such values should not be promoted. However, the path found by Zhenhuan, Haizao, Haiping, Mrs. Song, and Sun Li, all of who are alike in that they could only fight for their own benefits within their contingent patriarchy, are all discredited as amoral, despicable, or silenced in popular media text. The suppression these women suffer are two folds, including both sexual exploitation and class suppression. To use their sexuality in exchange of upward mobility in class is a venue used in practice but disdained officially and normatively by the government, without pointing out the realistic material quagmire that pushed them to search other no-less-hurtful choices.

State-Nationalism Smuggled into the Shorter Version under the Cover of Censoring Vulgar Content

Although the netizens doubted that the regulation of *Dwelling Narrowness* is related to the housing price and government's corruption, the newspaper articles only mentioned the sexual content and the modifications to be done about the lines discriminating against hepatitis B carriers. Close comparison of both versions of the drama shows that the second round censorship has changed the details of the television drama in order to control the information exposed to audiences, and guide them to judge the destiny of the characters in preferable ways. These changes fall into the following categories: emphasis of exporting Chinese culture; removal of the details of how the housing demolition office and anti-graft investigative groups operate, as well as potential platforms for democratic actions; and muting of excessive complaints about economic inequality and housing prices.

First, Haiping's Chinese tutoring job offered an opportunity for Haiping to explain the language and the culture, including social norms. The scriptwriter selected jokes that are sex related. The "wearing condom" example that I mentioned earlier is an example. Another example is that Mark, Haiping's student and Song's friend, asked Haiping about the meaning of "yinwei (because)", but Haiping heard it as "yangwei (men's sexual impotence)" (episode 14 of the full version, and 13 of the shorter one). The shorter version changed the caption into two characters that pronounces as *yangwei* but means "central" and "fake". In episode 34 of the full version and 32 of the further edited one, Haiping introduced to Mark the "business drinking culture". She pointed to another table, and told Mark that drinking and dinning together in a great atmosphere does not mean that they are good friends, and that the woman proposing a toast to the seemly-higher-rank man was feeling uneasy but had to do so because of this cultural norm.

This scene defines the drinking culture that uses women to please the powerful man at the dinner table as Chinese specific culture, without criticizing it. The producer of the television drama provided such scenes when shooting it, so that the censors could add it to protect the gendered culture in the name of nationalism.

Second, the complaints of Grandma Li and Haiping about social equality have been cut out. For example, Haiping grumbled that experts said the real estate market just stepped into its spring, while in fact the price is already unbearable for white-collar workers like them (episode 3 of both versions). 40,000 RMB (\$6,500) is a huge amount of money for Suchun's countryside parents but means almost nothing in the big city; while the condos' price might double soon, the locally-born colleague of Haiping has never worried about buying an apartment to get married (episode 3 of both versions). Haiping surrendered to the existing structure since the fourth episode. She said she was willing to sacrifice both her parents' and her generations in order to relieve her daughter from the burden of buying houses in the future. However, she was critical of the party's policy, saying that "serving the people" should change into "serving the people who get better off ahead of others" (episode 7 of both versions). Unlike Haiping, Grandma Li seems to attribute the reason of social inequality to people's different destiny. She blamed her daughter-in-law that she is a doomed person, because all the factories she entered went bankrupt after a while (episode 5 of the full version, and 4 of the shorter one). Nevertheless, she knows the stake she has -- the small condo, and tried every means to win more profit for the family in order to secure their future. Her theories and calculation in episode 4, 6, 17 (16 of shorter version) and 18 (17 of shorter version) are removed. Both Haiping and grandma Li's agency is strictly restricted. As tough women, they found their way to gain more profits, but could do little to change the structure.

Third, the strategies of both the much blamed demolition office and the anti-graft investigators are eliminated. The housing demolition office intentionally cut the electricity, water, and gas of Grandma Li's little condo, in order to get them to agree with their offer and move out (episode 5 and 17 of the full version, and 5 and 16 of the shorter one). The anti-graft investigative group followed Song and the people around him, and recorded the time and place they meet (episode 23 of the full version, and 22 of the shorter one). Because the details of both the governments with negative or positive public image are removed from the television drama, it is more likely that the censors care about not leaking such details to the general public. While the shorter version preserved Haizao and Haiping's mother's saying that Song's power is given to them by the people, it deleted the Party's secretary general's theory that the netizens could supervise the government with online discussion (episode 33 of the full version, and 32 of the shorter one). Therefore, while re-affirms the party-government's power being essentially for the people, the censors hid the specificities of governmental action. What audiences, as part of the people, could entrust the administrative power to the party and its member, but has little evidence to intervene or give suggestions. At the end of the last episode, the shorter version added captions to the scene showing Haiping heading to the court to return the money Song gave to Haizao. The caption says:

“The people involved in Song Siming's case are all arrested, including the former vice mayor of Jiangzhou city, Zhang Zhenguo, the former Jiangzhou City Back head Xie Kun,

Song Siming's wife, Jiang Miaomiao,⁵⁰ lawyer Chen Xingguo, president of Dajiang Real Estate company, Chen Sifu, president of Tianda Real Estate company, Zhang Hongsheng. The procuratorial organ has initiated public prosecution against them.”

These complemented captions make clear that the corrupt and misbehaving people will all be punished by the powerful and upright party-government. The changes made from the 35-episode to the 33-episode version molded *Dwelling Narrowness* from a fiery romantic drama into an advertisement against corruption and aberrant sexuality.

Conclusion

Gayle Rubin points out that there is a sex hierarchy (1993/2007) that glorifies procreative sex as good sex, while promiscuous heterosexuality and unmarried heterosexual couples, occupy the vast gray zone, to be judged by their individual contexts. The changes made to *Dwelling Narrowness* show that unmarried heterosexual couples who plan to marry fall into that zone, while promiscuous heterosexuality, like extramarital affairs, is condemned both within the story by the people with heteronormative, procreative marriages and outside the story by the censors, who ordered changes to the drama to avoid presenting such practices in any positive light. The economic difficulties for the new immigrants to settle in the big metropolis by owning a real

⁵⁰ Interestingly, this is the first time that Mrs. Song's full name is revealed to the television audience. If the audiences have seen only the longer version, they would not even know her full name. At her father's funeral, her last name is disclosed because her father's full name was Jiang Guihai. However, it is only in the last caption that her full name appears. Grandma Li's last name is Lin, but most of the time, she is simply called Grandma Li, just as Jiang Miaomiao is called Mrs. Song.

Another interesting point is that Mrs. Song's name takes the form of ABB, meaning that her given name has two identical characters. This is an unofficial way to identify children of military generals and high-ranking government officials of the socialist era. For example, granddaughter of the former vice chairman of the National People's Congress, Wan Li, is named Wan Baobao. The former Chinese politician Bo Xilai named his little son Bo Guagua. Born into a prestigious family, actress Kelan's registered name is Zhong Haohao. A daughter of the famous Ye family was Ye Qingqing. Jiang Miaomiao's name implies that Song might have exploited her father's connections to get promoted much faster in the government.

estate property pushed people to search out alternative ways. The women are active in securing a future for the family, despite their class differences: Haiping turns to relatives for help; Grandma Li insists on getting a better offer from the demolition office; Haizao uses her body to solicit down payment for her older sister and later to secure a financially satisfactory life for herself and her unborn child; Mrs. Song uses her money to profit through usury and sells her mother's and brother's houses to help Song return the bribe he accepted. Even though Haizao, among all of these women, get entangled in promiscuous relationship for multiple reasons, she was most condemned for using her sexuality as commodity. The modifications of this television drama try to divert the focus away from the rising housing price, which is the reason for immoral choices of young women like Haizao. At the same time, the censors accentuate "pure love" of procreative heterosexual marriage. Only such a marriage, and a premarital relationship destined for such a marriage, could be founded on love. The sexuality of these marriages and relationships is reduced, while the gratitude, caring, and warmth are highlighted. The government solves the regulation of sexuality by practically transmuting this problem into one about the relations between stable heterosexual procreative families (even if they are just core families) and the sustainability and peace of the government. The gender issue is involved in this structure, but the censors are not concerned with solving it or even depicting it accurately and affectingly, often sacrificing it in the name of keeping a stable family. The gender issue is not an issue for administrative control by the government; the issue that the regulators have been trying to solve is about using moral regulation of women both on screen and off screen to ease temporary tension.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROHIBITED TRANSGRESSOR: THE AWAKENED FEMALE MIGRANT WORKER IN THE “PORNOGRAPHIC” FILM *LOST IN BEIJING*

Chapter Abstract

In this chapter, I analyze the case of *Lost in Beijing*. This film went through five rounds of censorship, and was finally banned after about a year. By analyzing the news reports about the censorship of and prohibition against this film, I try to figure out the standard for the regulation. I found out that the regulators have much more power to act without through explanation for their actions. They are both the regulators and who provide the legal and administrative ground for their action. The legal restriction of content that should not be included in the films encompass a wide range of topics and scenes, thus made the movie practitioners trying to test the bottom line of the regulations at risk of being punished. However, I argue that both the film and the prohibition of it left spaces for hope. The unapproved version of the film survived through piracy in websites banned in China. There is hope in the most restricted situations.

The First Film Banned After Public Release in China

On January 3rd, 2008, The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) issued a notice to ban *Lost in Beijing*, or *Pingguo*. This film was released on November 30th, 2007, after five rounds of censorship and editing. It was nominated for the Golden Bear Prize at the 57th Berlin International Film Festival, and has won the Jury Prize at World Film Festival of Bangkok, Screenplay Prize at the New York Tribeca Film Festival, and Best Actress at the 4th Kazakhstan Eurasia International Film Festival. When banned, its box office was close to 20,000,000 RMB (about \$3,248,000), which is a decent number for non-commercial films: Jiang

Wen's *The Sun Also Rises* got 20,000,000 RMB box office as an art film (e.g. Xie, 2007, October 18). All the existing copies of the film were retrieved; its online circulation was terminated; the related administrative units are required by SARFT to stop producing its audio and visual products.

In this chapter, I analyze the public prohibition against *Lost in Beijing*, the newspaper articles about censoring, editing and banning of this film, and the online full version of this film. The goal is to track the reason for this prohibition, to discover the damage and change brought by banning this film, and to interpret the feminist potential in its story and the sexual scenes of the full version.

The “Impure” Female Workers Representation in the News

The protagonist of *Lost in Beijing* is a female migrant worker called Liu Pingguo. Migrant workers are sometimes called as peasant workers. The latter identity, in Chinese, is “nongmin gong”, which usually refers to male migrant workers. The term for migrant workers that include both men and women of this group is “jincheng wugong renyuan”, which literally means “people who go to the cities in search of job opportunities”, but only includes people from the rural area without receiving higher education. The television dating show, *If You Are the One (FCWR)* discussed in Chapter Two, used “jincheng wugong renyuan” in its special episode to refer to both male and female migrant workers. There are also gender specific identities assigned to each gender of the migrant workers: “dagongmei” for women, and “dagongzai” for men. While “dagongzai” is more frequently used in southern China; “dagongmei” is widely used more frequently in news reports and academic literatures. The gendered character “mei”, which means little sister, extends beyond “dagongmei” to construct other gendered identities. For example, Liu Pingguo is identified as “xijiaomei” (Zong, 2007, January 24). “Xijiao” is her work, foot

massaging, while “mei” points out her gender as female. More recent news stories have created new identities such as “changmei”, or factory girls, to mean, specifically female Foxconn workers in its city-like giant factory in Shenzhen (Shenzhen “Foxconn factory, 2014).

Although there are alternative genre of literature that empowers the female migrant workers (Jaguscik, 2011), in the popular media discourse, what these “mei” have in common is that they are reported as under-educated, victim of sexual violence, and morally self-abandoned sexual bodies (e.g. Fu, 2009; Yin, 2014). There are huge amount of stories about female migrant workers suffering from sexual violence such as rape (e.g. Hu, 2003, April 21; Survey Shows 65%, 2007, March 19; Feng, 2010, August 31) or are forced into sex slave (e.g. Liao, 2011, November 16). It is even more often to see them becoming single mom because the father of their newborn left before they gave birth to the child, or get pregnant before marriage (e.g. Liu, 2008, August 6; Feng, 2014, April 12; Wu, Wei, Liu, Feng, & Qiu, 2014, March 16). Although the news reports do condemn the violators and men who have unprotected sex, it is not unusual to see newspaper articles begin to blame the victims with details and judgmental sentences:

The judge thought that in these two cases, the *dagongmei* killed their newborn baby because they are ignorant about the law, struggling to survive, and have low social status. (Wu, Wei, Liu, Feng, & Qiu, 2014, March 16)

“Many *dagongmei* become a weak sheep when facing sexual violence.” Chairperson Zhang Xiaoji said that many criminals violated them again and again because they know the female migrant workers do not dare instigate trouble[. . .] Apart from the fact that many *dagongmei* do not bravely protect themselves, they are also reluctant to see the doctor at women’s health when they get gynecological disease” (Survey Shows 65%, 2007, March 19)

Some news articles did mention the importance of sex education, and the practical difficulty that created the ignorance about sex among the female migrant workers; however, they still concentrate on educating the women, rather than men or the social structure. In *Lost in Beijing*, actress Fan Bingbing played a foot masseuse. Some news emphasized the huge differences between Fan and the character she played in the film, Liu Pingguo, in class. Yet, *Lost in Beijing* represented female migrant workers' life without accusing the women involved. Before analyzing the film, I will clear up the process of how this film was banned.

***Lost in Beijing* Got Lost in Inconsistent Government Reactions**

Flashback: the first film banned in theater, online and on audiovisual copies after public release.

After five rounds of censorship, *Lost in Beijing* was released to the general audiences on November 30, 2007. Thirty-three days later, SARFT briefed the public on how they dealt with *Lost in Beijing*'s previous misbehavior. Unlike how it treated television dating shows like FCWR, this brief (Guangdianzongju Guanyu Chuli Yingpian Pingguo Weigui Wentide Qingkuang Tongbao, or SARFT's Brief on Decisions to Deal with Pingguo's Misdeeds) was posted on SARFT's website. It says that *Lost in Beijing*'s main problems are as follows:

1. Producing pornographic scenes (unapproved by censors) in film and audio-visual products, and uploading unapproved pornographic film onto the internet violated the 25th article of the *Regulations on Administration of Movies (RAM)*.
2. Sending unapproved version of the film to compete at the 57th Berlin International Film Festival violated the 24th and 35th of the *RAM*.
3. Promoting the film in unhealthy and illegitimate ways when publishing and playing the film violated the 3rd article of the *RAM* and related articles in the *Advertisement Law*.

The *Regulations on Administration of Movies*, cited in this brief, was in effect since its last revision by the State Council on December 12th, 2001. According to the English version of it translated by the World Intellectual Property Organization, the three articles *Lost in Beijing* violated are as follows:

Article 3

People engaged in the activities of production, import, export, distribution and projection, etc. of movies shall abide by the Constitution and relevant laws and regulations, and shall adhere to the orientation of serving the people and serving socialism.

Article 24

The State applies a movie examination system.

Movies, which have not been examined and adopted by the movie examination institution of the administrative department for radio, movie and television under the State Council (hereinafter referred to as "the movie examination institution") shall not be distributed, projected, imported or exported.

The import of special topic movies for reference in scientific research or teaching and the import by China Movie Archive of archival movies shall be in accordance with Article 32 of these Regulations.

Article 25

The following contents are prohibited from being recorded in a movie:

- (1) That which defies the basic principles determined by the Constitution;
- (2) That which endangers the unity of the nation, sovereignty or territorial integrity;
- (3) That which divulges secrets of the State, endangers national security or damages the honor or benefits of the State;

- (4) That which incites the national hatred or discrimination, undermines the solidarity of the nations, or infringes upon national customs and habits;
- (5) That which propagates evil cults or superstition;
- (6) That which disturbs the public order or destroys the public stability;
- (7) That which propagates obscenity, gambling, violence or instigates crimes;
- (8) That which insults or slanders others, or infringes upon the lawful rights and interests of others;
- (9) That which endangers public ethics or the fine folk cultural traditions;
- (10) Other contents prohibited by laws, regulations or provisions of the State.

The technical quality of movies shall be in conformity to the State standards.

Article 35

Whoever intends to hold a Sino-foreign movie exhibition, international movie festival, or to provide movies to a movie exhibition or movie festival, etc. held outside the territory, shall report to the administrative department for radio, movie and television under the State Council for approval.

The movies prepared for movie exhibitions or movie festivals provided for in the preceding paragraph must be submitted to the administrative department for radio, movie and television under the State Council for examination and approval. After a movie prepared for a movie exhibition or movie festival held outside the territory has been approved, the participant shall go through the temporary movie export formalities at customs with the approval documents by the administrative department for radio, movie and television under the State Council. After an overseas movie prepared for a Sino-foreign movie exhibition or international movie festival held inside the territory of China

has been approved, the holder shall go through the temporary import formalities in the customs with the approval documents by the administrative department for radio, movie and television under the State Council.

Article 3 emphasized that the film should serve the people and socialism. This is a general article that showcase the main direction for all movies. Article 24 required that the distribution, production, importation and exportation should get approval from the State Council first. Article 35 stated that films to be exhibited in film festivals should be get approval from the administrative department for radio, movie and television under the State Council first. These two articles requires the movie producers to get approval from the State Council before producing or exhibiting any version of the film. Article 25 stated the scenes prohibited from being included in the movies. It is not clear which of the ten (eleven, if the technological requirement is taken into account) paragraphs under that article. All these articles that SARFT said *Lost in Beijing* violated indicate that the producers, directors and distributors acted without getting due approval from the related administrative department in the government, and that the content of the film was problematic. However, it is not clear how did not serve the people, or what part of the content included the prohibited kinds of scenes.

In order to understand what exactly in the film disobeyed the content requirements, I looked further into the other regulative documents mentioned in the brief: *Provisions on the Archival Filling of Film Scripts (Abstracts) and the Administration of Films (Provisions*, the current version of which was approved by SARFT on April 3rd, 2006, and effective since June 22nd, 2006); *Measures for the Administration of the Publication of Audio-Visual Programs through the Internet or Other Network (Measures*, the current version of which was published by SARFT on July 6th, 2004, and effective since October 11th, 2004); *Notices of SARFT Re-*

Emphasizing Prohibition on Production and Exhibition of Pornographic Movies (Re-Emphasizing Prohibition), posted on SARFT website on December 29th, 2007; and *SARFT Notices on Enhancing Administration of Television Program and Film Online (Enhancing Administration)*, posted on SARFT website on December 29th, 2007. *Re-Emphasizing Prohibition and Enhancing Administration* was posted by SARFT's website on the same date, only 5 days before the prohibition against *Lost in Beijing* was published. *Re-Emphasizing Prohibition* even cited *Enhancing Administration*, although the latter was published on the exact same day. Both SARFT notices included regulation of online audio-visual content; while there is another ministry in charge of internet issues, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT). SARFT is a ministry-level branch of the State Counsel, which means it is at the same rank as MIIT⁵¹. SARFT's *Enhancing Administration* notice cited a document published by MIIT: *Notice Regarding the Launch of the Special Action Against Online Pornographic Information*. According to MIIT's website, the special action was done from April to September in 2007, but this notice about it was published on May 31, 2008. The date on which this notice was posted online was not only about a year after the special action, but also half a year later than the date on which SARFT notices was disclosed. It is a mystery why SARFT can know the documents from MIIT and cited it in a public brief before the documents are released. At first glimpse, SARFT (and MIIT) seems to have based its decision solidly on existing documents;

⁵¹ The Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China, or zhongxuanbu, formerly known as the Propaganda Department, did not appear in any notices of this or other cases in this dissertation. It is not clear whether it has any influence on these regulations. The Publicity Department, however, is higher in rank than both the SARFT and the MIIT, because it is directly led by the Central Committee of the CPC. Its head is always a member in the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee. According to Xinhua.net (List of New Members, 2012, November 15), there are currently 25 members in that committee, including the current president, Xi Jinping. The head of the Publicity Department was No. 7 in the list of new members elected in 2012.

however, a close look at these document's date of publishing suggests that SARFT and MIIT, as part of the state-government, help each other, and publish inter-referential documents, without having to fear supervision from the governed. In fact, the legitimacy of SARFT's decisions is never publicly questioned in all the news I have encountered in this case.

The brief on SARFT's decision on punishing *Lost in Beijing* repeated that the film contains pornographic content. The definition of pornographic content, however, is vacillating between being evasive and too inclusive. Paragraph 7 of Article 25 of the *RAM* disallow obscene content. The *Measures*, in Paragraph Seven of Article 16, disallows content that seduces minors to commit crime, or overly emphasizes activities of violence, pornography, gambling, or terrorism. The SARFT's *Enhancing Administration* notice used obscenity and pornography interchangeably. Comparing to other policy documents, notices and the brief, the *Re-Emphasizing Prohibition* had a comparatively more detailed description of what content should not be included in television and film products:

“Do not produce or exhibit harmful television and film products that includes pornographic and vulgar content, which displays plot of promiscuous sex, rape, prostitution (buying and selling), sexual behavior, abnormal sexuality, shows male and/or female sexual organ or other private parts, or plays filthy, vulgar lines, songs, background music or sound effect” (SARFT Re-Emphasizes Prohibition, 2007, December 31).

Huang Weiqun, from SARFT Regulation Center⁵², told CCTV in a television interview that, “If some audiences or parents are curious, they can go to the websites of related governmental departments and bureaus. They have clear definition of what is obscenity and pornography” (Bai, 2008, January 7). However, obscenity and pornography seems to be defining each other and are used interchangeably; while the more detailed statement of the prohibited content reply on common sense⁵³.

Since April 1st, 2014, six years after *Lost in Beijing* was banned, SAPPRFT (the former SARFT) began to allow movies to be censored by local SARFT branches rather than have them all sent to the state-level SARFT for approval, because the number of movies each year now are so huge that the censoring workload became overwhelming (e.g. Sen, 2014, March 17; Di, 2014, April 15). The news reports of this action leaked information about the standard used by the censors:

“The censors group is consisted of 36 people, including SAPPRFT officers who are still working or have retired, senior movie practitioners like Yu Yang and Xie Tieli, heads of Ministry of Public Security, Women’s Federation, and Ministry of Education, middle to high school teachers, and college teachers. Chen Peisi⁵⁴ disclosed that, the mainland

⁵² It is interesting that Huang was talking about the internet rather than television and film. However, the regulation of pornographic audio-visual content includes both industrially produced television program and film, as well as short videos and textual content. The internet is a platform that allows content from difference sources to circulate. Both the SARFT and MIIT are involved in regulating such content. In some cases, the law-enforcement authorities also engage in purifying online content by arresting violators.

⁵³ These policies and notices seems to have little effect in regulating *Dwelling Narrowness*, the television drama I discussed in Chapter Three, because all the rape scenes were kept, although this drama was aired after *Lost in Beijing*.

⁵⁴ Chen Peisi is a well-known comedian.

China movie censors' average age is over 60, and they are comparatively conservative” (Di, 2014, April 15).

This news report also said that the “Ten Taboos” (the ten kinds of scenes in Article 25 of *RAM*) are vaguely defined, “For example, ... the seventh forbids content that ‘propagates obscenity, gambling, violence or instigates crimes’, but how many slashes is violence and what degree of nudity is obscene are all depending on the censors’ feeling” (Di, 2014, April 15). The film practitioners also said that, despite this new policy, the censoring standards are still vague.

The movie industry dissatisfaction about SARFT’s censorship coincide with the conclusion we get from analyzing SARFT policy documents, notices, and briefs in this case. The power of retrieving previously approved film like *Lost in Beijing* is firmly grasped by SARFT, which stands for the party-government’s decision, without having to respond to people’s supervision.

Humiliating China? The eliminated Xiaomei and the “Compliant” Pingguo.

Undeniably, there are sexual scenes in *Lost in Beijing*. It was rated Category Three in Hong Kong (Zhang, 2007, November 26). According to the website of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, the films are censored by the Panel of Film Censorship, consisted of 300 members from all walks of life, and reviewed by the Board of Review if any person is aggrieved by the decision of a censor (Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority, 2000). *Since Lost in Beijing* was rate Category Three, audiences are strictly restricted to people over 18 years old. Li Yu told the press that she does not care about the category *Lost in Beijing* was assigned, “Don’t make a big fuss out of it.” (Gao, 2007, December 28)

However, even if we agree with the categorization of this film in Hong Kong as only suitable for adult audiences, it still remains unclarified why the re-edited shorter version of film

in mainland China was banned. Earlier news about this film offered us another path to interpret the prohibition. Zhang Hongsen, Vice Director of the Film Bureau, “attacked” *Lost in Beijing* for “humiliating the current age in its representation” (dui shidai you wuruxing miaoxie) (Shu, 2007, March 26). Zhang said it is understandable that this film could not win the Golden Bear Prize at Berlin International Film Festival. He criticized the story of the film, which is about the husband of the migrant worker couple trying to get 20,000 RMB (\$3,255) from her wife’s boss, for raping her, and even tried to sell her unborn child for 120,000 RMB (\$19,500), including the charge for confirmed rape. He criticized the film for trying to win international film award by catering to foreigners’ bias against China; however, by citing an anonymous jury member of the film festival, he claimed that even the westerners feel that the Beijing which they have visited is not like its representation in this film. The only film Zhang praised was *Tuya’s Marriage*. He said, “The story is very simple. This film displayed Chinese women’s good morality of enduring humiliation and bearing heavy loads (renrufuzhong): they consider others’ benefits before their own interests. When it was released in Berlin, audiences stood up and applauded for four minutes. This is how Chinese film should be!” (Shu, 2007, March 26) This SARFT official’s comment mixed national pride based on positive representation of the state, equation of the capital Beijing⁵⁵ with the country, which lead to SARFT’s requirement to change the film’s Chinese title from *Lost in Beijing* to *Pingguo*, and requirement of representing women who surrender to patriarchal moral requirements despite their suffering. This film itself further incorporated national pride by showcasing ethnic minority women, since Tuya was inner-

⁵⁵The time *Lost in Beijing* was released was a sensitive period. Beijing was about to host the Olympics in 2008; while the film was in cinema since November 30, 2007.

Mongolian. The film he praised, according to Li Yu's earlier interview, was recommended to the film festival by the Film Bureau of SARFT:

As to the other film, *Tuya's Marriage*, competing for the same award, Li Yu said the producer just told her this news, "We only know that we were the only one invited to this festival. *Tuya's Marriage*, I heard, was recommended to the festival by the Film Bureau, because they liked it." (Chen, 2007, January 25)

Unlike the director of *Tuya's Marriage*, who told the journalists that entertainment should come before education and enlightenment function of the movie (Shu, 2007, March 26), without showing agreement or disagreement with Vice Director Zhang, Li Yu's earliest response was that it is normal to disagree on a film and she has not received any notices from SARFT back then. However, since SARFT official criticized *Lost in Beijing* for misrepresenting the current age and Beijing, she still explained, in a later interview, that this film did not contain anything humiliating the country and the current age (Huang, 2007, April 19). Li Yu explained that she "did not shoot the dark side to cater to the film festival, nor did she criticize simply from the negative side, but to 'call for returning of humanity with loss' ", and said, "I did not want to win any award this time. The film went through a very difficult process. I am satisfied to be able to make it to audiences." (Huang, 2007, April 19) Producer of this film, Fang Li, further clarified that if they want just to win awards, then they would not have the actor and actress who are not famous oversea, but cost high paychecks and have tight schedules (Huang, 2007, April 19). He also said to the journalist that Vice Director Zhang had told him that the previous news intentionally selected certain parts of his speech to make it more sensational, and that since the film was approved by SARFT, it could not have shamed China (Huang, 2007, April 19; Tong Dawei and, 2007, April 19).

The final, approved version, which Fang and Li was talking about, is 15 minutes shorter than the original version. The inner critiques against *Lost in Beijing* was not fully disclosed to the public. However, from various news stories about the censoring and editing process of the film give away limited information about it. In a news report about *Lost in Beijing* passing censorship, producer Fang Li explained that while someone accused the protagonist for shaming China by not fighting back when raped, in the film: “It is evident that the character mistaken her boss as her husband when drunk. It is not rape. Later she fought back with silence; not all resistance are done by shouting.” (Kang, 2007, April 19) This refers to the scene in which Liu Pingguo was raped by her boss. The critique that the film humiliated China because Pingguo did not fight hard enough to resist being raped is equating national pride with women’s chastity. The shame was further accentuated by the fact that such scene was shown to foreigners, because the version played at Berlin was the un-abbreviated version. Fang’s explanation disavow the scene as rape, because, as he said, Pingguo thought the man was her husband. However, Pingguo was not willing to have sex with her boss, and their sex happened when she was drunk; therefore, Fang’s claim that it was not rape⁵⁶, seems to be hardly tenable from a feminist perspective. Ironically, the other rape scene was not mentioned. After An Kun saw Pingguo being raped by her boss, he refused to talk to Pingguo back at home. Pingguo tried to kiss him to get re-accepted, but An Kun continued to push her away and slapped his own face, “You fucking dirty bitch!” Pingguo refused to go away; instead, she covered him with a quilt and tried to stabilize his body. In the next scene, Pingguo was lying on the bed, her clothes pushed up. An Kun was on

⁵⁶ While *RAM* disallow movies to propagate obscenity and violence, it did not specifically ban rape scene. Only the *Notices of SARFT Re-Emphasizing Prohibition on Production and Exhibition of Pornographic Movies*, which was published more than half a year after this news story, included rape as something that should not appear in films.

her. He tried to take off her underwear, only to discover that she was not wearing one: her pantie was lost at the room of the Massage Parlor. Pingguo wriggled while An Kun spit on his left hand and used his saliva as lubricant. During the process, An Kun repeated, “Did he fuck you like this?” Pingguo grabbed the frame of the bed, and her facial expression shows both pain and disappointment. However, this marital rape⁵⁷ was not mentioned ever after, nor was it defined as rape. Neither the vice president Zhang nor producer Fang pointed this scene as one about sexual violence. That Pingguo showed less resistance against raping by her husband was not a problem of national pride.

The second scene mentioned is the one in which Liu Pingguo and An Kun made love when showering. When the host of Sina Entertainment asked how Li Yu thought about the hotly debated scene Pingguo had sex with her husband, she responded that the scene was to show that the married couple do love each other, so that the later incidents and changes became meaningful (Talking to Tong, 2007, April 19). Li Yu argued in an interview for inclusion of sexual scenes:

“I think these scenes are absolutely necessary, indispensable to the whole narrative. I want to call people to not take sex as a big deal, because it is not. It is just part of the narration. Sexual relationship is just one of the interpersonal relations in the society.”
(Gao, 2007, December 28)

However, since the definition of prohibited kinds of sexual scenes are not explicitly defined in the policy documents, whether the scene is necessary or not totally depends on

⁵⁷ Marital rape was not criminalized in the *Marriage Law of People’s Republic of China*, because the husband and wife have the duty to satisfy the other party’s sexual demand. However, Liu (2012) suggested resorting to the *Criminal Law* and sentence according to the bodily hurt caused by such sexual intercourse and violence accompany it. However, legally speaking, the *Marriage Law* does not protect individual’s consent by each time of sexual action.

judgment of the censors group consisted of 36 senior, conservative officials, teachers, and previous movie practitioners.

The third cluster of scenes are all about the whole story of a supporting character called Xiao Mei, or little sister, played by Zeng Meihuizi (Zhang, 2007, February 17). Xiao Mei is a foot masseuse working in the same Massage Parlor. She was fired for hurting a male customer who harassed her. Then, she became an underground sex worker to earn a living. Near the end of the film, Xiao Mei was killed by one of her customer. The policemen called Pingguo to identify her body. In the version approved by SARFT, Xiao Mei was eliminated. From the 112-minute full version of the film on YouTube, we could get to know where Xiao Mei's scenes are, and how they connected to the adjacent scenes. Xiao Mei was fired, because she cut the customers' toe nail with her work tools after he grabbed her breasts. Pingguo tried to help her keep the job, but failed. Then, Pingguo and Xiao Mei went to a restaurant, ordered several dishes and some cheap Chinese white wines, the bottle of which looks like Erguotou, a kind of cheap but strong Chinese liquor. Sad that Xiao Mei lost her job, they both got drunk. After lunch, Pingguo returned to work, being drunk. She was raped by her boss later on when lying on the massage bed. If Xiao Mei was completely cut out from the story, then the reason why Pingguo was drunk would be unknown.

News reports says that two minor story lines were cut out (Zhang, 2007, February 17; Kang, 2007, April 19). Except from Xiao Mei's story, which was completely eliminated, a large part of the story of Wang Mei, the wife of Pingguo's boss, was also taken out (Yang, 2007, April 19). In the full version, after Pingguo's husband told Wang Mei that her husband raped his wife, she suggested that they should make love to fulfill his redemption. They kept that sexual relationship for a while. Producer Fang Li was confused about the reason why An Kun and

Wang Mei's sexual relationship has to be removed, "It did not show the genital area or nipples of any gender (meiyou ludian), and it is not touching any political issues. Then, what is the problem with it? The censors group's response is that 'the scene makes us feel very uncomfortable'... " (Yang, 2007, April 19) The full version available on YouTube presents includes this scene. An Kun went to Wang Mei to ask for money, because Pinguo's Boss, Lin Dong, refuse to admit forcing sex against Pinguo's will. Wang Mei analyzed the situation to An Kun, and told him that if he wants money from her, then, she would not give it to him because this is against the shared interests in her family. Instead, she suggested, "My husband fucked your wife. Why don't you fuck his wife?" In the next scene, Wang Mei was in the riding position, still wearing the bra but her clothes unbuttoned. She moaned, and the sound accelerated, making it looks like she was working towards her orgasm. An Kun was lying down, trying hard to not make any noises. He looked at Wang Mei when she cursed her husband. Wang Mei asked, "What are you starring at?" Then she put her leopard pattern sun glasses on him. An Kun left with that pair of glasses. In Wang Mei and An Kun's relationship, which made the censors uneasy, Wang Mei was the one in control. She analyzed the situation for An Kun, and suggested that they have sex. When they did have sex, she was on top. She also rejected An Kun's gaze by blocking his vision. Later in this film, when An Kun was arrested for stealing the baby, Wang Mei got him out. Although even the censors could not explain their discomfort caused by the film, it is clear that they did not see any huge problem in the scenes in which Pinguo's boss buying sex. He rejected rushed service at the beginning of the film, and paid extra tip to another sex worker in a later scene. Because the edited version is no longer publicly accessible, I could not confirm whether these scenes are removed as well. However, it is clear that his habit did not become a topic in the news about *Lost*

in Beijing. The focus has been on the female characters: Liu Pingguo, Xiao Mei, and, to a lesser degree, Wang Mei.

The last edited scene mentioned in the news reports are about the gambling scene. Before *Lost in Beijing* was released in Berlin, Fang Li said SARFT did not have any problem with the theme of the film, but disagreed with some details and the style of camera language, “For example, censors group gave some advice on how to use the camera in the gambling scene. They thought the close up view of the cash bills might create misunderstanding.” (Yang, 2007, February 5) He added that they have gradually understood that they could not go too far in artistic creation, so that they audiences would not mis-interpret the film.

In short, although there is little evidence of what exactly was cut off from the full version of *Lost in Beijing*, the news reports about the year-long process, from censoring this film to final prohibition against it, revealed important information about the implicit standards behind these critiques and requirements. The producer and director of this film tried hard to work with the censoring system, but failed to comply to the requirements anyway. The sexual scenes and the women’s sexualized bodies became the focus of attention in the news discourse. They have to fight back rapes in ways recognizable by the censors group, so that the international image of China could be protected. The women selling sex for a living should not be seen by audiences. In addition, women with power to control men irritates the censors but they could not figure out the reason for the discomfort. The gender bias is so deep that both the censors and people producing the film could not argue on a gender-equal standpoint.

Before and after the prohibition: Golden Bear accident and the recruited director and producer.

Other than including sexual, and a little bit too explicit gambling scenes, *Lost in Beijing* was also criticized for releasing its unapproved version at the film festival and on the internet. However, the prohibition came 11 months after the full version was played at Berlin International Film Festival on February 15th, 2007. When *Lost in Beijing* was said to be critiqued by SARFT officer for humiliating China, producer Fang Li explained to the journalists that he has already sent in two reports to apologize for the accident, as well as explained the reason for it (Huang, 2007, April 19). Li Yu told the journalist that the reason why they played the full version is because they did not have enough time to finish the English captioning for the approved version, which only has Germany captioning (Huang, 2007, April 19).

While the producer and director of *Lost in Beijing* were frustrated in the year-long censoring process, they were excited and happy at the beginning of 2007, when they were invited to compete for the Golden Bear Prize. When the journalist called the director, she said:

“Now I am relieved: the post-production planned to be finished in three months is almost done now, in one month. I’ve just sent a copy to the Film Bureau for content censorship. This time they are very open and supportive. There is not much problem. The changes needed would be about minor details.” (Chen, 2007, January 25)

However, a news report published on February 5th said the censors group required 15 scenes to be cut out, and the film has not yet been approved (Yang, 2007, February 5). In this news report, producer Fang Li was confident that the edited version would pass its fifth-round censorship. He was certain that the film could be approved in time for the festival. On February 7th, said it was reported that *Lost in Beijing* got approved after the official nomination list was published in Berlin (Zong, 2007, February 7). Fang told the journalist that they were prepared to not attend the festival, if they could not get approval in time (Zong, 2007, February 7). In order

to make time for *Lost in Beijing*, the organizers of the film festival moved the release time of it from the opening ceremony to February 15th. The buyers at the festival were eager to watch this movie because rumors said it was required to make up to 50 changes (50 Changes Required, 2007, February 12). Fan Bingbing, Tong Dawei, and Zeng Huimeizi attended the premiere with the director and producer. Fan played Liu Pingguo, Tong played Pingguo's husband An Kun. The other actress, Zeng Huimeizi, played the role of Xiao Mei, whose story had been completely removed in the approved version, according to the censors' request. The producer and director of the film showed the full version, therefore Xiao Mei's story was included. However, if they have played the edited version, then Zeng's attendance would be awkward.

Several news reports and interviews published in April of 2007 wrote that *Lost in Beijing* was going to be released in mid-May. However, it turned out that the film was only made available in the cinema at the end of November. It is not clear what exactly caused the postponed release date. However, the prolonged censoring process had definitely contributed to delay the premiere of the film at Berlin, and made the schedule of its post-production even tighter.

For the other charge of leaking unapproved version to the internet, producer Fang Li explained that someone stole the film from the work station before it was fully edited, and posted it online; therefore he felt that he should not be blamed for others' pirate act (Chen, 2008, January 4). He was confused:

“The film has gone through official censorship and been approved after many alternations. Now they want to retrieve the license and all the copies. It confuses me what kind of version is okay. I have never worked against any government units. I was just exploring (mosuo) where the bottom line is.”

He was strictly prohibited to produce any film within two years. This is the first time he was banned from producing films within a period of time, but not the first time the film he produced was banned, or went underground. Fang Li worked in the state-owned nuclear industry in China before he joined foreign companies. Then he went to the United States, got a MBA degree in 1989, received permanent residence in the same year, and founded Laurel Industry in 1991. Laurel Film, an independent film company, was founded by Fang in 2000. The first film Fang sponsored was Wang Chao's *The Orphan of Anyang* (2001). The director was banned because the topic of the film was too dark: it is about the life of people living at the bottom of society. Then, he funded the same director's second film, *Day and Night* (2004), after the director was allowed to make film again. This film went underground not because of censorship or license issues, but because they are not satisfied with the film's artistic quality (Ha, 2014, July 23). Then, Fang invested in Lou Ye's *Summer Palace* (2006). This film weaved the Tiananmen Square protest into the story. Famous overseas, *Summer Palace* was banned in mainland China. Fang produced Li Yu's previous film, *Dam Street*, or *Hongyan*. The woman in this film was forced to give away her newborn baby because she was not married when pregnant. When her son met with her again, now knowing their relation, he felt love towards her. This film won multiple awards globally, but did not release in mainland cinema. After banned from producing films for two years because of *Lost in Beijing*, Fang Li cooperated with Li Yu again to produce *Buddha Mountain* (2011). This film was seen as an exemplary artistic film which was also commercially successful. After that, Fang Li and Li Yu produced *Double Exposure* (2012), a thriller. Fang Li's most recent position is the producer of Han Han's film, *The Continent* (2014). Han Han is a high school drop-out, writer, famous blogger, car racer, and influential public intellectual. *The Continent* was controversial in its way of story-telling, but passed censorship

without any fuss. All the films Fang produced after he endured the two-year prohibition did not have any problem with the censors group. He turned from the “god father of underground movie in China” (Ha, 2014, July 23) to a producer of films that could make money.

Li Yu, the director of *Lost in Beijing*, did not stop producing art films after this incident. However, she no longer had any problem with censorship. Before *Lost in Beijing*, she had directed two movies. The first one was *This Year's Summer*⁵⁸, also known as *Fish and Elephant*. It won the Elvira Notari Prize of the 58th Venice International Film Festival in September 2001. As the first lesbian movie in China, it was not publicly released in mainland China because the topic has to do with homosexual relationship. Her second movie was *Dam Street* (2005), produced by Fang Li. The script touched sensitive topic of pre-marriage pregnancy and the relationships between mother and son. Although as an artistic movie, it won the Award for Best Original Screenplay in the 2005 Pusan International Film Festival, it could not get permission to be shown in mainland China. In Li Yu's words, she spent three years to find funding for this film (Huang, 2008, May 12), the awards are of no use since the film's box office was miserable (Huang, 2007, April 19). Her recent two films after *Lost in Beijing*, *Buddha Mountain* (2011) and *Double Xposure* (2012), were also the result of collaboration with Fang Li. In 2011, she said her early films are trying too hard to be artistic: “It doesn't feel right to have to intentionally make people feel wowed, ‘This is art!’ ” (Huang, 2008, May 12)

⁵⁸ This film's influence to people's impression of Li Yu is long lasting. There is rumor that she is a lesbian. After *Buddha Mountain* made Fan Bingbing won Best Actress in Tokyo International Film Festival, a photo of Fan giving Li a French kiss in front of the journalists circulated on the internet. In 2012, a film practitioner told the press that Li Yu is a lesbian and she deeply loves Fan Bingbing (Qu, 2012, June 20). Fang Li, according to the news, loves Li Yu and helps her without complaints.

Whether Li Yu's later works "started to catch the charm of movies" (Huang, 2008, May 12) is beyond the realm of this dissertation, but her later films are not representing non-conformative people in straight forward ways as she did in *This Year's Summer*, *Dam Street*, and *Lost in Beijing*. For example, in *Buddha Mountain*, her first film after *Lost in Beijing*, homosexual behavior is represented in diminishing ways. The protagonist is a girl called Nan Feng. She has a good friend, Fatso, who is a larger size boy. After Fatso was bullied and robbed on the street by a group of hooligans, Nan Feng visited the hooligans to get Fatso's money back. She confronted the head of the group by staring back at him. Then, she grabbed a beer bottle and knocked her forehead with it. The hooligans were surprised, "Shit!" Nan Feng did not stop just like that. She grasped the girlfriend of the head of the group, and started kissing her, while Nan Feng's forehead is still bleeding. The hooligans got scared. The leading person tried to separate Nan Feng and his girl, and rushed to give back the cash they took from Fatso. Later, when she was walking with her boyfriend and Fatso, they asked her if she was a lesbian, because she kissed the girl. She laughed and hustled them, "What are you talking about?" She thought Fatso must be out of his mind to ask that. In these scenes, not only the protagonist is no longer a self-identified sexual non-conformer, she declined answering the question about her sexuality, and mark those questions as absurd ones. Kissing a person of the same gender is like hurting her own body. Such behaviors shows that she is not afraid to get hurt or act out of normal. In the thriller Li Yu directed, *Double Xposure*, the protagonist thought that she killed her best girlfriend after she accidentally saw that girl making love to her boyfriend. Although these female characters are full of sexual energy, they no longer identify themselves as marginalized, abnormal, nor do they confront patriarchy face to face. There are less news reports about her films being banned or censored, but more articles written by the fans to interpret the meaning of the scenes or to comb

the storyline. Her next two movies after *Lost in Beijing* also got considerable box office: *Buddha Mountain* got over 68,000,000 RMB (\$ 11,000,000) (Man, 2011, April 18); *Double Exposure*'s box office was 115,000,000 RMB (\$ 187,000,000) (Yang, 2012, October 25). Li Yu, a “Category Three director” (Zhang, 2007, November 26), turned into a director of art film who can also make money for the investors. Her next goal is to adapt Feng Tang's *Wan Wu Sheng Zhang*. The title means everything grows. Feng is known for writing erotic fiction. Many of his books are not published in mainland China, but only sold in Hong Kong. However, the eroticism in his books are written from a male perspective. Li Yu also confirmed to the journalist that she intend to show youth from the perspective of a sexually active young man (Li Yu Becomes, 2014, May 19). Since her next film would be “heavily flavored” (highly sexual) but the story is told from a male's angle. It will serve as a great tester to further understand the censors' standard: whether it is the sexuality that is the problem, or the active, sexual women in control of men that should not be seen. Yet, so far it is clear that both the producer and the director have stepped into the safe zone, and have become both artistic and commercially successful.

Fang Li from Laurel Film was punished because of *Lost in Beijing*; while the other two companies invested in this film was only criticized. One of these two companies is Beijing Polybone Film Distribution Co., Ltd. It was combined from Beijing Bona Cultural Exchange Co., Ltd, and Eastern Dragon Film Co., Ltd, which is a branch of China Poly Group Corporation. China Poly Group is formerly Poly Technologies Inc. This company was co-founded by the Armament Department of the Headquarters of the General Staff of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, and China International Trust & Investment Company, which was founded by “red capitalist” Rong Yiren, enterpriser and former vice president of P. R. China. The other company is Beijing Zhonghong Group Company, Ltd. Compared to Laurel Film, an independent

movie company whose mother company, even though one of considerable magnitude, is registered in the United States.

Lost in Beijing was compared to *Lust, Caution*, directed by Ann Lee. The latter movie was released in September, 2007, in mainland China, after about seven minutes of it was cut off. Tang Wei, the actress whose character in the film fell in love with a traitor for sex, became the scapegoat for the explicit sexual scenes in this film, and was banned for two years (Donald, 2010). In the case of the *Lost in Beijing*, Fang Li is the one who bears the cost of the prohibition. Ironically, because all the copies (film, online video, or DVD) are retrieved or deleted, now only the pirated full version of the film was available for screening and analysis. The next section of this chapter is based on the full version of this film on YouTube.

A History of Liu Pingguo and the Awakening Women in the Film

In main storyline, Liu Pingguo, a foot masseuse, is raped by, or, to paraphrase some news reports (e.g., Zhang, 2007, Feb 17), forced to have sex with her boss, Lin Dong, while drunk. Her husband, An Kun, sees the latter half of the intercourse while performing his job as a window washer of the office building's glasses. Enraged, An Kun moves to attack Pingguo's boss but is, in turn, beaten by security. When Pingguo and An Kun return home, An Kun, out of grief and anger, rapes Pingguo. In order to compensate for his spiritual loss, he visits Lin Dong and demands a restitution of 20,000 RMB (\$3,255). Lin refuses and denies raping Pingguo. Eventually, Pingguo and An Kun discover that Pingguo is pregnant. But because she was forced to have sex with two different men on the same day, Pingguo cannot be sure of the identity of the baby's father. Since Lin had sex with Pingguo first, An Kun is certain of Lin's paternity, so he ventures to claim his money with this piece of evidence. Because Lin Dong does not have any children, he engages with An Kun to pay An 100,000 RMB (\$16,277) and adopt the child if it

turns out he is the father. Upon An Kun's request of rape compensation, the total price is increased to 120,000 RMB (\$19,532).

After the child is born, however, a blood test proves that the boy is in fact An Kun's son. An Kun uses 4,000 RMB (\$651) of the 20,000 RMB he has already received to induce the doctor to change the result. Lin Dong and his wife Wang Mei pretended that the baby boy was their son, and told their friends that Pingguo was the nanny they hired. During the time Pingguo stayed at Lin's place, Lin was still secretly desiring her young body, but treated her and her son decently: he cradled the boy, and cooked for them. An Kun regret selling his own child, but Lin did not believe his words and refused to have the money back. As a result, An Kun sneaked into Lin's apartment, tied Pingguo, and took the boy. However, it did not take long before he was caught by the police. The policeman told Lin that DNA test said An Kun, rather than him, is the biological father of the child. While Lin was suspicious that Pingguo and her husband tricked him together, and, maybe, his own wife taught them so, he still wanted the child because, he said, he is already bond with the baby. In the end, Pingguo left Beijing with the baby and the 120,000 RMB.

The other two interweaving thread are about Pingguo's colleague, Xiao Mei, and Lin Dong's wife, Wang Mei. Xiao Mei was fired because she used the tools she had to fight back a customer when he grabbed her breast. In order to make a living, she started working as an escort girl who only accompany guests to drink and sing in the karaoke. Then, she started to date several men, and ask them to buy new cell phone for her. In the end, she was killed by one of her sex buyers.

Wang Mei had sex with An Kun, when he came to her to ask for money. Later on, while An Kun and Lin Dong were still arguing about how much Lin should pay An for the future kid, Wang and An had sex again. An Kun felt so relieved that he sang a song after he did it with

Wang Mei, but he refused to be touched again by her. Wang Mei also got him out when he was arrested for stealing the kid. However, they parted right after An Kun went out.

Women as men's reproductive dependents.

In the story, Pingguo and Wang Mei are valued or devalued according to their reproductive ability. Pingguo was treated disrespectfully when she went to Lin Dong, and ask to not be fired because she lied about her marital status. Lin Dong gave her 2,000 RMB to silence her in the awkward situation, "That's the end of it. Understand?" Pingguo rejected, "I didn't know An Kun asked you for money." Lin Dong responded, "I don't care if you do or do not. From now on, I never want to see you again. Neither of you." "Are you firing me?" Lin replied with a rhetorical question, "You don't expect a promotion, do you?" Then, he felt awkward, "Actually, it was just an one night stand." Pingguo disagreed, "Boss, but how could that be? I never wanted..." Lin was affirmative, "It was you who started it. You had an orgasm, right?" He asked Pingguo to get out because he had to go. Pingguo made him stay, and said, "You can't put the blame on me! Really, if you want to fire me, I will report you for rape." "On what ground?" Pingguo answered confidently, "The stuff that you left on my skirt." Lin felt hilarious, "Who do you think I am? Bill Clinton?" Pingguo continued, "An Kun doesn't know about it. I will not tell anybody." She began to sob. Then, she pushed him with more questions, then made the deal. During the process, Lin, a regular sex buyer, thought he could settle the problem with money, the amount of which is less than that An Kun asked. He also sees Pingguo as someone whose opinion is subject to her husband. It was not until Pingguo started to fight for herself by threatening him to report for rape did Lin started to consider her suggestion as an option worth thinking about. What Pingguo asked, however, was only to keep her job.

However, after Lin knew that Pingguo was pregnant and that the baby might be his, he even went to Pingguo and An Kun's shallow place with gifts for Pingguo. He tried to persuade An Kun to not have sex with Pingguo before she give birth to the baby, just in case the baby gets hurt. In his massage parlor, he relieved Pingguo from the daily cheer-up dance every masseuse would do in the morning. After the baby was born, he rarely goes to the parlor, but stayed at home to cook for his son and Pingguo. Even though Pingguo's body was still attractive to him, he signed an agreement with his wife that if he have intimate relation with Pingguo again, it would cost him half of his money and property.

On the contrary, Lin Dong's wife, Wang Mei, owns an infertile body. Right after Pingguo managed to make Lin not to fire her, the camera turns to Wang's spa. Wang Mei was performing cupping treatment for another woman. Her customer asked her how she managed her problem. Wang Mei was annoyed, "What problem? Infertility is not a problem. I don't want a child anyway." Then, An Kun came and told her what happened. Although she was angry, she still told An Kun that even if she has problem with her husband, when it comes to money, she shares interests with her husband as a couple. This is why she ended up suggesting An Kun to have sex with her as redemption. However, because she could not get pregnant, she had no stake to refuse the deal of buying the child, when Lin Dong suggested so. He said, "You have to accept it. I've already made my decision. My principle is that anything with a 70% chance. Then it is worth trying." Wang Mei adjusted her safety belt. Lin continued after a pause, "We are a married couple. This will never change. We can adopt this baby." Wang Mei responded, "I can't change what you have already decided. Sixteen years and it's always like this. I can only accept it." She paused and continued, "We have to sign an agreement. If during this process you do anything to hurt me, for example, you start another affair with Liu Pingguo, or to do something harmful to

me, all your assets will be mine.” Lin Dong emphasized, “Wang Mei, when I think about this, I think of us as a family. If you talk like this, we are up against each other.” Wang Mei sneered, “But I can’t act like a lamb waiting to be slaughtered by you.” Lin Dong agreed, “Alright! So if anything happened, I will split my assets fifty-fifty with you. You think I will fall for a dagongmei⁵⁹? ” Wang Mei required Lin to pull over and let her off at a place where cars are not allowed to stop. Then, the scene was over. In the end, Wang Mei still only got Lin to sign the agreement and split half of his assets with her if anything happens; however, she could not stop Lin from buying the child or agree to give all his assets to her if their marriage broke. Although Lin Dong says he take him and Wang Mei as a group with shared benefits, he made his decision to take the child before discussing with Wang, and accentuate his partnership with Wang when Wang started to discuss splitting his money. The decision about the child was made by two husbands. While Pingguo and Wang Mei tried to resist, their effort failed. In the end, all four of them sit on the same table to sign the contract of the deal. Women are supposed to be reproductive, and if she is within marriage, her body is not in her control. Pingguo tried to find unregistered doctor to get an abortion, but ran away after hearing the girl in the clinic screaming. Then, she lied to An Kun that she had gotten an abortion. An Kun became angry, and said she was stupid. Only after she told him the truth did he become happy again.

Neither Wang Mei nor Pingguo was able to destroy the deal made by the husbands, although both of them have tried to fight back against them in other ways. Their shared suffering contributed to their alliance in the end.

Women’s alliance and awakening of subjectivity.

⁵⁹ Here the official caption is “country girl”.

Wang Mei saw Pingguo as someone who she had to accept as the mother of Lin's son, but she also treated her as potential enemy who might destroy her family. In the celebration party for the baby, she pretended to be the mother of the baby boy, but she has to bring him to Pingguo when he got hungry. However, she was also strictly monitoring her husband and Pingguo's relation, since the latter has to stay in their home until the baby was old enough to eat food other than milk. Lin Dong used a mirror to peep at Pingguo when she was showering, after he performed as a good, caring father in front of everyone. When Wang Mei discovered that, Lin quickly lowered the mirror and pretended that he was checking his own hair style. Wang Mei stared at him resentfully, but she beat Pingguo after she got out of the bathroom, having no idea about what had happened.

However, when Lin Dong discovered that the baby boy was not his biological son, he thought he was tricked by Pingguo and her husband together, and doubted that Wang Mei might have got involved as well. Wang Mei suggested to An Kun that they could leave together, with half of Lin Dong's asset he promised to give her, but was rejected by An. A scene near the end showed Pingguo crying and Wang Mei tried to comfort her by holding her hands, then Wang Mei wept as well. Their opposition, in Wang Mei's eyes, was created by their men, but they ended up feeling each other's pain.

Pingguo and Xiao Mei were united from the beginning. Pingguo helped Xiao Mei to cut her hair in the shared dressing room of the message parlor. Xiao Mei ask her for advice of how to make her new boyfriend believe she was still virgin while in fact she was not. When Lin Dong blamed Xiao Mei for not letting her customer touch her body, Pingguo educated Xiao Mei on the side to tell her that she could give those men her hand when they wanted to grab her breasts. However, Pingguo's effort did not prevent Xiao Mei from being fired. Drunk at lunch, they both

cursed the men and cried bad. In the end, Pingguo was the person who came to identify Xiao Mei's body. Not long after that, she decided to leave the city with her baby and the money An Kun received to sell their own kid.

Both Pingguo and Wang Mei did not separate with their man and get out of their control at first. They, obviously, can protect their own interests through negotiating by themselves, or make suggestions for revenge, but they did not. However, after such compromise proved to be worthless, they held each other's hands for comfort. The film showed An Kun and Lin Dong on Lin's car after Pingguo left with the baby and the money. They appeared behind the credits. The Mercedes went wrong half way on the busy road, so Lin and An had to get out of the car to push it from both sides. Although these four people are two married couples at the beginning, they seemed to be re-organized and allied by gender at the end of the film.

Xiao Mei: a woman who rejected harassment at first but got killed by sex buyer in the end.

While Xiao Mei became a prostitute in the end and was killed by a buyer, she did not even accept sexual harassment at the beginning. Pingguo was more adapted to such work condition. When her customer want to grasp her hands, she got her hands out, but was smiling to that man flirtingly. Therefore, she got a 100 RMB bill as tip. She was also experienced enough to tell Xiao Mei that if the man wants her boobs, she can give him her hands. However, Xiao Mei was not as adapted. She cut off half of that customer's toe nail with her tools. According to Lin Dong, the man's blood colored the basin crimson. When Xiao Mei heard that, she told Pingguo that "he deserved it". Lin Dong fired Xiao Mei not only because she cannot endure sexual harassment, but also because the customer threaten to smash his parlor if Xiao Mei is not laid off.

Xiao Mei's action was repeated in real life in 2009. Deng Yujiao, who works at a spa club but not as a masseuse, stabbed two governmental officials when one of them tried to "buy her service". One man was dead while the other man was hurt. This event was adapted into Jia Zhangke's *A Touch of Sin*, or *Tianzhuding* (2013). Jia's wife Zhao Tao played Xiao Yu, whose prototype was Deng. This film was also banned in mainland China. Xiao Yu's loss of her job proved that direct resistance against male oppressors of the patriarchal system brings severe damage to the female rebels, although Wang Mei and Pingguo's experiences proves that submission to such oppression did not bring the women any concrete benefits either.

After Xiao Mei was fired, the job she could find was even more humiliating. In order to earn a living, she accompanied the men to drink and sing in the karaoke. Then, she started dating several men at the same time, and ask them to buy things for her. What exactly happened when she was killed by a buyer was unknown. The policemen saw her as a prostitute who was killed when making a deal with a buyer. Different from Xiao Mei, who are fired, Pingguo, a former conformist, quitted her position as a wife and mother controlled by her husband and her boss. While Pingguo's future is unknown, and she is burdened with the baby boy, she was determined to search for alternatives, with what the men owned her – the 120,000 RMB.

Conclusion

The censoring and prohibition of *Lost in Beijing* looks like a Rashomon. The censors, regulators, SARFT, the producer and the directors are contradicting themselves and each other in different time period. The regulative documents are vague about what content should not be included in the films; thus the regulative actions are contingent -- the movies are subject to the 36 censors' feeling to get the license, and the prohibitions are, sometimes, unexpected and contingent. The regulators have unquestioned power to issue prohibition and explain the reason

of their actions. The regulated are not on the same ground when punished. Companies which have closer connection with the government did not suffer as severely as those owned by foreign individuals. However, the prohibition did not prevent any actor, actress, director, or producer from commercial benefits in the future, after prohibition ended if he or she was subject to that ban. These prohibitions against the films could only create more difficulties for audiences to find such content, but could not forbid such information to exist in other ways. The purpose is to not allow the general audiences to get access to deviant media content, in order to prevent unwanted interpretation. Yet, ironically, for the content, the prohibition served to eradicate the edited, approved version of the film, but the more outrageous version got preserved through piracy and oversea websites not accessible in mainland China.

Lost in Beijing did not represent women in all-rounded positive ways, but it did show their endurance, intelligence, flexibility, desire, and determination to explore for alternative. This potential exists not in upper class ladies, but in Pingguo, a woman at the bottom of society.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

My father discouraged me to study Chinese issues before I headed out to join my doctoral program. He said the situation is too complicated to make an argument. The Chinese regulation system for media content is often dismissed as irrational, hilarious, inefficient, and thus impairs the Chinese state government's legitimacy to rule the country. However, it is of little use to say that the Chinese government's governing style is different from that of the States or other Western countries as part of the developed capitalist world; instead, how the institutionalized system works is worth analyzing, in that it offers us a great opportunity to explicate the systematic construction and maintenance of media discourses in the Chinese political and cultural context, and to unravel regulation of sex-related content as a process in an environment where pornographic information is illegal for both children and adults. This dissertation contributes to understanding the intricate relationship between the party-state government, the media industry, and discourses about sexuality tailored to in the popular media.

As a scholar of media and gender issues, I was frequently confronted with two kinds of warmhearted suggestions concerning my career choice. The first one is to say that Chinese women's status is much better than that of the deadly patriarchal countries, or that gender equality in the United States is not ideal either. Both facts lead to the conclusion that to critique gender inequality in China is unfair, because it is not the best nor the worst, and has been improving, compared to the condition half or one century ago. Such a claim clings to nationalist pride, which serves to disqualify critique towards gender inequality in China. The other kind of suggestion is that there is no hope of achieving gender equality in China because patriarchal oppression is so severe that one cannot see a way out. Such a belief admits the existence of

gender inequality in China but shows reluctance to work towards an unknown future condition of, possibly, fairer gender equality. This dissertation brings gender issues to be the focus of my study, thus problematizing gender in regulation of media discourse, rejecting binary, cynical perspectives on feminist critique and movements, as scholarly works should, and opening up previously under-studied, black-boxed topics with sources common citizens can find. In this way, I hope this dissertation can talk to common citizens as well as scholars for their respective interests.

Specifically speaking, this dissertation answers the following questions: what kind of country the transitioning China is? What kind of state government China has and how does it manage regulation of media content? How is gender problem manifested in the regulation process? Is the current situation going to get more gender equal, more just?

What Kind of Country Is China? Internal Contradiction of Two Ideologies

This dissertation analyzes contemporary, transitioning China under two interweaving frameworks: post-Socialism and neo-liberalism. For instance, David Harvey (2005) has identified China to be applying neoliberalism with its specific characteristics. The market economy promoted since the Reform and Opening in 1978 detached people and institutions from state protection: they have to earn their livings in monetary ways. However, China is also in a post-socialist status, which partly explains the Chinese characteristics that make this country's neoliberalism different from that of others. The party that governs China is still the CPC, a socialist party. The CPC has been struggling to legitimize its continuing governance since the Reform and Opening. China has been changing its society to connect with and merge into global capitalism. A natural guess is that one can only merge into capitalism by turning into a capitalist entity. Another deduction is that a socialist party cannot promote capitalism and rule a capitalist

country. Socialism with Chinese characteristics, proposed by Deng, aims to resolve such contradictions of socialism versus capitalism, by detaching market economy from capitalism, and defining such an economy as a tool that can be used for noble goals. In practice, the CPC government has been controlling the pace of China merging into global capitalism. It did not join the World Trade Organization (WTO) until two decades after the Reform and Opening. After being a member of WTO, China has plans to gradually open up to the global market. Another example is that China had special regions, with preferential policies like lower taxes, for global capital to invest in China (e.g. Ong, 2006), rather than opening up all at once, so that it can allow controlled degree of erosion to sovereignty and citizenship, instead of losing control over global capitalist power.

Balancing the socialist identity of the CPC and neoliberal practices challenges the Party-state government's control over ideology. This is not only because the way to obtain and distribute wealth in socialism and neoliberal capitalism are considerably different. It is also because the sexual morality of the socialist time is distinct from that of neoliberal capitalism. In the socialist era, the work unit would intervene to protect the completeness of hetero-normative families. This means that it would try to persuade people not to divorce because of lack of love⁶⁰. Hetero-normative pure love, connected with the Party, is in contrast with the evil, morally despicable capitalism in sexuality. The moral decay, manifested in promiscuous sexuality and increasing instability of core family, since the Reform and Opening is often blamed as a result of the capitalist influence. This is not to say that promiscuous sex only happens in evil capitalism,

⁶⁰ However, divorcing one's spouse who was marked as anti-revolutionary or conservative was quite common.

but that “bad sex” is related to the opposite ideology so that, by allying with hetero-normative ideals, the dominant ideology of the rulers can be further legitimized and honored. When economic practices are deeply trapped in the internal contradiction of Socialism versus neoliberal capitalism, hetero-normative morality is also in danger. While discussion of sexuality was almost non-existent, “bad or non-good sex” is much more commonly practiced. The generation, which experienced the strictly hetero-normative, morally pure socialist era, has not passed away. The fast speed of change in China made the sexual morality of the socialist time still linger in contemporary China, thus complicating the moral landscape among its people.

The hetero-normative sexual morality and family structure are constructed to be something everyone can obtain. Unlike monetary, cultural and social capital, love and happy family are represented to be accessible for common citizens. A stable family is also seen as the foundation for stability of the society. China is facing an increasing problem in more obvious class gap and slow-down of economic development. To solve the social conflicts and distract people’s attention from the less robust economy, culture and morality become the center of the CPC’s attention. This is why regulation of media content, in the name of establishing and repairing morality about sexuality in society, is at the center of the Chinese state-government’s contemporary policy.

What Kind of Governance Is Exerted in China Concerning Media Regulation?

China is well known, in the socialist and contemporary era, for imposing strict censorship on both legacy media like the press, television, radio and film, as well as new media like the internet and mobile phones. Such regulation takes multiple forms: the media practitioners are required to guide public opinions; media content is subject to censorship prior and post release, as well as self-censorship; the unwanted media content’s topic range from hardcore politics,

which attracts most attention, to sexuality and gambling. It is also an established history in the past, and is still present, although the general public could not have access to the details but only know the hear-say about the standard used.

However, the representation of Chinese government as an evil one and its policies as absurd, inexplicable actions, contradicts the fact that such a system has managed to maintain itself. In another word, what remains un-answered is why such a government has not been overthrown. Common Chinese people, when asked, are sincerely not planning to overthrow this government for ideal democracy, despite various dissatisfactions they have against their government's policies and institutional structures. To put it in another way, critiquing the Chinese state government as stupid does not explain why its governance manages to endure in a country with such huge population.

Usually, when scholars and journalists say that the Chinese government's regulation of sex-related content, from romance to porn-like scenes and stories, is absurd, what they are really saying is that the way the CPC government regulates such content is different from the established system of the developed Western world, including the United States, under-explained, subjective, and unpredictable. This means that regulation of sex-related media content is a grey area in which power rules over vaguely defined laws and policies. In the method part of this dissertation's Introduction, I propose that for this dissertation and other research on regulation of media content in China, it is better to look into how the system works in its context, rather than being satisfied at the insight that China is implementing a different, unclear system in such regulation. For this dissertation, I followed the Foucaultian approach for the three cases, by checking the context, institutional structure, policy texts and modified or unapproved media texts. The goal is to find and explain the contradictions, for the purposes of explicating the

complicated regulation system as it is represented in media discourses of factual truth, and to compare the changes of the approved and transgressive media texts, in order to know what has actually changed in the media texts because of the regulations, ranging from unofficial critiques to prohibitions.

The three case studies in Chapter Two to Chapter Four shows that the state government is not a seamless, united whole; at different time period, individuals of the government institution of media regulation contradict each other in news reports and interviews. The government's official regulative actions usually take place after the heated debates on the controversial content, and unofficial critique or praises made by the government officials. In this way, not only the government institution's official regulation always stands as ideologically correct, and morally noble highland in theory, it also, in practice, has extended time to make a seemly correct decision. The media laws and policies, challenged by the fast developing media technology and emerging media phenomenon, are trying to anticipate the changes and draw the boundaries for Chinese citizens' media-related behavior and ideology beforehand. However, my study finds that regulation of sex-related media content is often remedial, meaning that regulative actions take place after the circulation of such content, which is produced by the media industry. This process has created noteworthy consequences. That is to say, the regulation of media content in China is responding to existing controversies, based on influence of the media texts, and anticipation of the popular texts' further effects on audiences.

The fact that the regulative actions and government's explanations appear after the audiences' reaction to the popular media text does not mean that the government can only respond to the receptive effect of the media texts, rather than enforce constraints ahead of time. What it means is that the unclear boundaries for sex-related content also confuse the regulators.

Although they have approved certain content to be shown to audiences, reactions of Chinese audiences can surprise the censors, thus forcing them to wake up the unwanted consequences. However, to be more precise, the influence popular media texts have on audiences is what concerns the censors and regulators. Such influences allude to a subject who benefits or gets hurt because of the media texts, thus the regulation cannot be totally objective. The three cases show that the regulators in the government imbued nationalism, the legitimacy of the CPC's governance, and hetero-patriarchy in the regulation process by modifying or instructing changes of the media texts. This means that the interests of the nation weigh over that of individuals, political requirement of the government over commercial benefits of capitalist entities, and men's desire and welfare over that of women. Given that women are also individual citizens, participants of commercial media activities, family members and singles agents just like men, in all three preferred goal of media discourses, women suffer one more layer of oppression because of their gender identity.

Before and during regulative actions, the government's claims are under-explained as well. As you can see in the *FCWR* and *Lost in Beijing* cases, both of which involve official notifications, the government's clarification serves more to re-iterate how correct itself and its decisions are, rather than to help media practitioners and audiences to know the allowed boundaries for their behavior. The ruled, including media practitioners and audiences, do not need to know the boundary permitted by the ruling government. By threatening them with the consequences of transgression, the government manage to keep the majority of people and media entities being cautious not to transgress the regulators' bottom line. The safest way to do that is to stay closer to the ideology promoted by the CPC.

The Chinese media regulators' behavior shows that they, who collectively represent the government's intention, are implementing top-down power without having to explain themselves. Even though there are many self-contradictions in their claims and news reports, they do not feel the necessity to explain themselves because their absolute power secures their ruling without having to respond to bottom-up supervisions. As my analysis of the case of *Dwelling Narrowness* has shown, the edited version removed content that acknowledge people's supervision of the Party's exertion of power via public discussion online, and the details of how the branches of the Party act for or against the citizens' benefits. The government's uncurbed power is so blatant that Chinese citizens are fully aware of its existence. However, it is just because the citizens know the absoluteness of the state power that they are reluctant to find out the logic for the government's actions. The un-reasonable regulative actions are not the goal. The objective of regulation is to tailor sex-related media content for nationalism, legitimization of CPC governance and hetero-patriarchy, as well as to regulate the masses by halting just a few transgressors with its absolute power. Because audiences feel the government's power and their incapability of curbing such power, they do not bother to seek for solutions to the status quo. As a result, the government continues to reiterate internal contradictions. China may not be as advanced in modern politics as other countries like the United States, but it has a long history with records and practices of using power and strategy to govern a huge population of great differences. To study China, one cannot overlook the intelligence of the government and its rulers.

How Are the Private Topics Allowed to Enter Public Media Discourses?

When discussing public media discourse, I use "public" in the most literal way: I mean that the media content is publicly accessible to audiences. What kind of sex-related content is

allowed to enter public media discourses is important because these media texts are crucial resources for Chinese women to perform self-education on sex, intimate relationship, and family, provided that sex education in China lags behind practices.

My analysis points out that Chinese media laws and policies are vague about what kinds of sex-related content is allowed. However, to say that the definitions are vague is not enough. What matters is that such vague definition made it possible for the government to smuggle other ideological requirements in the regulation of media content. That all audiences are treated the same, despite their age, gender and class differences, means that the imagined targets for which media content shall have certain effects is the entire Chinese audience. To protect the youngsters is a good excuse to get adults and parents, who care about children's early exposure to sexual content, to join the CPC's side and applaud state regulation of sex-related content. The reason government regulators hesitate to define clear laws and policies, but utilize waves of discursive and institutional regulation to manage circulation of sex-related content is because the unsaid goal of such regulations cannot be clearly written. It is worth the repetitive governmental effort to maintain the public discourses because the benefits exceed the cost. At the same time, if one restricts his or her analysis to just the government, the media industry and audiences respectively, it is hard to discover the intricate, interweaving benefits that prohibits the government to take further steps to institutionalize regulation of sex-related media content.

Unlike other laws such as the copyright law (Han, 2011), which has been established in other countries, there is less pressure to systematically establish laws regulating sex-related media content in China. Pornography and obscenity are defined in various ways in different countries, thus their definition and regulation in China are not distinctly unreasonable and different from that of the rest of the world. The system does not feel the same pressure as other

regulative ones, which are dealing with public issues, to conform to a global standard, which basically does not exist. There are requests within the media industry to urge the government to establish standards for the practitioners in the industry to enjoy more freedom by knowing the boundaries. However, to say that the Chinese government should adopt the rating system established in the West cannot achieve its goal, because the moral nobility of the CPC as a socialist party naturally expels defining fixed boundaries for promiscuous sexuality, which are against hetero-patriarchy as well. The most recent NetEase Entertainment news report leaked that the task of censoring television is distributed to multiple branches of the government (2014, March 12). The standards included but are not limited to the following: the protagonists cannot be a womanizer (buneng taihuaxin), and the third wheel could not end up living happily; the post-80 generation could not have a baby before getting married; there should not be any student lovers in school or violence on campus. These standards disallow certain deviant representations, but it is clear that they do not include any statement about what topics of the private sphere can be represented if shown in certain ways.

Even if the Chinese government determines and manages to establish and build a clear system to regulate sex-related content, it cannot guarantee that this system will be gender equal. Creation of a system of regulation that is subject to popular supervision cannot automatically bring gender equality, as the case in Hong Kong has shown (e.g. Stockbridge, 1994). Gender equality cannot be achieved without specific attention to it.

Restraining from anticipation of promising changes, this dissertation points out the diversified ways in which women are disciplined in representation of sex-related topics, from courtship, to relationship and marriage. Women are objects of sexual desire, bodies with reproductive capability, targets of audiences' gaze, and spectacles used to attract audiences by

the producers and directors. Because they are represented more explicitly as bodily spectacles of sexual desire, these women are also much more easily targeted for symbolic annihilation when regulation of sexual content occurs. In the media texts discussed, women as characters are also caretakers and search for ways to secure collective welfare and wealth of the family. Due to the increasing class gap in China, the women in the media texts of fictional television drama and film or reality shows are forced to look for alternative ways to meet survival needs. These needs include living in one's own mortgaged condo with his or her core family members, as well as getting better career opportunities, health care, and education for children. The women and their families' needs in the media texts are caused by the trends of neoliberalism, in that neoliberal capitalism drives migration of people looking for better opportunities at different geographical locations, thus bringing forth separation of family members. These needs are also consequences of the CPC's policy to allow some people to get wealthy first, while in fact creating an increasing class gap: the basic requirement of lodging, food, health care, education and social security are detached from state security to market-oriented uncertainty and precarity. In the *FCWR* and *Dwelling Narrowness* cases, the solutions women found encompass hypergamy to people of higher class and self-prostitution. The women who turned to or were forced into such solutions are harshly criticized for abandoning moral requirements to themselves. The high moral standards put women at the center of critique and as the scapegoats for structural failure. The same standards do not apply to men in any of the three cases. Moreover, women are also bearers of nationalist pride. Not fight against raping is not acceptable, especially when audiences are non-Chinese.

Is There Hope?

The Chinese cases analyzed in this dissertation bring us back to the pre-public sphere status when the public and public sphere in the media are not established yet. As I have mentioned in the governing style of Chinese government of the Conclusion, the party-state government wants legitimized but un-supervised power. Reality shows that it has so much power that it is not necessary for it to offer sufficient explanation to citizens for its actions. It is in this environment that we are discussing whether there is hope for fairer gender equality in the future.

In all three cases, the transgressive media texts are available on the internet in China. *FCWR* and *Dwelling Narrowness* are not officially banned in mainland China, but only taken off from the official television channels and the website of the television station. *Lost in Beijing* was prohibited; however, that means the version of it approved by the censors is not accessible anywhere, but the transgressive full version got preserved on foreign websites. As a result, the more transgressive media text got preserved even in the extreme case of prohibition. In this way, these cases have proven that there is hope for transgressive media texts to be stored to survive regulations. It is just more difficult, but not impossible for people to find such texts.

The state government takes actions to regulate media texts based on assumptions of audiences being easily influenced by these texts. However, media scholars' research has shown that audiences can perform various interpretations of media texts, and the latter has limited effect on the former. This dissertation does not look into the audiences' reaction to these regulations of media texts but rather the regulation itself. I did not interview members of the audience to know if they used VPN (Virtual Private Network used to get over firewalls for online content banned by the local government) purposefully to search for such popular media texts. What we do know is that it costs money to subscribe for VPN services, or considerable time to look for free ones. To get a VPN is luxury. It requires sufficient knowledge through formal or informal education,

time and willingness to look for such information, and extra money to spend on such needs. Be reminded that even the middle class people in China, who are likely to be the kind of people who can afford such luxury, are under financial pressure to maintain an easy and comfortable life. The upper class enjoys enough benefits therefore their consciousness is not likely to threaten CPC governance. The lower class is struggling for survival; the bearer of hope in *Lost in Beijing* being a young, female migrant worker lacks supporting details to find its correspondence in reality. Because of the complicated reaction audiences may have, further study is needed before we can confirm hope in audiences actively searching for a more gender equal future, although this dissertation has offered a way for them to perform critical thinking against regulation of sex-related media texts.

From the state government's perspective, it is carefully managing the tension between ideological direction and economic benefits. The goal of regulation is to curb circulation of transgressive media texts threatening state-nationalism, legitimized Party governance, and hetero-patriarchy. The way to guarantee such regulation is un-supervised power, rather than a clearly defined system that allows bottom-up dissidents. To understand regulation of sex-related media texts, one has to understand power. Power that does not feel the necessity to offer self-explanation makes the media industry struggle to get closer to the Party. The state government's power can perform waves of regulation, but it may refuse adoption of a more transparent, standardized system, because the establishment of such a system would invite bottom-up freedom owned by media entities and individual audience. Therefore, the question of regulating media content is one about democracy. However, it is not to say that copying the system of another developed country can solve the problem. What these cases has shown is only that

entrusting power to the Party allowed it to smuggle other ideological requirements for the media text during the process of regulation.

While democratic move that allow for political participation and deliberation of the citizens can contribute to improvement of gender equality, gender equality cannot be achieved as an additive to other revolutions and reforms. Nor can it be accomplished by closing discussion on issues of the private. Whether gender equality can be improved and how it can be improved remains to be discussed, but first of all, such issues should be admitted to be legitimate ones, and citizens should be allowed to join the discussion.

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