

For Doing Women's Film History Conference

Changing the Images of Woman in Contemporary Chinese Cinema

——An Analysis based on Li Yu's Four Films

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Introduction

Western theories may not function well when evaluating Chinese reality. An obvious example is China set up a socialism reign upon an economic base of abject poverty in 1949, thus oppugned the absolutism of Marxism that the superstructure is determined by the socio-economic base. However, the effort of integrating Chinese context with western theory has never stopped, and independent film is a great field for this practice. Unlike industrial/commercial film whose main target is profit, the original intention of independent film is hard to define. It may come from an enthusiasm for creation, a dissatisfaction of internal contradiction of the society, the utilitarianism of film festival awards, or simply a practice in linking up the text with overseas theories.

When women are involved in film production, gender research and female criticism (not merely feminism) provide important extra perspectives and point of views in understanding films. In these films made by women, some are “interpellated” by phallogentrism and proficiently told in a structure of patriarchal narration that we rarely perceive the filmmakers’ female identity^①. The other films, no matter if the filmmakers admit they are feminists, do bear gender features and special concerns in storytelling, thus become a place for theory and practice to examine each other. Chinese female director Li Yu is apparently the latter.

Based on four films directed by Li Yu, this paper analyzes the heritage and variance of woman characters in contemporary Chinese films. In analyzing five characteristics of the woman’s image in her films, the paper argues that although the development of western theory has went into an era of post-feminism, independent films in China made by women still preserve the radical facet of the earlier second-wave movement of feminism. Meanwhile, to some extent, women characters in Li Yu’s films are compatible with foreign theoretical context, but also have their own Chinese features.

1. Backgrounds of Li Yu and her films

After quitting her job as a well-known television presenter, Li Yu started her directing career by making three documentaries, *Sisters*, *Honor and Dream* and *Stay and Hope*, and then turned to fiction. Now she has established herself as an important female director of the new generation of Chinese filmmakers. Her four fiction films, *Fish and Elephant*^②, *Dam Street*^③, *Lost in Beijing*, and *Buddha Mountain*^④ offer a similar theme of women’s tragedy in familial life. The story backgrounds of the four films are set in contemporary China.

Referred as the first lesbian film in mainland China, *Fish and Elephant* follows Xiaoyun, the elephant keeper in the Beijing Zoo and her lesbian lover, Xiaoqun, a cloth saleswoman in a market stall. Her relationship is tested by her recently divorced mother who returns to town in the hope of setting her daughter up in marriage. Further complicating matters is Xiaoqun's ex-lover, Junjun who murdered her father and returns to her former life with the law in hot pursuit.

Dam Street tells the story of Xiaoyun, a sixteen year old girl, whose pregnancy is disclosed and shocks both her family and the community. The high school expels and her boyfriend Wang Feng, escapes to another city- Xiaoyun is humiliated by the whole town. Ten years later, Xiaoyun's life is at a standstill in the same small town. She makes a meager living as a singer in a local entertainment troupe, and strikes up a friendship with a ten-year old boy, Xiaoyong who becomes her closest confidante and defender in the community that scorns her.

Lost in Beijing tells a young and poor couple Liu Pingguo and her husband An Kun who move to Beijing for a better life. An Kun works as a window washer, while his wife works as a foot masseuse. Liu's boss Lin Dong rapes her when she is drunk, and the action is witnessed by An Kun. An Kun tries to blackmail the boss but fails. Soon, Liu is found pregnant, Lin Dong and Ann Kun signs a contract that if the baby is identified as Lin's child biologically after birth, he will pay the couple 100,000RMB (around 10,000GBP). But complications make them head for a collision course.

Buddha Mountain follows three teenagers, Nan Feng, Ding Bo, Fei Zao who fail the Chinese College Entrance Examination, the sole determining factor of acceptance to a university in China. They escape from their own families and they rent a house from a middle age desperate housewife, Cui Yueqin, who lost her son in a car accident. In a progress of comforting and conflicts, these four people developed a deep, abiding friendship.

Fish and Elephant is the sole film not released in China because the script has never been censored. Li Yu was prohibited from filmmaking for two years because the film was screened in overseas film festivals without governmental permission. *Lost in Beijing* was banned after one-week releasing in China because of its exotic scenes and in the SARFT's^⑥ words, "a humiliating description toward the time^⑥". *Dam Street* and *Buddha Mountain* were released in China.

2. The sexual insults from the society

During an interview, when Li Yu was asked if she is a feminist director, she once said:

People have different points of view. As a female director, I am not necessarily a feminist, but the feminist identity you argue points to a problem that Chinese films do rarely discuss women's life and fate. Women are overly scanned by men's eyes, and are always the targets of being invaded and manipulated by men.^⑦

Although she did not admit herself as a feminist, but her Laura-Mulvey-style speech may

unconsciously circumscribe the female characters in her films. But rather than simply “gazed” by men, the women characters are frequently humiliated and insulted by men and society, which seems to be a tradition in the history of Chinese film.

Traced to 1930s, the Left Wing Film Group in Shanghai had made a great number of films about women’s suffering. For example, the films *Angels on the Road*, *Cry of Women*, *The Boatman’s Daughter*, *The Goddess* and other films of the generation generally follow various women roles from the lowest class of the society, usually country girls, who fall into slave girls, concubines or prostitutes when they trying to make a living in the metropolis. Their major humiliation and insult come from their sexuality.

Sexuality, as Kate Millett points out: “*it appears a biological and physical activity; it is set so deeply within the larger context of human affairs that it serves as a charged microcosm of the variety of attitudes and values to which culture subscribes.*” (Millett 23)

However, in Li Yu’s films, most situations in which women are insulted and humiliated are not subscribed by the major culture of contemporary China, or namely, not agreed by the values that Ideological State Apparatuses favors. Conversely, it professedly incited by masculine desire, a risk of deviating major values, and then become the antagonists of the society. The humiliation of women substantively derives from the abusive values of polygamy in Chinese ancient tradition, which treat woman as inferior to men. From this perspective, traditional Chinese culture has apparently not expired but hides an undercurrent and an impact on modern society and modern women. Thus, the humiliation is not only at the hand of men but also buttressed by past social traditions.

In Li Yu’s first film *Fish and Elephant*, the sexual insult is more radical and exceeds the traditional taboo. Teenager girl Junjun, sleeps with a policeman, steals his gun, and kills her father who has raped her since she was a kid. Li Yu never acquired formal film education, but resulting raw nature of the film allows an unvarnished passion of instinct that drove by her intuition to speak to the audience. Such primitivism may help critics to discover the mental reality of the director. Although the patricide brings Junjun a temporal freedom, but she is surrounded and caught by the police. Arrested by murder, while the incestuous sexual insult she suffered is left unanswered. Therefore, without any sympathy, the society plays a cold accomplice in her tragedy.

In *Dam Street*, the story starts in 1983, when the Ideological State Apparatuses overwhelmed all in China. Xiaoyun and her boyfriend are both expelled from high school after her pregnancy is discovered. Due to the far insistence of high moral bottom line of contemporary China[®], a teenager’s pregnancy before marriage in 1980s may ruin her whole life. In the film, the headmaster of the school broadcasted news of the pregnancy to the entire student body through a loudspeaker in the playground. Xiaoyun meets a similar fate which Hester Prynne bears in *Scarlet Letter* three hundreds years earlier- shunned and labeled unworthy. Ten years later, after the society had defined her as a slut, Xiaoyun continues to suffer sexual harassment from various men, include a well known township entrepreneur, a married man who finally succeed to have an affair with her and the audiences who watch her singing. Since women are seen inferior in

contemporary 1980's society, they can not be forgiven when they committed a so-called crime, and are treated abusively.

In *Lost in Beijing*, after the foot masseuse Liu Pingguo was raped by her boss when she was drunk, her husband signed a contract to trade the unborn infant for money. The misery of Liu ostensibly led by her husband and boss, but also actually traced to the continuing social undercurrent, the tradition of commercializing women. For instance, from South Song Dynasty (1127- 1279 A.D.) to the liberation of Communist Party (1949), the husband may pawn their wives to another man. After signing a contract with a deadline of redemption, the husband may get paid and another man can get the wife for impregnation or concubine. The setting of the two men character in the film also accord with the Party A and Party B of that historical pact, namely, the poor and the sterile rich. The film reflects this transaction- the wealthy boss Lin Le is sterile, and An Kun, Liu Pingguo's husband, is a poor steplejack worker who cleans windows and gets minimum wage.

The baby transaction in the film presents a new perspective of Kate Millett's theory of coitus that "*Its central vignette a picture of human sacrifice performed upon the woman to the greater glory and potency of the male.*" (Millett 292) In the film, this is embodied in boss Lin Dong's intensive aspiration of the infant that subconsciously reflects his dread of sterility. His worry implies a social pressure of male self-esteem: to some extent, incapable of impregnation denotes vanishing of man power. Therefore, Liu Pingguo is sacrificed by the patriarchic structure rather than the bargain. The subordinate plot of the film also reflects a similar social persecution. Xiao Mei, Liu Pingguo's friend and another foot masseuse, irritated by sexual harassment from a male customer, assaults him by cutting down one of his foot nail, and is fired by the massage parlor. Xiao Mei, frustrated in her attempts to find a new job, she quickly degenerates into a prostitute and is raped and killed by a whoremonger at the end of the film.

Although Li Yu's original creativity is that women are not only the victims of sexual insults, they also rebel with the weapon of sexual insults. Such kind of female character had not appeared before in Chinese film history.

For instance, in Li Yu's latest movie *Buddha Mountain*, when the girl Nan Feng finds her pure male friend Ding Bo who never had a love relationship before and gets sexual harassment from a female gang member, Nan Feng does not choose a traditional way to revenge, such as fighting or smack her head with a bear bottle. Instead, she runs over and kisses the girl forcefully. Thus, in the film, there are two sexual insults that launches by girls. The first is the gang member sexually teases the innocent boy, and the second is Nan Feng's revenge. It may hard to define the specific motivation of Nan Feng's action, but since the censorship detests the stories of how women are bullied, which is considered as indirect complains toward the society, the image of female victims in films are gradually becoming vague and minor. Thus female's change from the victim to implementer in the sexual insult might metaphors the director's hope of female's independence and arousal.

3. Women's identity in the single parent family

The single parent family is a common narrative background in Li Yu's films. In *Fish and Elephant*, Xiaoqun's mother divorced her father; in *Dam Street*, Xiaoyun's father died years earlier, and her song's foster mother, Wang Zhengyue, is also dumped by her husband; In *Buddha Mountain*, the husband of the middle aged woman Cui Yueqin, eloped with a young woman, and the other three teenagers also escaped from their broken family. In *Lost in Beijing*, although Liu Pingguo's husband An Kun is with her, but he is not responsible to the family- he is an absentee father and husband, who never cares and even bribes the doctor to change infant's blood type in order to sell the baby to Boss Lin..

The absence of male in the family also changes the social identity of female. Woman's status in the family is unique, as Ann Kaplan points out: "*The very survival of the human race depends...on the woman's function in cementing the family through her skills in emotions and relationships.*" (Kaplan 20) The main characters of the four films are all youth, whose mothers take the responsibility of man's familial duty. These mothers usually domesticated by patriarchy and abide by its marital and familial values.

For instance, in *Fish and Elephant*, Xiaoyun's mother urges her daughter to go on blind dates and get married in order to continue the family, but she does not accept her daughter's lesbian identity; at the end of *Lost in Beijing*, Liu Pingguo take her infant and leave her family silently, from when she also has to play the familial role as a father; In *Buddha Mountain*, Nan Feng also bears a responsibility of taking care of her two male friends; The most apparent example is in *Dam Street*, when the mother knows her daughter is pregnant, she lashed her in front of the picture of the dead husband, while asking her to explain to the dead man. Obviously the mother is succumbed to the patriarchy and totally identified herself to perform the paternal rights.

Although the suffering of women in these films may creates a signification of patriarchy repulsion. But it is unbecoming to define the director as a feminist of the Second Wave. Since her attitude toward male is neither radical nor repellent. In other hand, she tries to avoid of disfiguring them and depict them mercifully.

In *Fish and Elephant*, the various men in Xiaoqun's blind dates are amiable and polite. Even that masculinist who defines good woman as "a lady in living room, a farmwife in kitchen and a slut in bedroom" also behaves tenderly and softly, and he even wins the heart of Xiaoyun's mother and gets married with her at the end.

In *Dam Street*, the director also places her faith toward the men of next generation on Xiaoyun's son, Xiaoyong, a ten years old kid. Although at the beginning of the film, Xiaoyun's boyfriend Wang Feng, escapes to another city to make a living after they are expelled by the school, but the director does not wrote any scene to criticize his irresponsibility, instead, in order to decrease the ugliness that may incur from the character, he is killed in a constructing accident, and there are two scenes that depict the women's laments. The married man, Liu Wanjin, who has an affair with Xiaoyun, also be described as a virtuous man who loves Xiaoyun so much and marries her at the end. He even goes to the police station to falsely admit guilt after Xiaoyun stabs a man who tries to sexually harass her at her wedding.

In *Lost in Beijing*, although Liu Pingguo's husband, An Kun trades their infant with Boss Lin Dong for money, but there are also numerous scenes depicting the two men's love toward the baby. Later, An Kun regrets the deal and wishes to give money back to get his own child while Lin refuses. To Lin Dong, even as he rapes Liu Pingguo, he is depicted as though this guilt is partially assuaged. For example, Liu is too drunk and mistakes Lin as her husband, accidentally grabbing his genitals outside his trousers and seducing him. The film also emphasizes that she gets an orgasm which she has never had before with her husband.

In *Buddha Mountain*, the sympathy toward men is more intensive. Coming from broken family, the young characters base their friendship on toleration, understanding and supporting each other.

Therefore, these films are also able to make conversations with male audience, and the stories are also not androphobia. In converse, the conflicts and director's criticize should rather ascribe to the social environment, for instance, the social identification of lesbian in *Fish and Elephant*; the polarization between the rich and the poor in *Lost in Beijing*; Ideological reprobation of sex before marriage in *Dam Street*; the inhumanity of National Collage Entrance Examination system in *Buddha Mountain*. The director apparently has a warm understanding toward the relationship between women and men, as she points out in an interview: "I am not contrived to avoid of making feminist film, because I am enjoy looking for the harmony between women and men."^⑨

4. Metaphors and symbols in the female gender

Filmmakers usually develop metaphoric and symbolic significations to female gender which can also be traced in Li Yu's film languages. There are three images that appear throughout Li Yu's films, peeping, mirror images and water. If peeping and mirror are compatible with western theoretical context in analyzing women's feature in films, as many theorists such as Lacan and Mulvey^⑩ have done, water would be a purely eastern image.

Water frequently appears in Li Yu's films. For example, in *Fish and Elephant*, Xiaoqun washing the elephant with water is given prominence in *Dam Street*, the story located in a residential community known for being aside a river, and throughout the film, characters wet their feet when they have to pass a dam to go other places; In *Lost in Beijing*, Liu Pingguo makes love with her husband or being peeped by Boss Lin during her showers; In *Buddha Mountain*, important communication between women of two generations happens when they are boating upon a lake. And Nan Feng makes love with Ding Bo under water, which in Li Yu's defense in an interview that "the water is as if her romantic fantasy toward making love, or I should say, the water is her love."^⑪ Love making under water denotes the metaphor of coitus in the Chinese idiom "Shuǐ Rǔ Jiāo Róng", 水乳交融 (Literally means blend milk with water).

There are numerous examples metaphor women as water in Chinese traditional culture, especially in literature. For instance, in *A Dream of Red Mansions* (Chinese name *Hung Lou Meng*, one of the four masterpieces^⑫ of Chinese classical literature, by Cao Xueqin, 1718-1763), the

protagonist describes that “*women are made of water, while those of men of mud*” (Cao I. 23) which symbolizes the purity of women. And in expressing his loyalty towards his lover, the protagonist says: “*since all the water in the world comes ultimately from a single source, a bowlful of it scooped up anywhere should have sufficed*” (Cao III, 292). The water metaphor in traditional Chinese culture also connotes men’s cautious towards women, as Chinese idiom says, water carries and sinks boats, water can be soft and strong, and water can be calm and furious.

Another metaphor hiding in the setting of these female characters is that most of them are symbols of traditional culture which appears inferior in contemporary China where modernity is all important. In *Dam Street*, Xiaoyun is a singer of local opera troupe that sings traditional Sichuan Opera. However, she suffers a daily dilemma as audience require her to stop singing opera and sing pop songs while doing stripe tease. In *Buddha Mountain*, the desperate housewife also practices her Chinese Opera songs daily. In contemporary China, the Chinese Opera stands for Chinese traditional culture but has withered into a minor and weak art form from its historical glory. In these films, these women’s devotion to Chinese Opera both connotes their marginalized social status and their identity in patriarchy, being gazed as merely singers, a lower class in current society.

The female Chinese Opera singer can also be seen in other films, such as *Raise the Red Lantern*, by Zhang Yimou, *24 Cities* by Jia Zhangke, and *Woman • Demon • Human*, by Huang Shuqin, the first feminist film of mainland China. In China’s mainstream blockbuster movies *the Message* and *City of Life and Death*, woman characters also engage with this job and are seen as lower class.

Ironically, before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, Chinese Operas was a male-dominated field. In height of its popularity, women were not permitted to perform on the stage and female characters in the scripts are all played by the male. Because the Chinese Opera singer was considered as a demeaning job in ancient China, and women, as belongings of men, were not allowed to show themselves in front of the public. Although the two genders got equal status in Chinese Opera after the liberation of 1949, but it was after the patriarchy lost its patience that this lapsed art could no longer satisfy their requirement of superior status, thus women’s new job is still inferior.

In other two films, women also make livings with disadvantaged jobs, for instance, the foot masseuses in *Lost in Beijing*, or the Zoo keeper and stall-keeper in *Fish and Elephant*. These jobs belong to the lower class, or namely, serve the people rather than being served. The only rich woman in the four films is Boss Lin’s wife in *Lost in Beijing*. But she is also abandoned from her place of prominence because of her infecundity.

5. Women’s spiritual predicament of birth and death

The spiritual predicament of female is an eternal topic of Chinese film. Traced back to the 1940s, China had made a great many of films to explore the mental struggle and pain of lonely females, such as *Spring in a Small Town* and *Sorrows of a Bride*. Unlike these films that females’ difficult positions usually incurred by love relationship or boredom of familial life, the predicaments of Li

Yu's characters are not merely confusion of daily life, but are grander. All the four films are involved with the topic of birth and (or) death.

For instance, Junjun drives her father to his death in *Fish and Elephant*, the entire structure of the subordinate plot line of this film; *Dam Street* and *Lost in Beijing* relate to women's pregnancy, the birth of life, and both consist the core conflicts of the two films; *Buddha Mountain* deals with death of a child and a suicide that frames the direction of the story. In these films, birth generally refers to things with hope, such as life, love and friendship, while death not merely means the end of life, but also includes the lost and desperation. Li Yu has a permanent interest of birth. Even before she started to shoot fiction, she had made a documentary that highly praised by Frederick Wiseman. The documentary *Sister*, records the story of a woman who has a twins in her uterus, and the family decided to give birth to the girl ahead in order to guarantee the girl can take care of the boy as a older sister when they grown up.

It is impossible to analyze birth and death thoroughly in this paper, since they are both immense topics. But if viewing from the screenwriting perspective, birth and death, as the two poles of life, are easy to incite substantial reaction of the characters' human instincts and disclose the configuration of their mental reality. Meanwhile, a heavier film context may lead the audience to think more. In eastern philosophy and religion, birth and death are serious topics. Unlike Woody Allen's jocosity of dancing with Azrael, Buddhism and Taoism both emphasize that only humans are responsible for their karma and the entelechy of immortality, and their different subjective activities change their destiny. The fate of good and evil is a process of accumulation. At the inevitable hour, evil can not be forgiven by a deity and before resting in peace forever, there is no scene for the good to encounter their family members and friends in the heaven.

In western mainstream films, such as Hollywood genres, the death is usually a visual element to create suspension or visual effects, while birth is usually a start of a story. In comparison, in Chinese films, the two are commonly enlarged as the structure of the whole story to bear the major narration, or sublimed to spiritual symbols--- death signifies the sacrifice of ideal or the accusation of unfair society, while the birth symbolizes the eternity of the will.

6. The negativity inside women's initiative actions

Unlike the female characters in the 1940s film that are passive toward their spiritual predicaments and continued to live ignorance, women in Li Yu's films are more aware and self-conscious toward their difficulties. They are activists, willing to counterattack the predicament initiatively.

The director emphasizes that women's ability of supporting and understanding each other is better than men. In her films, even the protagonists and antagonists identify with each other in an emotional level. For example, Liu Pingguo and Boss Liu's wife hold each other's hands and cry in *Lost in Beijing* or the intimate conversation between Xiaoyun and her son's adopted mother in *Dam Street* that transcends the adversity between protagonist and antagonist to a mutual understanding. This is a relationship that male characters do not have in Chinese film.

However, sometimes their actions are negative and their efforts of changing situation lead to a more negative result. The major activities women make in these films are destruction of self-mutilation, to kill and run away from family.

The self-mutilation can be seen in *Fish and Elephant* when Xiaoqun breaks a mirror and bleeds; or Cui Yueqin continuously cuts her wrist with a razor blade in *Buddha Mountain*. Li Yu once spoke about the self-mutilation in an interview:

“The blood is important in life. When you see the red fluid, you may feel that you are alive. It may come from my life experience. I have a female friend once tried to commit a suicide, when she cut her waist for once, she can not feel pain, and she kept cutting. She is looking for the pain because it brings her a feeling of existence¹³.”

A stronger activity is suicide or murder. To the former, Cui Yueqin tries to kill herself twice in *Buddha Mountain*, and Junjun kills her father in the latter. They all lead to negative results. Both western and eastern religions do not subscribe to suicide as a solution to difficulties. Thus, in the majority of older Chinese films, it is used to emphasize the weakness of the character or criticize the social reality. This approach can be seen in 1930's films *Sorrows of a Bride* and *New Women*. Because of the impact of Ideological State censorship instilled after the liberation in 1949, such a feature is now absent in the mainstream films of China. Although the suicide is included in the film, it does not come back with the pre-revolution original significance in Li Yu's films. In *Buddha Mountain*, the suicide should neither be ascribed to social criticizing nor the character's weakness. If Cui first attempt at suicide was because of her anger and desperation, her second suicide is relaxed and composed after a scene of a conversation with a Buddhist monk. Although the suicide has never been an teaching of Buddha or the essence of the eternal liberation of human being, the director is prone to praise the effort that women tried in changing their predicaments. The films have no answer for an eternal solution of women's difficulty, thus the story of *Buddha Mountain* stops with an open ending.

For another, patricide has always been a conception that Chinese film critics strive to integrate into western theoretical context. However, in Li Yu's film, the patricide is neither the declaration of feminist revolution against patriarchy, nor an Oedipus complex. It is a structure of folk wills that hides deeply in Chinese traditional culture. It is explored periodically and in used in literature to help terminating a dynasty or regime. For instance, in Chinese classical literatures such as *Three Kingdoms*, *Outlaws of the Marshes* and *Stories from a Ming Collection*, most of the male characters exiled their fathers, and take the position of their fathers. The world without father naturally bears a dormant theme of patricide, which is performed by women in Li Yu's films. From this perspective, the director's attitude stays in folkloric position rather than official.

Escaping is a classical action inherited from the era of Henrik Ibsen. In *Dam Street*, in order to not break the relationship between Xiaoyong and her adopted mother (who was left by her husband because of adopting the child), Xiaoyun leaves without telling Xiaoyong that she is his real mother. In *Lost in Beijing*, when Boss Lin and An Kun can never make a concession of the ascription of the infant, Liu Pingguo takes the baby and runs away from them. In *Buddha Mountain*, teenager girl

Nan Feng escapes from her problem family after she fails the college entrance examination. In *Fish and Elephant*, Junjun also escapes from her family after she kills her father. The run away, as Chinese literature master Lu Hsün points out in a speech about Ibsen's *A Doll's House* that could only leads to three possible endings¹⁴: return home again, fallen or death in patriarchic society, such as Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

The conclusion of escaping that Li Yu made in her films is also pessimistic. For instance, Xiaomei falls to depth of a prostitution after she left the massage parlor in *Lost in Beijing*; Junjun is caught by police in *Fish and Elephant*; Nan feng feels more confused and loses her life plan in *Buddha Mountain*; In both *Dam Street* and *Lost in Beijing*, the main characters run away from their original lives, but their future are still vague. However, above actions at the very least indicate the self-awareness and the will of women in fighting against difficulties.

Conclusion

If analyzing from the perspective of traditional film criticism, Li Yu's films are prone to be classified as radical independent films, which eulogize the natural desire and life wills of women whose lives are constricted by social obstacles. In depicting the life style of these marginalized women that social mainstreams and cultural structure can neither perceive nor identify, director shows she may be pessimistic about the struggle of women in acquiring equal gender rights. But she gives hope, since the women in her film are appealing and often more capable than men and are able to support and understand each other when confronting the difficulty.

Under the pressure of formidable ideology, LiYu bravely calls for the self-awareness and independence of women. Censorship may make her message more vague, but her attitude should be applauded and is a great advancement for Chinese film. From this perspective, her pessimism may aim to awaken controversy and promote audience's vigilance to women's tragedy in China.

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- ^① For instance, *The Hurt Locker* by Kathryn Bigelow, or *Twilight Saga* and *Vanilla Sky* by Catherine Hardwicke Olivieri
- ^② *Fish and Elephant* was awarded Elvira Notari Prize in Venice Film Festival, 2001, and the Best Asian Film Prize at Forum of New Cinema of Berlin Film Festival, 2002.
- ^③ *Dam Street* won C.I.C.A.E. Award in Venice Film Festival, 2005, and was awarded Best Director in Flanders International Film Festival, 2005, and Lotus du Meilleur Film in Deauville Asian Film Festival, 2006.
- ^④ *Buddha Mountain* won Best Artistic Contribution Award and Best Actress in Tokyo International Film Festival, 2010.
- ^⑤ SARFT is the abbreviation of State Administration of Radio, Film and Television of China
- ^⑥ *SARFT bureau criticize Lost in Beijing*, <http://news.qq.com/a/20070325/000236.htm> (Chinese version)
- ^⑦ *Li Yu speaks in Beijing Normal University*, <http://edu.people.com.cn/GB/8216/6701497.html> (Chinese version)
- ^⑧ For instance, according to a survey by one hospital, the teenager abortion rate is 44.28% of all abortion (302/682). *Cause and Treatment of teenager abortion*, Chinese Contemporary Medication Journal, 2010, No.23.
- ^⑨ *Interview with Li Yu: "I want shoot women for all my life"*, Yinchuang Evening Newspaper, December 15, 2007 (Chinese version)
- ^⑩ See *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* by Jacques Lacan, and *Visual pleasure and narrative films* and *Visual and other pleasures* by Laura Mulvey
- ^⑪ *Li Yu and Her Buddha Mountain*, <http://ent.163.com/10/1026/22/6JV49C71000300B1.html> (Chinese version)
- ^⑫ Four masterpieces of Chinese classical literature are *Journey to the West*, *Dream of Red Mansion*, *Three Kingdoms* and *Outlaws of the Marsh*.
- ^⑬ To looking for a freestyle in *Buddha Mountain*, Interview with Li Yu, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/c/2010-10-26/05493125652.shtml> (Chinese version)
- ^⑭ Lu Hsün, *After Nora escapes: a speech at the art forum of Beijing women's senior normal school, Dec.26th*. The Complete Speeches of Lu Hsün, First Edition, 2007, Yangzi River Press of Art and Literature (Chinese version)

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