

## Fictional Depictions of Youth in School in Films Made in China and United States

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This study discussed the differences between Chinese youth film and American teen film through the perspective on cultural foundation. The authors argue that Confucianism was an alternative that greatly affects the depiction of young characters and the causal relationship of morality and fate of the characters in films. The objective of such a comparison was not to advocate for either Chinese or American youth cinema in portraying young people, but to promote a better understanding of the strengths and impacts of youth cinema and youth genre. In addition, this study examined cinematic depictions of young characters portrayed in Chinese youth films and American teen films. It was argued that Chinese youth films and American youth films differ in depictions of school settings and even their purposes.

Keywords: Youth cinema, Chinese-language cinema, American cinema, sexual representation, school setting, youth genre

“Chinese society can now boast that it is the world’s fastest growing economy, but this has been achieved at a cost” (Zhou, 2007, p. 10), as Ji Baochen (2005) commented that Chinese teenagers are crazy about Hollywood blockbusters but have no idea who some well-known Chinese historical figures are. It reveals one of characteristics of public aesthetic preference among Chinese youth population. However, it also encourages Chinese filmmakers to produce youth films targeted at adolescents, teenagers and young adults in which the plot is based upon the special interests of the youth population.

Chinese films about teenagers have adopted different techniques and stories representing young people. It is a categorized system that displays relevant subgenres and character representations within the general youth genre. Some of these films capture certain youth styles and also focus on certain celebratory perspectives of adolescence. The ages of the films’ characters are the basis for this youth genre, and representations of the themes of its subgenres are more directly connected to some specific notions of young people’s cultures, behaviours and styles. It can be argued that this image of the Chinese youth population comes from within certain ranges of experiences afforded Chinese youth.

This study has two main paradigms in a comparison of youth cinemas from Chinese and American communities.

(i) Firstly, it is the representation of sexuality on screen. Zhou (2007) argued that “within Chinese society, growing up in a context of modernization and westernization, youth [since the last decade of the twentieth century] have demonstrated even more startling changes in their values and worldview” (p. 10). Significantly, youth films “are marked by a startling display of sexual and emotional frankness” (Zhou, 2007, p. 141). Moreover, some American scholars’ critiques on representations of young people in cinema also paid much attention to the changes in terms of sexual issues. For

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instance, Shary (2005) argued that “teens on screen [in the contemporary era] learned to explore their sexual practices and endeavored to actually educate themselves about the subject” (p. 89). Following such a trend, the debate over sexual expressions among young people is a substantial concern in this study.

(ii) Secondly, the other paradigm is the way of portraying young people that focuses not only on features and characteristics of young protagonists, but also on the nature of portraits of youth, such as narrative style and film form, as well as social indication. This implies that the differences in both youth cinemas should be treated in terms of essence, instead of degree (e.g., degree of sexual openness).

Using both paradigms, this study focuses on differences in essences, context, and representation of sexuality in both youth cinemas. An overview of the contemporary Chinese youth cinema is provided, including a brief cultural foundation, industrial trends, and market acceptability. Comparisons are made between the Chinese youth cinema and American youth cinema in terms of youth in school. At the same time, this study discusses how American youth cinema representations of sexuality impact Chinese youth cinema. The objective of such a comparison is not to advocate for either Chinese or American youth cinema in portraying youth and sexual issues, but to promote a better understanding of the strengths and impacts of youth cinema.

### **Cultural Foundation**

In the contemporary era, youth genre has outlived its educational, inspirational, realistic purposes. The influx of American youth films gave added stimulus to the film industry. The appearance of the sexual conquests of the characters in *American Pie* in many ways presented a radical change for Chinese youth film. It is an excellent example of the teen sex-quest story that embodies the impact on Chinese young audiences. In the 2000s, the Chinese film series *Pubescence* (China) demonstrates not the conventional young characters but libidinous young protagonists. These films appeared, all working on the sex-quest plotline, and collectively revealed taboos of teen sex, such as portraying the male protagonist masturbating with underwear on. However, an extraordinary fact should be paid much attention while we admit the influx of American, and Western, culture. The content of Chinese youth film is influenced by Chinese culture itself, including Buddhism, Confucianism, and the Chinese classics. Dominant among those influences, the Confucian philosophical traditions emphasized respectful, benevolent and hierarchical relations, harmonious social relations, and morality.

Chinese culture, especially Confucian culture, tends to give a considerable amount of reverence for life as an absolute ethic. Significantly, Confucianism is an alternative that greatly affects the depiction of young characters and the causal relationship of morality and fate of the characters. Why, then, use Chinese Confucianism in youth films to offer an ethical system that shapes the familial and young characters' personal values? Why not use other ethical and philosophical system? Confucianism is the great Chinese tradition that has gathered around the teachings of Confucius<sup>1</sup> for over 2,500 years (Littlejohn, 2011, p. xix). As a result, it infuses all phases of Chinese life. It is reflected in China's poetry and history, its government and social life, and the ethics that shaped society (Hoobler & Hoobler, 2009, p. 8).

According to Cornelius and Smith (2002), Confucius' teachings became an essential part of the imperial examination system by which men entered the governing class (p. 4). Kaizuka (2002) also argued that Confucius made his way round the various kingdoms of eastern China, spreading his own particular theory of government (p. 13). In Confucian philosophy, 'kingdoms' (*guo*) and 'family' (*jia*) are equally considered inviolable. 'Family' occupies a central position in Confucian culture. Filial piety is a virtue of respect for his/her parents and ancestors. It is defined as lifelong

service to parents. In terms of this obligation to father/past generations, Cornelius and Smith (2002) had argued that:

... the family was a microcosm of society and operated under the same hierarchical system, with the most important relationship within the family being that between father and son (p. 69).

This fairly embraced their understanding of two relationships of the well-known Confucian 'Five Relationships'<sup>2</sup>: (a) *jun wei chen gang* (ruler guides subject), and (b) *fu wei zi gang* (father guides son). Interestingly, the legacy of Confucian ethics for centuries remains the role of a son's (or a daughter's) obligation<sup>3</sup> to the domestic sphere and to their secondary position to their parents. On the other hand, for Confucianism, the material-satisfaction between 'father' (*fu*) and 'son' (*zi*) has no priority for either side. Spiritual and moral satisfaction is more important for the father as a father and for the son as a son. It is argued that the basic characteristics of Confucian ethics are hierarchy and inequality, and that the typical manifestations of hierarchical and unequal relationships are integral to that ethical relationship (Zhao, 2007, p. 5). An understanding of the ethical relationship between a 'father' and his 'son' (or, in general, his children) 'lies at centre' (p. 5) of Confucian ethics, and may thus provide a better understanding of Confucian ethical theory.

In Chinese culture, the relationship between the father and child (*ren*) is viewed as a significant relationship in everyone's social life. While this essay focuses on the issues related to representations of sex and sexuality, the quality of the father-child relationships was more important than the masculinity of the father. The conventional belief is that since 'filial piety' is a cardinal value in Confucianism, a salient feature of the father-son relationship is unquestioned obedience of the son to the authority of the father (Tu, 1985, p. 115). However, Lamb (2010) argued that the rising level of education among younger fathers in China explained some generational changes, especially in urban centers like Shanghai and Hong Kong (p. 351). He believes that Chinese filial piety and Confucianism have thus changed, and apparently have not had a uniform effect on all fathers, past or present.

Young people conform to sex role standards when the relationships with their fathers are close. According to Pleck (2010), a similar conclusion was suggested by research on other aspects of psychosocial adjustment and on achievement: paternal warmth or closeness appeared beneficial, whereas paternal masculinity appeared to be irrelevant (Lamb, 2010, p. 98). Although it is not possible to deny the 'change' to Confucianism, the important feature of 'father' does not change. Tu (1985) argued it is the recognition that the father's ego ideal, his wishes for himself as well as what he has created as standards of emulation for his family, is an integral part of the legacy that the son receives (p. 119).

Moreover, young people in American youth films find themselves involved in sexual activities, whether intercourse, foreplay, or the basic negotiation of sexual preference; "The majority of these narratives could be characterized as comedies, although they tend to take seriously the stakes of sex" (Shary, 2005, p. 63). Those young protagonists in Chinese youth films are also involved in sexual activities, but the majority of the narratives display tragic, unfortunate, sorrowful predestination and negative representations. Confucian culture is significant in these films for a variety of reason, not the least of which is explaining such a difference. Confucius addressed his students that "As sexual desire diminishes with age, there may be less conflict between the desire for sex and the desire to do good (at the very least, the older crowd may not waste so much time thinking about sex)" (Bell, 2010, p. 153). This is not to imply that the desire for sex needed to be entirely extinguished, but it indicates that adolescents may have difficulty controlling and subordinating to moral principles.

Shary described American youth cinema after 1994 as '*the return of teen sex*' (2005, p. 104). He argued that the narrative emphasis on sexual conquest has become 'prominent' since the later

1990s (p. 104). A considerable number of films had been covered in his study, such as *Kids* (Larry Clark, 1995), *Cruel Intentions* (Roger Kumble, 1999), *American Pie* (series), *Real Women Have Curves* (Patricia Cardoso, 2002), *What a Girl Wants* (Dennie Gordon, 2003), and *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen* (Sara Sugarman, 2004). Shary also noticed that teen films produced after 2005 fulfill the trend of 'return of teen sex', such as *Love at First Hiccup* (Barbara Topsøe-Rothenborg, 2009), *Fired Up* (Will Gluck, 2009), *16 Wishes* (Peter DeLuise, 2010), etc.

Shary (2005) believed that the surest sign of change since the 1980s, teens on screen began having sex again, and even liking it, as they learned to explore their sexual practices and endeavored to actually educate themselves about the subject (p. 89). However, he also argued that the narrative emphasis on sexual conquests were not prominent in those youth films (produced after 1994) as much as they had been in the early to mid-1980s (p. 104). Shary (2002) pointed out that portrayals of teen sex in '90s youth films are not quite as pessimistic or condescending, although it is usually shown to be distinctly more problematic than it was in the '80s (p. 235). Although the majority of youth sex in cinema remains problematic, youth films such as *American Pie* and its sequel (e.g., *American Pie 2: Secret Disguise* in 2001, and *American Pie Presents Book of Love* in 2009) represent 'a return of the romp or even an inauguration of more balanced, meaningful depictions of carnal education remains to be seen' (2002, p. 238).

In 2000, *100 Girls* (Michael Davis, 2000) tells a story about a college freshman who is trapped in an elevator after leaving a party at a women's dormitory with an unknown, unseen woman when the power goes out. He and this unknown woman have sex in the dark. When this freshman wakes up in the morning—still in the elevator—he finds himself alone with a pair of her panties. He tries to identify his mystery dream girl from a whole dormitory of young women. A film like *100 Girls* (Michael Davis, 2000) offers another clear perception of teen sex: without seeing the face of a girl, the boy may have sex with her. Libb Thims (2007) tried to explain it from the perspective of 'thermodynamic system'. He stated that:

... the relation between heat and order also explains the stereotypical inverse connection between the highly ordered neurological nature of geeks and nerds, to use common terms, and their lower levels of physical hotness, on average, as well as the less ordered neurological nature of supermodels and beauties and their higher levels of physical hotness, on average (p. 501).

Thus, we find that Cynthia (played by Jaime Pressly)—the 'hottest of the 100'—states in her notes:

"I'm not stupid. I know I got things easy. Guys will pretty much do anything for me because of the way I look. It's a case. You see, nothing is a challenge for me. Everything's made easy. And if I ever actually do, do something on my own, then everyone assumes I got there because of the way I look..." (from the film's subtitle)

Yet instead of examining the nature of love's dynamics, *100 Girls* attempts to highlight the male protagonist's motivated behaviour after sex in the elevator. This film approaches youth sexual practice with a very facetious view, depicting it as a licit love affair, and beyond being devoid of any real sexual responsibility.

Libb Thims' 'thermodynamic system' is in this sense rationally explicable. When we look at the representations of sex, Confucianism is frequently described as sex-negative, but that is incorrect. Fang Fu Ruan (1991), the Chinese physician and medical historian, argued that Confucius himself never spoke slightly of the sexual impulse (p. 19). So, it is necessary to discuss the understanding of the implications of Confucius' remarks—"eating food and having sex is the nature of human beings". Ruan (1991) also quoted that "when teenagers and youths become conscious of sex, they

will look toward young and beautiful women" (p. 20). Madsen and Strong (2003) examined the early Confucian masters' classics (e.g., *The Works of Mencius*) in terms of human sexuality as well as sex, and they argued that "it is not something that we need to despair and repress" (p. 149). However, "to purify the heart and diminish the desires" was highlighted in *Later Chronicles of the Han Dynasty*<sup>4</sup>. In the current decade, some Chinese scholars point out that there is a renaissance of Confucianism in contemporary Chinese communities. Yu discussed about Confucian social and political aspirations in terms of quality and democracy as well as the Confucian conceptions and values. Yu also paid much attention to the application of Confucianism to the group that is 'coming-of-age' in the modern Chinese communities and even in Western countries. Yu (2011) argued that "the Confucian religion with its emphasis on filial piety present itself as a moderating force in the contemporary world of clashing civilizations" (p. 89). She also believed, thus, that in the Confucian context, we may want to revive a series of terms in relationship to humanity and ritual propriety in public discourse (p. 134).

Even though some teenage characters in Chinese youth films audaciously have sex, and masturbate, the narrative emphasis on sexual conquest is different from those of American teenage characters. We find that boys' horny desires take place in the youth films produced in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. But this 'sexual desire' (*xing yu*) always leads to some tragic, unfortunate, sorrowful narrative and negative representations. We find little narrative that could be characterized as comedies.

There are some 2000s films that did show the scenes of having sex and masturbation, although primarily as non-comedy films, such as *Shanghai Dreams* (China) (2005) depicting a rape scene, *2 Young* (Hong Kong) (2005) illustrating teenage parents who have sex at an early age as well as their unfortunate experiences after the girl becomes pregnant, and *Formula 17* (Taiwan) (2004) demonstrating that homosexuality reaps poor karmic fruit after the two young protagonists have sex. These films often depict characters as humorlessly failing to approach anything originally intended by them. In the following paragraphs, the comparison between Chinese youth films and the American youth films are made in terms of representations of sexuality existing in the subgenre of youth in school, since the most conspicuous differences usually remain aligned with the otherness of the cultural matrix.

### Youth in School Settings

Chinese youth films and American youth films differ in depictions of school settings and even their purposes. School-aged young people seek various forms of social bonding experiences and the school setting provides the opportunity for such an experience. One of the authors, Wang Changsong, spent his adolescence in high school in China, he always strove for higher grades and became overloaded by various assignments and examinations. In the school environment, some classmates carried a sense of superiority; however, most students seemed not to care whatever their age, current social ties, or sense of self. Some films do embrace messages of students' complaints over the burdens resulting from a myriad of subjects. The documentary film *Senior Year* ("Gaosan", Zhou Hao, 2005) is an excellent example. This part compares the depictions of school settings in Chinese youth films and American youth films, as well as the representations of sexuality in the films.

According to Shary (2002), the majority of American teens' socialization takes place at or around school (p. 27). He believed what makes the school film a specific subgenre is its focus on the actual socialization process at the school. This is opposed to other youth issues which are less integral to the school setting, such as crime, sex, terror or family (although these issues are often developed in films around a school setting). Farber, *et al.* (1994) argued that "the common tendency of filmmakers to manipulate emotions in the movies examined here invalidates what many know, and leaves some realities hidden" (p. 206). They discussed the schooling portrayed in the American

films, and they clearly pointed out that schooling represents a widely contested social territory to which large numbers of people in the culture have immediate access; schools therefore provide vital sites where public deliberation and compromise can still take place, and in which wider community participation remains possible (p. 4).

With that school setting in American youth films come a platform for young people to address their overcoming of conventionality. The 2004 popular film *Mean Girls* (Mark Waters, 2004) depicted a girl who is raised in the African bush country by her zoologist parents, and who thinks she knows about survival of the fittest. However, the law of the jungle takes on a whole new meaning when the home-schooled 16-year-old enters public high school for the first time and encounters psychological warfare and unwritten social rules that teenage girls face today. In this film, the 'Plastics' are the social pinnacle of the high school hierarchy. This film describes how female high school social cliques operate and the effect they can have on girls. *Mean Girls 2* (Melanie Mayron, 2011) is a stand-alone sequel to *Mean Girls*. Driscoll (2011) suggested the film undermines the idea that girls' conformity is a form of safety and yet suggests that society is not responsible for the mean girls' behaviour because they can be defeated by public exposure (p. 61). *Mean Girls* and its spin-off have shown the high-school campus in a bright light, while *Sydney White* (Joe Nussbaum, 2007) discovers that today's sisterhood in college is not what it used to be. With the help of her socially challenged new friends, Sydney (played by Amanda Bynes) takes on the reigning campus queen to attempt to transform the school's misguided social hierarchy.

The teen comedy film *Sydney White* poses very different reasons for the teen queen's competitiveness. The female protagonist directly seeks power over seven male students. '*It's time to take back the school*', says Sydney. She competes because she believes that many students in the university are insufficiently self-aware. They are damaged by some unbalanced clique culture that is inevitable because it is embedded in the campus environment. Kaklamanidou (2013) argued that *Sydney White* is "an intensely political text, which addresses issues of class and gender" (p. 77). This female protagonist is presented as a confident, decisive, intelligent and pragmatic young woman. Although, as it has already been noted, teen sex comedies like the *American Pie* series focus on boys and sex, the camera's turn to teenage girls instead of boys can be seen as progress in the politics of a male-centred society. Kaklamanidou believed it could "be mostly attributed to the girl power movement of the later 1990s and 2000s" (p. 80). Another example includes *The Clique* (Michael Lembeck, 2008) and *16 Wishes* (2010).

Despite the 'girl power' depicted in the films mentioned above, Chinese youth films do not empower modern adolescent girls within the school settings as much as American teen films do. Interestingly, girl power can be seen from the depiction of Chinese young women warriors in swordplay films. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000) successfully featured an empowered female protagonist played by Zhang Ziyi<sup>5</sup>. As Szeto (2011) argued, this female protagonist "is a young girl facing all those mediocre fighters" (p. 55).

Most Chinese girls in school stress the conventionality of the social environment. In the film *Winds of September* (Taiwan) the only two female protagonists are Huang Qinyun (played by Jennifer Chu) and Shen Peixin (played by Teresa Daley). Also at the school is a gang of seven boys. The boys represent a specific force against the school system. Shen Peixin is the class monitor. She is shown to be mild in temper. She attempts to persuade one of the gang to join the school's band to avoid being disciplined by the school. This Eurasian-looking girl represents female leadership in the school, but her ingenuous behaviours indicate that she obeys the rules and regulations of the school while the depictions of male protagonists in the film question the aim of education.

*High Noon* (Hong Kong), unlike *Winds of September*, is sentimentally hopeless as teenagers idle away their time in school. In this film, the clique at school is more like any social group. They

tease the young teachers, they smoke drugs in the toilet, and they flirt with girls. The two female protagonists role is to address the concept of women as sexual objects of pleasure. One of the female protagonists even commits suicide due to public exposure of her sex video. In this film they are just the subjects of the event of 'kou nuei' (picking up hot chicks).

Thus, neither *Winds of September* nor *High Noon* illustrate as much 'girl power' as the *Mean Girls* series and *Sydney White*. Although the term 'disempower' seems problematic for describing these Chinese girl characters, there is a signal absence of power, rather than an assumption that girls don't/can't practice power until they have become 'empowered'. In exploring this quandary as feminists, the discourse of girlhood that supports Confucianist principles also limits the transformative potential of girl characters in film. Admonitions for Women (*Nüjie*)—the most influential book outlining the four virtues females must abide by—fairly includes "the exclusion or limited involvement of women in literary arts" (Rosenlee, 2006, p. 104). Lingzhen Wang (2011) argued that in Chinese context, feminist discourse was originally bound together with Western imperialism and then took different routes and transformations (p. 15). She believed that Western feminist discourse appear in Chinese community together with discourses of modernity and the modern nation-state. Betties and Adams (2008) stated that girl power signifies a cultural shift in describing what constitutes today's ideal girl (p. 102). Today's ideal girl in Chinese communities may be 'disempowered' in many youth films, but 'girl power' has begun to appear in the form of youth film in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The *Pubescence* series are an excellent attempt to illustrate the Chinese version of 'today's ideal girl'.

As a teen comedy genre, American youth films seriously challenge the educational system. The college comedy *Accepted* (Steve Pink, 2006) demonstrates a high school slacker, who is rejected by every school he applies to, who then opts to create his own institution of higher learning. However, it is rare to see any characters in Chinese youth films voice their dissatisfaction with the local educational system even as there is little to indicate the Chinese educational system is better or more mature than the one in the States. Indeed ironically, those Chinese characters indirectly challenge society's preconceptions about school education. The parkour<sup>6</sup> teenager in the film *City Money* represents resistance towards the national higher education entrance examination (commonly known as Gaokao), struggling for self-management of learning, as well as a solid passion for parkour.

*Accepted* involves a group image of college-aged students who are turned down by colleges. Near the end, scenes of this film highlight the mood of dissatisfaction towards existing education. The transcript of a portion of the speech by the hero effectively expresses the perspective of a less-stressful process of higher learning. He points out the failures of conventional education and the importance of following one's own passions instead of being dictated to on what to do. At the State of Ohio educational accreditation hearing, Bartleby Gaines (played by Justin Long) says:

"I'm not going to answer your question, 'cause you guys have already made up your minds. I'm an expert in rejection, and I can see it on your faces. And it's too bad that you judge us by the way we look and not by who we are. Just because you want us to be more like them when the truth is we're not like them. And I am damn proud of that fact. I mean, Harmon College and their 100 years of tradition. But tradition of what? Of hazing kids and humiliating anyone who's a bit different? Of putting so much pressure on kids they turn into these stress freaks and caffeine addicts.... 'cause you rob these kids of their creativity and their passion. That's the real crime! ..." (from the film subtitle)."

This film portrays a happy ending in which the institute reopens, with more students enrolling. Sealey (2008) also noticed some schooling problems were lampooned so effectively in this film. He exemplifies secondary schooling still (not to mention higher education) has a strong vocational

message (p. 33). In fact, some of the earlier college comedies have already featured students' performance/behaviour against the educational system, such as *Animal House* (John Landis, 1978), *Real Genius* (Martha Coolidge, 1985) and *Slackers* (Dewey Nicks, 2002).

In *City Monkey* (Kong Linchen, 2008), the athletic protagonist, with vigour and vitality, shows skilled parkour moves. But he expresses some inconsistent conversation at home. This high school boy convinces his mother not to make him join the coming national higher education entrance examination. The conflicts depicted in the film move between parkour, national higher education entrance examination, puppy love, acting in commercials, and the mother's illness. Throughout these conflicts the parkour teenager obediently participates in college entrance examination with qualification. He voices his mind, but he cannot practically resist the continuous pressure from his family. Also interestingly, the 1990s Hong Kong comedy series *Fight Back to School* (Gordon Chan, 1991, 1992 & 1993) allocated stories among crime, school and romance. These films sarcastically depicted some teachers and school leaders with the help of "nonsensical unsettling of linguistic normatively" (Gelder, 2000, p. 370). Some teachers and school leaders (e.g., the principal and director of teaching and learning) are always the objects that make student hate schools and teachers. For instance, the students in *Fight Back to School* (1991) make use of a crime mess to seek revenge on these teachers and school leaders.

Furthermore, romantic affairs and teen sex represented more variety in American teen films than Chinese youth films. Shary (2002) concluded "interracial, homosexual, passionate, dysfunctional, dangerous, liberating" (p. 261) affairs were represented within teen romantic and sexual experiences. *Love at First Hiccup* (2009) centers on a high school freshman who falls in love with a beautiful senior as his "first hiccup". This film follows their budding romance as they learn to overcome the little hiccups that can be found in all relationships. This positive depiction of young characters in this teen comedy film not only prevents vilifying youth in school or representing them as irresponsible and injudicious, but also indicates that this teenage character retains some sense of integrity or morality. He demonstrates passionate belief in what he is doing. He confesses his love to the senior. He protects the senior from losing her virginity. The dangers, or, the threats, of school youths' love and sex are involved in various conflicts of youth films, but young people themselves have been given more space to handle their affairs, and problems as well. *College Road Trip* (Roger Kumble, 2008) is an excellent example. It illustrates the conflicts between an overprotective father and an overachieving high school girl, as well as indicating that the young person must be dealt with as an autonomous individual. The father's presence on a trip that was designed to mark his little girl's emergence as a young adult leads to an endless series of comic complications. The daughter's complaint—"treating me like a, a child"—represents she is craving the freedom of choosing a university as a young adult and, ultimately the father's expression—"I let you go now"—strongly reflects that young people are given more space to handle their affairs.

Chinese films about school youth falling in love and having sex are perhaps the most difficult to exemplify. The independent film *Beijing Bicycle* (Wang Xiaoshuai, 2001), which won a Jury Grand Prix of Silver Bear at the 51<sup>st</sup> Berlin International Film Festival in 2001, is the story of two adolescents, whose destinies are linked through their desires to own the same bicycle. For the schoolboy in this film, the bicycle represents improved social standing and peer acceptance. He even loses his confidence after losing his bicycle in front of the girl he fancies. When the girl suggests giving him a ride after school, he becomes more upset. Epstein (2007) argued that "possessing a bicycle gives him a sense of freedom and independence that allows for a distancing from his family" (p. 221). He believes it allows him to socialize with classmates from a more affluent background and it is the vehicle through which he expresses his personal interest in his girlfriend. In the other boy's case, he always just eyes a young girl who lives next door to a grocery store, but believes that



such a pretty girl would never be interested in him, because of his rural background. He ultimately discovers this girl is in reality a maid who pretends to be a wealthy urban resident. She actually wears her employer's clothing and shoes. The characters' emotional affairs, and unrequited love depicted in this film do not deliver any message of happiness, and with no positive results.

### Conclusion

Youth films from the Chinese and American communities contrast different levels of openness on sexual subjects. This study not aims to recommend "the best" level of openness, but has underlined the tangible connections between sexual subjects and actual social conditions. While the Chinese young population may always be targeted for their consumptive power that supports the local film industry, we must show them to properly learn more about their sexual depictions and own representation, and further, to produce better youth-genre films in the future. Most discussions are concerned with examining the conditions under which youth live only within the context of their representation in cinematic texts. These discussions seem to suggest that young people have always been a concern in Chinese film history, both in terms of cinematic portrayals of youth and their reception of films as audiences.

### Note

- <sup>1</sup> Confucius (551–479 BC) was a Chinese teacher, editor, politician, and philosopher of the Spring and Autumn period (Chun-qiu) of Chinese history. Confucius's principles had a basis in common Chinese tradition and belief. He championed strong family loyalty, ancestor worship, respect for elders by their children, and of husbands by their wives. Confucianism is a system of thought based on the teachings of Confucius, who lived from 551 to 479 B.C.E. If only one word were to be used to summarize the Chinese way of life for the last 2,000 years, the word would be Confucian.
- <sup>2</sup> Later Confucians posited five basic human relationships: father and son; elder brother and younger brother; husband and wife; ruler and government minister (or subjects); friend and friend (or friends). Any other human relationship could be seen as some variation of one of the five. According to Lee Dian Rainey, our roles are based on how we relate to one another—as a father or as a younger brother. In each case, our behaviour and our duty will be different, depending on what our role is in the relationship.
- <sup>3</sup> When Mengzi talks about filial piety, usually the emphasis was not particularly directed at the father-and-son relationship but of the child-parent. Scholars in the Han dynasty had developed this fundamental principle of elevating the role of both the father in a family and the ruler in a state and transferred the expectation of filial piety to the ruler in place of the father, thus, exchanging the functions of father and ruler. "*Father And Son in Confucianism And Christianity: A Comparative Study of Xunzi and Paul*", Sussex Academic Press, (2007), p.6. Many scholars have reached a similar conclusion regarding the importance of the child-parent relationship in contemporary China. Chinese scholar Yu Dan, in her *Sentiment of the Analects of Confucius* published in 2008, pointed out that the current definition of father-and-son relationship does not reflect the ruler-and-subject, but 'filial piety' still functions as 'civic virtue' (*gong gong mei de*) in the society.
- <sup>4</sup> *Later Chronicles of the Han Dynasty* is an official Chinese historical text covering the history of the Han Dynasty from 6 to 189. Fan Ye and other authors compiled it in the 5th century during the Liu Song Dynasty, using a number of earlier histories and documents as sources. The book is part of the early four historiographies of the Twenty-Four Histories canon, together with the Records of the Grand Historian, Book of Han, and Records of the Three Kingdoms. Parts 1 and 2 of Volume 79 were the biographies of Confucian scholars. Forty-six Confucian scholars were included.
- <sup>5</sup> Zhang Ziyi is a Chinese film actress and model. Her first major role was in *The Road Home* (1999). She achieved fame in the West after leading roles in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *Rush Hour 2* (2001), *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), and *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005). She has been nominated for three BAFTA Awards and a Golden Globe Award.

- <sup>6</sup> Parkour is a holistic training discipline using movement that developed from military obstacle course training. This is a non-competitive sport, which can be practiced alone or with others. It can be practiced in any location, but is usually practiced in urban spaces. Parkour can include running, climbing, swinging, vaulting, jumping, rolling, quadrupedal movement, and the like, depending on what movement is deemed most suitable for the given situation.

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