Thesis

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Premarital sex in China and its representation in movies

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Abstract:

Due to China's open door policy and global development, Chinese society has become more and more open; the Chinese attitude towards premarital sex has changed. Films can reflect people's social attitudes, norms and values towards several issues, with premarital sex being one of them. Thus, through movies we can grasp both the filmmakers’ and people’s perception and attitudes towards premarital sex as well as the gradual changes. The thesis adopts a comparative approach and analyzes five modern Chinese films, five Chinese films from the 1980s and five modern western films. Through an assessment of Chinese movies, the thesis intends to observe changes in attitudes towards premarital sex in the current age from several decades ago. By comparing recent western films and Chinese films, it allows us to discover the ways in which premarital sexual behavior is expressed within these two cultures; economically, politically and socially different regions of the world.

Key words: premarital sex, social learning theory, social change, social attitudes.
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1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, as economic development has rapidly progressed, Chinese society has simultaneously transformed with the passing of time. For instance, the Chinese people’s mindset has become increasingly open to different ideas as they are continuously introduced to advanced technology hailing from foreign countries. As an example, even movies have evolved in terms of both its form and content as compared to several decades ago, while at the same time the attitude of Chinese people towards sex has also changed. To provide a contextual basis, Chinese people have historically adopted a conservative attitude towards sex; where premarital sex was infrequent several decades ago.

By comparing modern China to its past, we can explore how the evolving social environment has changed the Chinese people’s ideology towards premarital sex. Through data collection, we can find the tendency of occurrence and its growing trend. On the one hand, some people support premarital sex because they believe that we should respect human rights, because sexual rights are considered to be basic human rights and there is no law to limit premarital sex. On the other hand, some people oppose premarital sex due to their belief that premarital sex corrupts the general mood of society and is not beneficial to females. The societal stigma attached to women who have had premarital sex will make it difficult for them to find marriage, while some women are pushed to the point of suicide; hence premarital sex may result in women being more vulnerable. Thus, we also explore how Chinese people’s attitude towards premarital sex has changed.

The media plays an important role in social life; Chinese people are fond of playing with their computers and Smart phones wherever they go, a practice which is called phubbing. They watch movies and browse the news through computers and Smartphones. Movies, as an entertainment product, are an indispensable aspect to modern people. We can observe that some people learn and perform actions which they
learn from movies in real life. In this case, I assume that movies influence people’s social values and norms. Movies can reflect a movie maker’s attitude towards several issues and reflect the present situation of society; more specifically, people’s attitude towards certain things. I also suppose that movies reflect actual social attitudes, values and norms towards premarital sex.

In my thesis, I would like to use a comparative method on a compilation of five modern Chinese movies and five 1980’s Chinese movies. My aim is to investigate the representation of premarital sex in modern Chinese movies, and the frequency of a premarital sex plot or the absence of it; I would apply the same methodology to the 1980’s movies and subsequently compare the difference in the representation of premarital sex. Due to globalization, there has been an explosion of cultural exchange all over the world; western movies have entered Chinese cinemas and Chinese people do not solely watch Chinese movies nowadays, they have taken a liking to western movies. Therefore, I would be interested to compare modern Chinese movies to modern western movies, to analyse the differences of representing premarital sex between western movies and Chinese movies.

1.1 Theoretical framework
Those theories are related to my thesis; I give a relation schema about those theories below (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Theoretical framework schema

![Theoretical Framework Diagram]

- Social learning theory
- Socialization
- Social change
- Mass media
- Family structure/context
- Gender inequality
- Sexual socialization
- Sexual culture
The social learning theory was developed by Bandura (1977), who mainly theorized on how the environment, cognition and behavior influence human behavior. I believe that socialization and social changes belong to the environment aspect of Bandura’s (1977) theory, where socialization includes family structure, sexual socialization and gender inequality. Mass media would belong to the cognition aspect as mass media can influence a person’s perspective towards anything, and assexual culture is gradually formed in the process of socialization and social changes, sexual culture would in turn influence mass media. According to Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory, the environment and cognition may influence each other, hence socialization and social changes can influence mass media and vice versa.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Changing of sexual culture in the background of social change in China

2.1.1 Social learning theory

We can use the social learning theory to explain sexual behavior. According to Bandura (1977), our own behavior is mainly influenced by behavior, cognition and the environment; these three factors interact with each other and exert an influence on our behavior. Bandura (1977) believes that there are two different processes that can trigger behavior learning: one process is learning behavior through results by gaining experience directly, we choose an action and face the consequences no matter what the result, failure or success is an experience; the other process is through the observation of other people’s behavior, we gain experience indirectly by observing how others achieve success and we imitate this behavior and subsequently gain experience. Nevertheless, people will produce different behaviors and cognition in different environments. For example, people’s attitude towards sexual behavior was different a few decades ago as compared to the attitude in modern day China. People’s behavior is primarily influenced by antecedents, consequences, and cognition (Bandura, 1977). A simple example can be given for these three effects. In the case of antecedents, youth attitudes towards sexual behavior can be influenced
when they learn about sexuality from their peers, through movies or other magazines that cover sexual behavior. However, what kind of result will sexual behavior produce? As people consider this question over a period of time, this is the consequential aspect of behavior. As for cognition, people will always consider the advantages or disadvantages of their actions, and they will naturally choose actions which result in their happiness. If sexual behavior provides happiness for the youth, they would then make the choice to practice sexual behavior. People commonly use the observations they have learnt to respond to their environment (Haruna & Ibrahim, 2014); for example, we can utilise our social experiences when we encounter any problems and use our knowledge to solve them in response to society. Social changes cause people to become more open to new ideas; therefore, they change their attitude towards premarital sex. Bandura (1977) emphasizes the notion that behavior, cognition and environment cannot be considered as separate variables in the social learning process as they constantly interact with each other.

2.1.2 Social change
Since the founding of a new China, economic development has grown rapidly while at the same time, social change has also undergone an obvious transformation in China. In modern society, social change is mainly observed in the cultural, economic and political sub-systems. This change has occurred across the country from the rural to the urban areas and from agricultural production to industrial production in recent years. Social change is the shift from traditional methods to modern ways in Chinese society, while people’s values are simultaneously changing. In Giddens’s (2009) view, social change is difficult to define because all things are constantly changing; every moment is a change in motion, every year is a new year and every day is a new day. Nonetheless, we can look at a particular period of social change to study this phenomenon. For example, Chinese society has undergone enormous changes; as Chinese society has gradually accepted and received culture from different countries, it has become increasingly multicultural and more open.
since the founding of the new China to the present day, and the general attitude towards sexuality has also changed in a large social context.

2.1.3 Sex culture

China has undergone a sex revolution since the founding of the People's Republic of China; sexual culture has become an important component of social culture in modern Chinese society (Chen, Liu & Meng, 2011). According to Chen, Liu and Meng (2011): “Sexuality refers to many aspects, it included knowledge, belief, art, morality, customs, and other behaviors and habits acquired as members of society.” (p. 44). It means that more people are accepting of sexual behavior because they have knowledge about sexuality and have developed their own belief. We can observe these practices in the movies, as movies are a form of entertainment in our social life, and we draw upon the example of movies to assess if a sexual behavior is acceptable by society’s standards.

Firstly, we can see how the environment changes perceptions in Chinese society, and we need to further analyze the social change in China.

2.2 The changing of attitude towards sex in three periods of social change in China

2.2.1 Maoist period

The Maoist period is historically dated from the 1950s to the mid-1970s. During this period, the attitude of the Chinese people towards sex was very conservative; people did not directly talk about sex. Sex was regarded as shameful and it was a difficult topic to raise in this period. Although sex and reproduction are inseparable, premarital sex or an extramarital affair could not be accepted in society at that time. (Zheng, Zhou, Zhou, Liu, Li & Hesketh, 2011). When the new China had just been established, development of society was sluggish while international connections were few and far between; coupled with the shackles of traditional ideologies, the
topic of sexuality was understandably prohibited (Zhao & Geng, 1992). There were very strict requirements for women’s fashion during this period, where scantily clad women would not be accepted in general. If any women had premarital sex, they would be discriminated in their neighborhood or in the workplace, and this was extremely damaging because a women’s reputation is very important at that time.

2.2.2 Late 1970s

Deng Xiaoping played an important role during this period of rapid economic development by presenting and introducing the open door policy in China. An increasing number of Chinese people went out of the country to attain foreign experience, while Western culture gradually penetrated Chinese media, which triggered the process of modernization and globalization which has been observed to have had a major impact on social life and sexuality in China (Zheng et al., 2011). Giddens (1990) explains this process as *detraditionalisation*. People gradually accept culture from other countries, and either gives up old cultures or recombines the old and new cultures together (Gross, 2005). People began to change their perception of sexual behavior from a conservative position to a more open stance. People's attitudes towards sex, love, and marriage were changing and increasingly influenced by western culture (Yu, 2010). Prior to the open door policy, people thought that sex is built on the basis of marriage, but now they have begun to steadily erode this view while at the same time, sexual and reproductive relations have gradually become weaker. The one-child policy was also introduced during this period, which meant that only one child was allowed per family rather than the common practice of having five to six children per family prior to this policy. The one-child policy, rapid economic development and the open door policy has all had a great impact on Chinese society within this period.

2.2.3 Recent decade

In recent decades, an increasing number of young people can accept the idea of
premarital sex. However, many young people do not use any contraceptives or protective measures during the practice of sexual behavior (Guo, Wu, Qiu, Chen & Zheng, 2012). Based on this phenomenon, we can observe that the awareness of using sexual protection in young Chinese minds is still very low, which may lead to an increase in the occurrence of several infectious diseases, such as HIV. It is well known that and effective method to control the spread of HIV is to provide a better understanding of sexual behavior to youths (Wang, Li, Stanton, Kamali, Naar-King, Shah & Thomas, 2007). If youths continue to have an increasingly open attitude towards sexual behavior, it is imperative to guide them by providing them with the knowledge on how to protect themselves and avoid unnecessary risks. In the worst case scenario, if an accidental pregnancy happens (parents who disagree with the marriage or the couple are financially unable to sustain the baby), many girls may face an abortion. Thus, we need to pay more attention to the problem of contraception in order to improve the sexual behavior of young people as well as decrease the associated risks (Guo et al., 2012).

2.3 Family structure/context

Social change theory is commonly used as a wide theoretical framework and a macro level phenomenon, whilst the family structure is a micro context. The family unit is the primary socialization outlet for human beings and in the process of socialization, families has played an integral role in Chinese society from ancient times to the modern day (Steinhauer, 2016). Many Chinese people believe that family harmony leads to social harmony; and the basis of social harmony is family harmony (Steinhauer, 2016). In their study, Guo, Wu, Qiu, Chen and Zheng (2012) reveal that young people’s first sexual experience is closely associated with their family structure. Currently, the structure of a family mainly consists of normal families, single-parent families and reunited families. Studies have shown that young people who live close to their parents are considerably less likely to have premature sex than children who are living in single-parent families or children in a
reunited family (Guo et al., 2012). Parents are able to provide more attention and education to children if they live in a “normal” family whereas children would lack communication with their mothers or fathers in single-parent families. Studies have shown that male youths who communicate with their fathers on the topic of sexuality are prematurely having premarital sex. Likewise, young women who communicate with their mothers also have a tendency to prematurely experience premarital sex (Wang et al., 2007). In China, if two parents divorce, most boys would follow their father while the girls mostly follow their mother. In these cases, boys suffer a lack of communication with their mother and girls with their father, hence single-parent families easily lead to young men and women experiencing premarital sexual behavior. In a reunited family, the girl would follow her mother to a new reunited family, but since the girl's feeling towards her stepfather is relatively unfamiliar, she would not communicate with her stepfather regarding sexual topics. Boys are even less communicative with their stepmother about sexual topics in a reunited family. It is important to notice that divorced families are discriminated in Chinese society, and parents who choose to divorce will undoubtedly influence their children, where children in separated families have a tendency to prematurely experience premarital sexual behavior (Guo et al., 2012). Parents’ divorce causes great harm to their child because maternal and paternal love are indispensable to children. Children living in divorced families may be easily discriminated in school, while at the same time, it also influences their treatment of sexual problems and their partner of choice in the future. Wang, Li, Stanton, Kamali, Naar-King, Shah and Thomas (2007) suggest that there is no relationship between a family’s economic status or a youth’s feelings towards their family and the age of experiencing premarital sex. Needless to say, parents have a great influence on the child's attitude and behavior (He Lei, n. d). According to Bandura's (1977) Social learning theory, it is illustrated that within a family environment, the parents’ attitude towards sex directly influences their child’s attitude towards sex. Therefore, family have a very important impact on a child's sexual values (Yu, 2010).
Chinese social change has caused China's overall sexual attitudes to correspondingly change, where the family environment and family structure is integral in forming the sexual values of future generations. Sex has always been a sensitive topic that few people in public or within families have talked about in Chinese society, hence liberal families would be able to provide a platform for children to gain a correct understanding of sex (Yu, 2010). As with many families, the age difference between parents and their children in the modern age has grown bigger, where many parents do not know how to communicate with their children regarding the topic of sexuality, and some parents do not even possess such knowledge. Thus, age difference and a generation that is acclimatized to restrictions have prevented parent-child communication of sexual topics (Yu, 2010).

Another important aspect is the family planning policy which has a very important impact on the family unit. The main purpose of this policy to control the numbers of the Chinese population; and family planning in China is widely implemented. The family planning policy is a step to better meet the one-child policy prior to 2016 in China where every family only had one child since 1980. The family planning service widely propagated contraceptive knowledge in order to control the number of children in a family (Zhou, Xiong, Xiong, Shang, Liu, Zhang & Yin, 2013). However, their publicity did not focus additional attention on young unmarried people as compared to married couples, resulting in many young people having premarital sex but not knowing how to protect themselves, which led to a series of problems such as abortions and infectious diseases such as HIV. A survey found that most students lack awareness on the risks of premature sexual behavior and do not possess knowledge on contraception. Throughout their daily lives in home or school, access to contraceptive knowledge is very limited, which points to the necessity for family planning services to be aimed at students (Zhou et al., 2013). It is crucial to address the youth’s lack of sexual knowledge and contraceptive knowledge, as it has a close relationship with family structure and the environment. Here, mass media
plays an important role to young people, because when they lack this knowledge in their education, they would obtain it from mass media. This is particularly true in the case of movies because it is an important resource in a young person’s life entertainment which is an avenue that they can learn from.

2.4 Gender

2.4.1 Gender inequality

Bourdieu (1984) mentions that males are active above a female and females are passive under a male in the act of sexual intercourse, and the inequality of such sexual behavior is also reflected in social life. Sexual inequality also determines the notion of male dominance. There is a traditional ideological assumption where most families believe that boys are better than girls during the olden times in China. People use yin and yang to describe the male and female gender, where women are yin and men are yang in China (He Lei, n. d), but the idea of males having a higher status than females has existed for thousands of years in China. Even in modern China, inequality between men and women still exists within the family (Steinhauer, 2016). Males have a higher status than females in both the workplace and family. Males can express their ideas with freedom, whereas women cannot. In China, both parents and the government still encourage girls to suppress their feelings or expression of violence, which is totally different from western culture. The views regarding boys and girls on sexuality are different and the Chinese government has constantly made efforts to promote equality between males and females (Lars & Sharareh, 2012).

2.4.2 Male and female attitude

Guo, Wu, Qiu, Chen and Zheng (2012) find in their research that males were more likely to have premarital sex than females, and males were more likely to accept premarital sex than females. This is primarily because females felt that pre-marital sex would reduce their value in the marriage market, so they were more likely to
associate negative emotions with premarital sex behavior, whereas male do not have such emotions. Many people have a virgin complex in China where some men want to be married with a maiden, which is also a traditional concept; whereas in the modern day, many young men have been receptive of non-virgins as premarital sex is widely accepted by young people. If women have never had premarital sex, they can put forward high conditions in the marriage market. Moreover, if their children are daughters, parents will be more protective; while the protection of the boy is relatively smaller (He Lei, n. d). Parents believe that girls will be more disadvantaged when they choose a partner or spouse if they have had premarital sex, and sometimes a girl’s body will suffer great damage if there is no better protective measures of contraception. A primary reason why boys experience more premarital sex is because parents pay less attention to boys. Meanwhile, women also have the liberty to choose their premarital sex partner, and a survey found that women tend to select high-income and highly educated men, hence high-income or highly educated men are more prone to premarital sex (He Lei, n. d). Wang and Davidson (2006) found that women take less initiative when they want to have sex; most women choose to have sex with their boyfriends because they think that sex is the protection and expression of love. Some women believe that marriage to highly educated or high-income men would protect their future happiness. With the traditional view that men are responsible for women if there is an occurrence of pregnancy during premarital sex, they must get married, hence some women have premarital sex with their boyfriend as a way to guarantee marriage. In addition to that, some women view pornographic images and read magazines to obtain sexual behavioral information, and subsequently have sexual intercourse with their boyfriends out of curiosity (Wang & Davidson, 2006).

2.5 Mass media

Giddens (1997) explains that mass media can change a youth’s belief and attitude towards certain things. We use Smartphones, computers and Bluetooth in our
everyday life, and all these products can provide us with the resources to change our belief and mindset (Giddens, 1997). Our attitude towards premarital sex can also be influenced by mass media. The development of satellite television can increase premarital sex relationships, as youth obtain information from the media where they can also learn the foreigner’s culture. Resultantly, they will be more open-minded with the idea that there is no problem with having a premarital sex relationship and this is a prime example of how mass media can change the youth’s sexual values and sexual norms (Taleghani, Merghati Khoie, Noroozi, Tavakoli & Gholami, 2016).

There are many cyber words and channels such as “sexy chat” “sexy web” and “phone sex”. Media technology allows us to communicate with each other more conveniently and faster, where young people can learn more sexual knowledge and sexual experiences through the media (Taleghani et al., 2016). For example, as the youth get know each other over the internet, their discussions may lead to sexual topics, and if they desire to do so, they can meet each other in real life.

From another perspective, mass media has developed sexual socialization (L’ Engle, Brown & Kenneavy, 2006), which is a process where people discover more information about sexual knowledge and skills, thereby changing their sexual attitude, norms and expectations. All these concepts are gradually being accepted by our society (L’Engle & Jackson, 2008) as people gain more sexual knowledge and develop their version of correct sexual values and norms. Thus, mass media play a positive role in sexual socialization (L’ Engle, Brown & Kenneavy, 2006).

Movies as an important part of mass media, has a large influence on people. Daneshnia (2014) gives us an example in his article, he writes that British women’s social status has changed significantly in the late nineteenth century and during the next three decades, and this can be reflected through films which portray that social change, industrialization and political reform have a huge impact on women; while at same time, some middle-class moralists believe that films have a great influence
on the morals of an audience. In Daneshnia’s (2014) essay, he had many different ideas about premarital sex where women have the freedom of power over their sexuality, and he tried to show those changes through movies. There was also an European book about masculinities which was written by Powrie, Davies and Babington (2004); they collected essays and based their study of masculinity in films, finding that masculinity concepts are relatively lower in European films than America films. Through these essays which describe films in many European countries, they analyzed many different elements of the films, such as gender, social class and race. Comparing European films with Hollywood films, they studied the differences in how masculinities are represented in European films and Hollywood films (Powrie et al., 2004). Kelly (2016) found that the panic of teenage sexuality arose in recent decades since 2000 through an analysis of a group of Hollywood films, while he also found that Hollywood films were less descriptive of free sex. Through the comparison of films we can also discover Chinese people’s attitude towards premarital sex through movies.

2.6 Summary

According to the social learning theory, social changes and family structure or context have a large influence on peoples’ attitude towards premarital sex. Chinese people’s attitude towards premarital sex has changed from a conservative viewpoint to a more open-minded position since the Maoist era to the current modern society. The open door policy has played an important role in this transition, where Chinese people’s attitude towards sex has been affected by western culture. The social change in this matter is a big context; while the family structure is a small context. Youth attitudes towards sex are related to family structure, where youths living in single parent families or reconstituted family have a tendency to experience premarital sex at a younger age as compared to those living in normal families. Through this literature review, we also highlight that males and females have different attitudes towards premarital sex. Males find it easier to accept premarital
sex, and based on certain requirements, female are able to accept premarital sex as well.

In my opinion, media has played an important role in the youth’s attitude towards premarital sex, such as in movies. This statement is supported by various literatures. Mazengia and Worku (2009) found that pornographic movies can cause youths to experience sexual behavior prematurely. Movies, as youth entertainment products, have a large influence on a youth’s sexual value and norms. I will focus on how the media, especially movies, presents premarital sex and how this thematization may influence youthful attitude towards premarital sex and the risks of having premarital sex.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research method

This thesis adopted a comparative method for analysis by evaluating movies from different eras. There are two primary reasons I chose to use this method instead of questionnaires or interviews; the first reason being that the thesis topic is a sensitive one. Most Chinese people would avoid answering questions which are related to sexuality and in other cases, their answers would be untruthful and cause complications in the collection of real primary data. The second reason is that it would be difficult to identify sample groups due to the vast diversity of Chinese citizens, there are major cognitive differences between the people who live in rural and urban areas as well as those who live in northern China or southern China and their perception towards premarital sex. Therefore, I did not utilize a quantitative approach. I would like to investigate the changing of attitudes towards premarital sex through movies because I presume that movies reflect actual social norms and values of a society. Based on the literature, I also assume that mass media can influence youths’ attitudes towards premarital sex because movies are one of the most influential outlets of mass media that is loved by young people. Therefore, I
would like to study how movie makers present, perceive and interpret premarital sex over the course of time through the comparison of several movies across different generations. I would like to compile several movies which contain premarital sexual behavior. By comparing “old” (several decades ago) and modern approaches, I would like to collect five movies which were produced several decades ago to ably demonstrate the people’s attitude towards premarital sex in olden China, and another five movies produced during modern times for the same purpose in modern China. I can evaluate the changing of attitudes towards premarital sex by comparing the views of directors portrayed within movies. I also intend to compile five movies in modern western countries to compare western people and Chinese people’s attitudes towards premarital sex in the modern age. My findings should not be taken as a generalization of the entire romantic movie industry, but we can draw significant conclusions from them.

3.2 Selection criteria. Movies included in the analysis

I would like to collect movies from websites, and I chose the 1905 movie website (http://www.1905.com/mdb/film/?fr=homepe_menu_mdb). There are two reasons I chose this movie website. (1) 1905 movie website is one of the better movie websites which is produced by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China, with one of their main tasks being the promotion of Chinese movies. (2) 1905 movie website provides a wide-range of official access to movies, it can share all CCTV6 movie channel media platforms, and the majority of movies watched on the CCTV6 movie channel can be found in this movie website. Hence I collected movie samples from this website, considered an official movie website in China. Due to the monthly renewal of the movie website, several new movies will be uploaded and other old movies will be deleted intermittently. Thus the timestamp of my research is dated prior to 2017.03.10. All data points were collected before this date.
Firstly, I set out to collect five modern Chinese movies. I outlined the selection criteria as below: all movies must be modern Chinese movies, produced in the last 5 years, are mainland Chinese films and are romantic movies. Based on these criteria, I found 2,570 movies, so I added extra criteria: it should have a strong performance in the box office. With that, I narrowed it down to 22 movies; I filtered the movies to aim for those which talked about relationships between unmarried people and are readily available on this movie website, bringing it down to 18 movies. Finally, I added the last criteria of youth, because most premarital sex happens between young, unmarried people. Based on these selection criteria, I only found five movies (Table 1).
Table1: Five modern Chinese movies included in the analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Release date</th>
<th>Box office</th>
<th>Main prize</th>
<th>Times to play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The left ear</strong></td>
<td>Alec Su</td>
<td>2015.04.24</td>
<td>500 million RMB</td>
<td>The 5th Beijing International Film Festival Most youth literature IP</td>
<td>28,000 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fleet of time</strong></td>
<td>Zhang Yibai</td>
<td>2014.12.05</td>
<td>5.88 million RMB</td>
<td>Optimal film prize in 2015</td>
<td>40 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>My old classmate</strong></td>
<td>Guo Fan</td>
<td>2014.04.25</td>
<td>4.56 million RMB</td>
<td>The 21st Beijing University Student Film Festival Organizing Committee Award</td>
<td>10 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>So Young</strong></td>
<td>Zhao Wei</td>
<td>2013.04.26</td>
<td>7.26 million RMB</td>
<td>The 33rd Annual Gold Award Best Cross - Strait Chinese Movie</td>
<td>30 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The continent</strong></td>
<td>Han Han</td>
<td>2014.07.24</td>
<td>6.318 million RMB</td>
<td>The 9th Chinese Youth Video Forum Annual New Writers Award</td>
<td>20 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Only VIP can watch

Second, I set out to collect five movies from or about 1980s. I outlined the selection criteria as below: all movies must be mainland Chinese movies, romantic movies and readily available on this movie website, I only found 11 movies about 1980s; I filtered the movies to aim for those which talked about relationships between unmarried people. I found six movies, one movie about 1937, so I found those five
movies (Table 2).

Table 2: Five Chinese movies from or about 80s included in the analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Chinese movies in 80s</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
<td><strong>Director</strong></td>
<td><strong>Release date</strong></td>
<td><strong>Box office</strong></td>
<td><strong>Main prize</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girl:</strong></td>
<td>Ma Xiaoqing</td>
<td>2006.03.12*</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The yearning-girl inn</strong></td>
<td>Dong Kena</td>
<td>1985.08.26</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>Radio, film and television department 1985 outstanding film award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contract signing season</strong></td>
<td>Zhi Lei</td>
<td>2000*</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Out in the silence</strong></td>
<td>Li Yanyan</td>
<td>2013.05.01*</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Red skirt popular in the street</strong></td>
<td>Qi Jiaxing</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Those movies are very old, so it is difficult to find box office and prize, and less people like watching old movies.

*There are three movies are released after 2000, it means those movies released on this website after 2000 but the content of those movies are related to 80s.

Finally, I set out to collect five modern western movies in recent years; all movies must be western movies, romantic movies. I found 1946 movies. I filtered the movies to aim for those which talked about faithful love between unmarried young people (real love). In 2017, I did not find any movies, in 2016, I found 2 movies, but one
movie not released; in 2015, I found 1 movie, in 2014, I found 5 movies, four movies about married person; in 2013, I found 2 movies, one is talked about married relationship; in 2012, I did not find any movies, in 2011, I found one movie but not released. In 2010, I found four movies, one is not released, one could not find, one is cartoon. I find those five movies (Table 3).

Table 3: Five modern western movies included in the analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Release date</th>
<th>Box office in China</th>
<th>Main prize</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passenger</td>
<td>Morten Tyldum</td>
<td>2017.01.31</td>
<td>2.938 million RMB</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan Romance</td>
<td>Tom O'Brien</td>
<td>2015.10.02</td>
<td>No data*</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love, Rosie</td>
<td>Christian Ditter</td>
<td>2014.10.22</td>
<td>No data*</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Romeo and Juliet | Carlo Carlei      | 2013.10.11   | No data*            | Best Film Soundtrack of the Year
Best Drama Film
Soundtrack Award |
| Dear John        | Lasse Hallström   | 2010.01.24   | No data*            | Taylor Award
MTV Movie Awards
American People's Choice Award
American Youth Choice Award |

*For those four movies I only found box office in America or in Hong Kong in China, but for my analysis box office in mainland China is more important.

*I cannot find data of times to play on this website, because those movies cannot be
watched on this website, this is because Chinese policy on limitation, but one can watch those movies on other Chinese movie websites.

4. Analysis

4.1 A brief description of films

4.1.1 Five modern Chinese movies

**The Left Ear:** The movie tells the story of a 17-year-old girl named Li Er who has impaired hearing in her left ear, if you stood on her left and spoke to her, she would not hear it. One day, the humble and introverted protagonist discovered her hidden love for a boy named Xu Yi, while Xu Yi was rejected by another girl, Ba La. Li Er felt broken-hearted and eventually became friends with Ba La by chance, while also discovering that Ba La is really in love with another boy - Zhang Yang. Unfortunately, Ba La died in an accident and Li Er continued to pursue her love for Xu Yi. However, Xu Yi was no longer the man he was in middle school, which resulted in Li Er’s disappointment; leading her to ultimately pursue a relationship with Zhang Yang.

**Fleet of Time:** The film mainly focuses on Chen Xun and the memories of his youth, when he fell in love with a female classmate named Fang Hui in high school. The two of them stayed together throughout their university years, but Chen Xun fell in love with another girl, Shen Xiaotang. When Fang Hui found out, she was immensely sad and impulsively decided to have sex with another boy, which resulted in an unwanted pregnancy. Finally, with the support of Chen Xun and her friends, she aborted the baby and disappeared without a trace after the operation, illustrating that their youth time has gone forever.

**My Old Classmate:** A transfer student, Zhou Xiaozhi, meets her new deskmate Lin Yi, and the two of them stayed together throughout junior high school and university as their love slowly bloomed. Lin went abroad for studies, and Zhou agreed to
follow suit to be with Lin Yi but could not fulfill this promise. During this time, Lin met a new girlfriend, but discovered that she had sex with other men; so he decided to return to his homeland, but learned that Zhou already made marriage plans. At the wedding, he did not have the courage to object to it and take Zhou away, leaving their relationship a distant memory and reminding the audience that each of us had a deskmate to accompany us through the unforgettable student era.

**So Young:** Zheng Wei likes her neighbor’s brother, Lin Jing, and is determined to gain admission to the university which Lin Jing is studying in. However, when Zheng Wei successfully enters the university, she discovers that Lin Jing has already gone abroad for further studies, and she eventually falls in love with a poor boy named Chen Xiaozheng. Unfortunately, Chen Xiaozheng decides to give Zheng Wei up in order to study abroad as well. Several years later, Lin Jing returns to pursue Zheng Wei again, while Chen Xiaozheng also returns at the same time, although he hides the fact that he would be married to his boss's daughter. Ultimately, Zheng Wei stays with Lin Jing.

**The Continent:** There were three young men Ma Haohan, Jiang He and Hu Sheng who lived in the eastern part of China. Due to great changes emerging in their lives, they start a funny and sad journey. They experience friendship, love and a test of affection for one another. On the road, they met a variety of people and undergo various experiences.

**4.1.2 Five Chinese movies from or about 1980s**

**Girl:** The film tells the story of Lin Yi and Gui Lei’s sentimental love story. Lin is a good and introverted girl who has refused many boys’ pursuits, while Gui Lei is a handsome and serene boy. The two people were destined for love but trembled with nerves until Gui was finally brave enough to confess, but they eventually broke up after a period of time. Gui is hit in an accident and injured when he received Lin’s
letter. Lin regrets her words and wants to get the letter back, but it is too late. They never met each other again.

**The Yearning-Girl Inn:** A remote mountainous hotel, due to poor management, has incurred losses over the years. So the commune secretary decides to recall Zhang Guanyin who has been exiled because of adultery. However, the former shop manager Qiao San leverages on family background and unites the staff who were previously dismissed by Zhang Guanyin, to collectively frame Zhang Guanyin. They broke into Zhang Guanyin room to catch them in the act when the secretary was out of the inn. Zhang Guanyin and her boyfriend obligingly revealed a marriage certificate but the inn made them feel very disappointed and they eventually decided to leave the place.

**Contract Signing Season:** The film tells the story of a young man and woman in a performing arts company. Throughout their performances, they develop a new repertoire and meet several difficulties which slowly built their character and with good faith they strived towards a new life.

**Out in the Silence:** In the early eighties, Han Chong is not married and leads a quiet life. He often meets his friend La Hong, who has a dumb wife and a pair of children, but they stay out of each other’s way. However, La Hong is lazy and often beats his dumb wife. As a witness of this situation, Han Chong does not know what to do. A few days later, La Hong mistakenly steps on Han Chong’s motor equipment and dies. The village gathers and the elderly have a discussion on how to give the widow some compensation. Han Chong is deemed to be only responsible for raising the children until the village clears the compensation amount.

**Red Skirt Popular in the Street:** Directly related to the theme of fashion, this film was recorded in the early 80s regarding the opening of people’s minds as their
thinking changes. Models dare to put on "bare breasts," wear a red dress on the street, wear “chopped skirts” and patronise various clothing stores.

4.1.3 Five modern western movies

**Passengers:** The film tells the story of the future of mankind in taking a spacecraft for interplanetary travel. As they prepare to go to another planet, there is a small computer failure which causes one passenger, who has been asleep for 90 years, to awaken from his hibernation in advance. In order to reduce his loneliness during a centuries-long space-sailing mission, he awakens another beautiful female passenger, and they start a romantic story.

**Manhattan Romance:** TV advertising editor Danny is making a documentary about love. However, he must first deal with his feelings of chaos in his own world if he wants to successfully complete the job.

**Love, Rosie:** The film tells the story of a young girl and boy as they grow up together and face the real world. Their relationship has always been in the “above friendship, under relationship" state and they experience many things together, finally discovering that they love each other.

**Romeo and Juliet:** In this story, Rosalie firmly believes that she was born to be with Romeo and that they are destined to be together. However, the appearance of her cousin Juliet caused her dream to burst. With her hatred towards Rosalie, Juliet used all ways possible to get lost with Romeo but the story did not end here, as the rumors of Juliet's crazy behavior made Rosalie worry about the safety of her sweetheart.

**Dear John:** The film tells the story of John, who occasionally meets Wenna. John recognizes himself in Wenna and also gains an understanding of love. Nonetheless,
the honeymoon period is always short, and John must return to the army and serve overseas. They remain in contact through letters but by the end of the story, Wenna sends a break up letter to John.

4.2 Comparing modern Chinese movies with 1980’s Chinese movies

Amongst the five modern Chinese films, four films portrayed premarital sex whereas only one movie did not have any premarital sex scenes. We visualize the frequency of premarital sex in each movie (Chart 1).

Chart 1: Frequency of occurrence of premarital sex in five modern Chinese movies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of occurrence of premarital sex in five modern Chinese movies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>My Old Classmate</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The film Left Ear contains two scenes of exposed premarital sex; this film treats the shooting of premarital sex more meticulously whereas the Fleet of Time and My Old Classmate are not as meticulous. For instance, during the shooting of the premarital sex episode in The Left Ear, the director showed the entire process. In the So Young film, premarital sex occurs towards the end of the film, where the director mainly portrays a kissing scene between two people. From the perspective of the length of screen time allocated to premarital sex scenes, the longest was two minutes long; but on average, most films kept premarital sex scenes within a minute’s length throughout the film. Except for the film The Continent, the other four films are student-age films, where premarital sex mainly occurs in high school and university, which emphasizes the notion that the four films are a representation of the modern young person’s
attitude toward premarital sexual behavior.

Amongst the five films from the 1980s, all of them did not contain any fragments of premarital sex, which is reflected in the social status of China in the 1980s. The director did not input any premarital sexual plots during the making of these films. Even though several of these movies were released after 2000, there were still no scenes portraying premarital sex. The films solely focused on showing the pure relationship between men and women and their visible love, because the directors were very aware of the real social background. Another film, Girl, is a 1980's student love film which describes a pure love relationship between a male and female.

A comparison between modern Chinese films and the 1980s films has revealed some interesting findings. Firstly, from the director's point of view, amongst the collection of modern films there were four movies which contained premarital sex fragments, with only one having it absent. From this figure, we can observe that the modern director is better able to portray premarital sex in movies, which is also an indication of growing acceptance. Moreover, judging by the way a director shoots a scene of premarital sex, it indicates their increasing receptivity of premarital sex with meticulous filming. This is seen where one modern film director shot three premarital sex scenes in a single film, while other film directors generally shoot at least one premarital sex scene in a plot. Therefore, in the case of modern Chinese love films, the modern filmmaker readily accepts and intends to portray premarital sex in movies, a technique which is more commonly used in films that are shown on television channels. On the other hand, amongst the 1980's five films, the directors generally did not shoot premarital sex scenes in their films because the filmmakers paid more attention to the people's expression of the concept of love. Not one of the five films portrayed premarital sex, indicating that it was stigmatized and faced difficulties with social acceptance in the 1980’s.
Amongst several films revolving around characters who were of student age, the 80's movie Girls is about a love story during the high school era, where the male and female lead characters did not have premarital sex even though they loved each other; which is in stark contrast to the four modern student age love films which all contained plots with premarital sex. The four box office movies were rated very highly, revealing that the majority of film viewers were accepting of premarital sex. As these films covered high school and college love, premarital sex commonly occurs in real life during high school and university days, and such films are a portrayal of this norm on the screen. This illustrates how modern Chinese society is accepting of the existence of premarital sex in movies, otherwise these films would have been banned. By comparing the 80’s love films with modern love films, we can observe pure love in the 80s films, which is generally all about love and contains no sexuality, whereas in modern films, it is common that love and sex have a coexistence in society.

After extensively reviewing the literature, the social learning theory is a key concept (Bandura, 1977) which can explain these changes effectively; people’s cognition, behavior and environment constantly interact. Firstly, we address the changes of the environment as aforementioned in the literature review regarding social changes (Giddens, 2009). In 1970, Deng Xiaoping put forward reforms in an exercise of opening up the country’s economy, with the open door policy being proposed within this period. During the 1980’s, the country was still in the early stages of reform and China's social environment was in the process of gradually shifting from conservatism to greater openness, as the population was introduced to foreign advanced technology. From the film development aspect, Chinese films which were in black and white screens began to shift to colored screens, slowly eroding the closed social environment that was anchored on at traditional sense of shackles on the people at that time. In this current age, Chinese society is vastly different where the social environment is more open than ever before. From a micro-perspective, the family structure has also changed; while the 1980's Chinese families were more traditional and retained traditional
customs, today’s Chinese families are more open to new ideas and norms. The concept of a family is the key difference, which impacts the family’s education and the passing of this concept to future generations. As the mindset of the people shifts from closed to open, the next stage is cognitive change; in the 1980's, the people's awareness were more or less subject to traditional cognitive constraints, such as maintaining that premarital sex is unacceptable in society. Drawing upon the concept of marriage from a traditional Chinese perception, a woman's chastity is of ultimate importance, hence if a woman is unmarried and experiences sexual behavior, she will be regarded as unclean and would face difficulties in being respected. A man’s judgment is different as there exists an unequal cognition between men and women in people's eyes. In the 1980’s, even during the period of reform, most people still needed a change in their thought process and consciousness as the majority of them treated premarital sex as an unacceptable act. As compared to the present Chinese society, the urgency to deal with premarital sex awareness greatly changed, as seen in the sexuality shift from 1980's films to modern Chinese movies.

At the same time, people's perception of traditions is also tied to their view of premarital sex, because when the social environment was in a closed state, it led to a low degree of premarital sex awareness which in turn causes cognitive constraints that motivated people to choose to abstain from premarital sex. It can be said that there was a cognitive closure on premarital sex and that the whole social environment was closed to the idea due to a narrow view in people's cognition, which resulted in a low occurrence of premarital sex. Returning to the topic on films, it was as early as the 1980s when premarital sexual behavior was viewed through a closed cognition, leading people to reject premarital sex. As these behaviors were a rarity, it led to a closed social environment, which in turn made people approach premarital sex conservatively, and this caused people to hardly ever pursue premarital sex.

The films play a very important role in the process of socialization. Mass media, as a
medium of traditional promotion in the process of socialization, plays an important
tole in cultural transmission, particularly through the industry of films. As seen in the
transformation of Chinese films from the 1980s to the modern day with regards to the
portrayal of premarital sex, the film has played a catalytic role in the rapid spread of
culture where Chinese people gain an understanding and knowledge about premarital
sex through films. In the movie Fleet Time, the film told the story of an actress who
engaged in premarital sex without protection which resulted in a pregnancy and was
subsequently followed by an abortion. We can observe the role of films as an avenue to
promote good sexual practices, reminding Chinese people to face premarital sex safely
and to protect themselves from accidents. For young Chinese people, it is also a good
outlet to receive sex education. Moving on, as the content of films evolves and
increasingly include scenes of premarital sex, it reflects the process of sexual
socialization in China. Due to the lack of sex education, Chinese schools and parents
rarely discuss the topic of sex with their child, primarily because most Chinese parents
lived in a generation that was not as open as the modern age; hence Chinese parents
rarely spoke about sexual education. Furthermore, sexual topics are rarely mentioned
in Chinese schools because sexual topics are considered sensitive. Thus, it is
self-evident that films are important in influencing culture and promoting Chinese
development of sexual socialization. Based on these films, we can observe that the
development of sexual culture has gradually progressed forward in Chinese society,
which is a form of social change.

4.3 Comparing modern Chinese Movies with modern western movies

In the five modern western films, they all contained premarital sex scenes. We look at
the frequency of premarital sex in each movie (Chart 2).
As can be seen in the figure, every movie contains premarital sex in western movies. The first film presented premarital sex three times, while the second and third film portrayed premarital sex twice and the fourth and fifth just once. In these five films, the cinematic description of premarital sex is more detailed; for instance, premarital sex in the five films was at least one minute in length, with some extending to two minutes, though there was little flash. In a direct comparison between modern Chinese films with the five western films, scenes of premarital sex occurred far more frequently in western films than in Chinese films. Furthermore, the shooting of sexual behavior is more detailed and meticulous in western films, where the filmmakers of the five western movies presented premarital sex that is considered insensitive and in larger amounts of content than in the five modern Chinese movies.

Firstly, based on the five western movies, modern western filmmakers are observably more accepting of premarital sex than modern Chinese filmmakers, mainly from their shooting style of premarital sex in movies. Similarly, the comparison of a modern Chinese film My Old Classmate, with a similar western film, Passengers, show cases the differences. Scenes of premarital sex were portrayed three times in the entire movie in My Old Classmate, with one scene being way under a minute, while the other two
scenes lasted for about a minute. The three scenes in this movie were not as bold as those in Passengers. Amongst the other Chinese movies, premarital sex scenes were more explicitly presented in The Left Ear film, but in comparison to modern western films, there are differences in the details of describing premarital sex cinematically. These methods reflect the filmmakers’ attitude towards premarital sex as evident through those ten movies, implying the notion that western filmmakers are more accepting of presenting premarital sex in their movies as compared to Chinese filmmakers. Moreover, western filmmakers are more flexible in using premarital sex scenes than Chinese filmmakers and they are willing to give it more screen time.

Similarly, we can also use the social learning theory to explain this phenomenon; due to the significant differences between Chinese and western cultures, awareness of premarital sex within western and Chinese societies are vastly different from a cognitive aspect, which led to two different social environments. The western social environment is relatively open as compared to China's social environment, which eventually led to the people exhibiting different behavior. For the people in western societies, premarital sex may be their lifestyle of choice according to their wishes because they have the right to their own body, whereby the social environment gives them the freedom of choice. As modern Chinese society is gradually becoming more open, we can observe from recent films that the conduct has changed from a total absence of premarital sex to the presentation of premarital sex scenes, evident from the 1980s Chinese movies and modern Chinese movies. As the Chinese social environment continues to change, it will lead to further changes in people's behavior as Chinese people slowly begin to accept premarital sex. In summary, China has experienced a social revolution with the progressive introduction of western technology and culture, where such a change would gradually affect the social environment of China and the way people treat others and their consciousness of certain practices, thus resulting in behavior transformation. Throughout the comparisons made between modern Chinese movies and modern western movies, it
can be observed that China's films become more and more open as premarital sex is progressively accepted with a growing trend to slowly converge with western movie standards.

Through the analysis of films on the differing presentation of premarital sex, we can observe that Chinese film have transitioned from the olden films with no premarital sex to modern ones that contain premarital sex, as the performance of premarital sex occurs more often than ever before on the screens. While social changes in people’s cognition of premarital sex have a significant effect, we can also come to the conclusion that a different social environment for people to practice premarital sexual behavior also has a very important impact.

The film is also a form of cultural spread. Many young people acquire behavioral cues from films, and as mentioned in the literature review, the social learning theory discusses the process of behavioral acquisition, where people can learn from experiences. Additionally, they can also be based on imitated behaviors where films as a means of cultural transmission are an effective and rapid channel of transmission. As Giddens (1997) said, the media can change a whole person through certain things such as attitudes and beliefs. Movies, as a form of mass media, have a large influence on people’s attitudes, as in the case of Chinese people’s approach towards premarital sex. With the advent of globalization, Chinese people and filmmakers are not just watching Chinese movies but are also viewing many western movies, as their attitudes have eventually changed. The film, as a public display of entertainment, will only be released widely if it is accepted by the public. Amongst the five modern Chinese films, the first four movies which contain premarital sex had a strong showing in the box office. On top of that, the click-through rate was also very high in the 1905 movie network, which may be an indication that the majority of people have a receptive attitude towards premarital sex scenes in movies. Furthermore, Chinese attitudes towards premarital sex have also been affected by these films, but the experience may
vary from person to person as the size of the impact is not the same individually.

5. Conclusion

This paper mainly discusses the impact of films (as well as media, family, socialization, social change, social learning) on the attitude of premarital sexual behavior of Chinese people. By comparing modern Chinese films and films produced or derived from the 1980s, we have found that the Chinese people’s attitude towards premarital sex has changed. Modern Chinese people and filmmakers are more receptive to the portrayal of premarital sex in films because as the Chinese social environment undergoes gradual changes, it influences Chinese people's cognition and triggers cognitive behavioral change. By comparing modern Chinese movies with western modern films, we can observe that western movies present premarital sex content with a higher intensity and larger content than Chinese films, indicating that the western audience and filmmakers are more receptive to premarital sex in films.

Through this thesis we can infer that movies reflect actual social attitudes, values and norms towards premarital sex. Films, as an increasingly popular leisure and entertainment option for modern people, play an important role in our social life. Thus we have to establish the correct understanding of premarital sex for unmarried young couples through films; by giving them an understanding on how to protect themselves with contraception, to avoid infectious diseases such as HIV and for women to pay attention to the potential damages that may be caused by abortion. In China, both families and schools should encourage sex education for young people so that they acquire the necessary sexual knowledge and gain an accurate understanding of premarital sex to better protect themselves in the future.

This paper also reveals how modern Chinese people are increasingly receptive of premarital sex scenes in films, because there was no previous intuitive response. As the Chinese social environment changes, Chinese people’s cognition and behavior
simultaneously change under this influence, which eventually leads to a change in the society’s mindset towards premarital sex. The comparison between Chinese and western films show that western people are more receptive of premarital sex in films and also reflect the different social environment that they live in where values and norms are different regarding premarital sexual behavior.

In future research, we can learn more about attitudes towards premarital sexual behavior by selecting several films to observe people’s attitudes towards premarital sex through questionnaires or interviews. This is a more sensitive topic, so the interview and the design of the questionnaire would need to be carefully noted.

6. Bibliography


