“Love” is not an unusual topic in Chinese studies, but very few scholars have addressed issues relating to how love has been represented in post-Mao cinema. While most research on Chinese cinema has concentrated mainly on male directors, such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige, I focus on films by women directors, who have been largely ignored. Starting in the late 1970s, women directors represented women from a more personal point of view and handled (albeit with discretion) subjects that had been marginalized. These developments attest to the process of untying of individuals from the grand narrative of nationalism and the emerging of gendered consciousness as a byproduct of burgeoning individual consciousness. This paper takes Zhang Nuanxin’s The Drive to Win (Sha’ou, 1981) and Sacrificed Youth (Qingchun ji, 1985) as examples of how gendered personal expression converges with state ideology in post-Mao China.
sexual connotation. Furthermore, it indicates that a handsome appearance is nothing but an empty shell which is meaningless for true love. As Kam Louie observes, “discussion of the physical aspects of love in Chinese literature is still frowned on” in the early post-Mao years (86). On the other hand, the carnal side of love was fleetingly registered in Chinese cinema in the same year when Zhang’s story was published: the kiss in The Thrill of Life (Shenghuo de chanyin, dir. Teng Wenji & Wu Tianming, 1979) marked a breakthrough in the representation of physical passion in Chinese cinema (Xie, 226). Like a range of post-Mao films made by male directors, it is heavily political and with no intention to position woman in the central place of a romantic relationship.

In contrast to the high visibility of images of women on screen, the peripheral status of women in the film industry constantly obstructs the visibility of women’s filmmaking in China. Compared with women writers’ works, some Chinese critics hold that “most female directors have not turned their gender position into the motivating force for their creative work” (Dai 133). It seems to suggest that women directors were generally less aware of gender consciousness than women writers. But is this really the case? A deeper examination of Chinese films in the post-Mao period will reveal that in fact women directors were active in exploring gender-related questions through the medium of film. The cinematic narrative of women’s love that had been very rarely seen on Chinese screens played an important role in women’s exploration of female subjectivity. Placing emphasis on the private nature of love in the romantic relationships portrayed in films, my study concerns the following questions: how has the portrayal of women’s romantic relationships changed in films by women directors? Is it true that love emerged purely in the form of a personal passion? How does the representation of love on screen mirror the bond between gender and nation in the post-Mao period?

2. The reappearance of love on screen in post-Mao China

In the Left-wing cinema of the 1930s, the happiness of individuals was closely tied with the destiny of nation; or, in other words, romantic love was not possible under the circumstance that the nation was threatened by foreign invasion, domestic struggle and feudal remnants. After 1949, socialist cinema revealed the change in the relationship between love and marriage: “It was when two people who wanted to build socialism decided to marry” (Louie 69). As Xiaoping Cong points out in her analysis of the adaptation of Liu Qiao’er’s libretto into a socialist film script with the same title, the heroine’s love for the hero is based on her knowledge of his political identity as a labor model and her having seen his capabilities of farming (263). Romantic love in socialist China was generally replaced by a “class love” that was rooted in people’s sharing of common political ideals. Moreover, women in socialist films, such as the eponymous woman character in Li Shuangshuang (dir. Lu Ren, 1962), usually occupy themselves with the collectivization movement and have no time for romantic relationships. During the Mao years, as Liu Jianmei says, “personal love as well as subjectivity were repressed or channeled into the sublimated collective energy” for nation building (18).

In 1977 the launching of the Four Modernizations particularly marked the desire for national reform in the post-Mao period. The endorsement of the Reform and Open-Door Policy then paved the way for the (re)opening of China to the West and (re)
introduction of Western ideology. The late 1970s saw the recovery of the Chinese film industry. An extensive critical and theoretical debate took place concerning the modernization of Chinese cinema in the context of the Four Modernizations of the state.

The resumption of expressing personal feelings constituted a crucial part of the individual discourse after the late 1970s. “Love” was a keyword in a range of literary and artistic works since the late 1970s when the Cultural Revolution came to an end. The loosening political climate encouraged filmmakers to invest their personal interests in their filmmaking. There was a remarkable trend in post-Mao cinema: the restoration of humanist values, corresponding to Scar Literature. The directors turned to the individual’s love life that had been disturbed or destroyed by the Cultural Revolution, regarding love as redemption as well as a way to resume human dignity.

The reappearance of love on screen was seen in many films made in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Chris Berry points out, “It is in 1980 and 1981 that romantic love takes over the screen in a big way” (101). Of the 41 films from those 2 years, Berry considered in his study, Postsocialist Cinema in Post-Mao China: The Cultural Revolution after the Cultural Revolution (2008), no less than 34 involved some form of romantic love. Berry believes that Kam Louie’s view of the characteristics of love in early post-Mao Chinese literature can be applied to films made in the same period: love in films made in 1978 and 1979 “is based on and subordinate to ‘a shared commitment to socialism’”; while films made in 1980 and 1981 reveal that “romantic love begins to take over from socialist love” (101). However, as this study will argue, although romantic love began to be represented as an autonomous force, films such as Nor for Love (Bushi weile ai, dir. Xiang Lin, 1980) and The Drive to Win (Sha’ou, dir. Zhang Nuanxin, 1981) made it clear that socialist ideals shared by lovers still functioned as the basis for true love.

Foregrounding love as a privileged theme, the historical perspective of the early post-Mao films that portray the subjectivity of women is associated with the nation’s rejuvenation. In many films that resurrected a narrative of love in the early post-Mao years, sublimation was an essential element. The aim of sublimation in the early post-Mao films was no longer a revolutionary victory, but the purging of personal pathos for the revitalization of a modern state. Educated to devote themselves to socialist construction on the basis of the official slogans of equality between men and women, women directors maintained a strong concern for state modernization. Therefore, their attempts to foreground personal expression in their filmmaking were strongly linked to a gendered perspective within the nationalist narrative of modernization. This gendered perspective, partly unconscious and partly consciously produced, played an important part in their construction of the individual subjectivity of the characters in their films. However, the later post-Mao years witnessed the subtleties of their construction of women’s consciousness. The emphasis on women’s agency shifted to a more private domain where memories and fantasies reveal secrets that had been buried in the grand discourse.

Zhang Nuanxin is one of the representative figures in Chinese cinema of the first half of the 1980s when the Fourth Generation was at their peak of filmmaking. Although Zhang refused the tag of “woman director” with its highlight on her gender (Cui 215), both of her major films made in the 1980s deliver messages that express a female perspective, which is manifested through her emphasis on women’s agency and self-discovery. This perspective is closely related to the authorship she emphasized
repeatedly, an authorship that, within the context of the post-Mao period, is linked with the emergence of individual’s consciousness. At the same time, Zhang’s films were no exceptions in their compliance with state ideology. *The Drive to Win* extols the devotion of self to the nation which will in turn give meaning to one’s life. *Sacrificed Youth*, through comparing Han and minority culture, criticizes the ultra-left ideology that dominated the nation. However, besides denouncing the distorted values of the Cultural Revolution, *Sacrificed Youth* emphasizes the reconstruction of the woman protagonist’s memory about love. I consider Zhang’s two films as examples that best illustrate the negotiation between representing love as a personal passion and emphasizing its function in the service of nationalism.

3. **The Drive to Win: The Drive to Sacrifice**

*The Drive to Win* retains what Lingzhen Wang describes as the “pronounced nationalist character” of the socialist feminist films of the 1950s and 1960s that tied female agency to the political mainstream in China (603). The film combines the fate of an individual with that of the nation, just as the director balances her pursuit of personal expression with grand narrative. The woman protagonist’s romantic relationship serves only as a minor plot element. Instead of portraying love as a purely personal passion that originates from sexual attraction, this film emphasizes the importance of a shared ideal in a romantic relationship.

*The Drive to Win*, whose script is written by Zhang Nuanxin and her husband Li Tuo, tells the story of a national woman volleyball player called Sha’ou. Despite being injured shortly before an international competition with Japan, she insists on participating in strenuous training and endures the painful process of physical therapy. Unfortunately, her team loses the game, and she is informed immediately thereafter that her fiancé, Dawei, has died in a rock-climbing accident. Stricken by this double blow, she runs to the Yuanmingyuan Garden, where she finds inspiration and forces herself to face up to the frustrations in her life. She chooses to devote herself to coaching the new generation of women volleyball players. Although paralyzed after years of overwork, she is gratified to witness the final victory of China against Japan in an international volleyball contest.

In *The Drive to Win*, the beauty of women’s bodies is boldly shown, especially the athletes’ legs in short sports pants. This liberality in the presentation of the body can be attributed to the comparatively lax political environment in the early 1980s. However, Dawei’s love for Sha’ou is not based on her physical attraction, while Sha’ou’s love for Dawei has nothing to do with his handsome appearance. The cinematic narrative lays emphasis on their shared life’s goal: to be world champions. Dawei is characterized as a man who combines the features of a brave athlete, lover, and caring father. He is an idealized husband, to a certain degree, for a woman like Sha’ou who “cherishes honor more than life.” Instead of forcing her to get married, he supports her pursuit of a volleyball career. He also acts as a mentor father who encourages her to face her frustrations and guides her to understand the final goal – the truth of happiness lies in the process of achieving rather than the result itself. Dawei’s words function essentially to support the edifying tone of the film – the meaning of life lies in people’s devotion to serving the country.
Moreover, the film includes no hint of sexual desire between Sha’ou and Dawei. In the sequence in which they walk in a park together, enjoying each other’s company, their talk has nothing to do with romantic love. Just like the love depicted in Zhang Jie’s “Love Cannot Be Forgotten,” the love between Sha’ou and Dawei is portrayed as spiritual. Meanwhile, unlike the happy couples in socialist cinema who toiled together in fields and factories, Sha’ou’s love ends with the tragic death of her lover, and she is deprived of the chance to marry. After her team fails to get the gold medal in the competition with the Japanese, she decides to be a good wife serving Dawei, declaring that “I shall be his director of logistics. He will be free to go rock climbing.” However, this pursuit of personal happiness finishes immediately upon the news of Dawei’s death in an avalanche. The only choice left is to secure her selfhood in her relation with the nation.

The sequence set in the Yuanmingyuan Garden (the Old Summer Palace) deliberately relates Sha’ou’s contemplation of individual tragedy to a grand discourse of national honor and disgrace. This sequence is both the dramatic climax of the film and the clearest example of the film’s effort to link an individual woman to the national project. Sha’ou immerses herself in grief after Dawei’s death, which makes her mother worried. One day, after an argument with her mother at home, Sha’ou rushes out the door and walks to Yuanmingyuan Garden, where she and Dawei once went on a date.

Historically, the Yuanmingyuan Garden is a very special place. A royal garden built in the Qing Dynasty (1636–1912), it was famous for its extraordinary buildings and treasures. However, it was robbed and burned in the Second Opium War by a united army of English and French forces and was further destroyed in 1900 by the Eight-Power Allied Forces. Subsequently, with only its ruins left, the garden became a symbol of national disgrace and a historical site for Chinese patriotic education. During the 1980s, many poets lived in the area and met to write poems. Bei Dao, one of the most famous among those poets, wrote a short story set in the Cultural Revolution called “In the Ruins” (1978), about a university professor who was labeled as anti-revolutionary during the Cultural Revolution. Missing his daughter, he walks out to the Yuanmingyuan Garden, where he encounters a village girl whose father was beaten to death for stealing a watermelon. A passage reveals his feeling toward the ruins of the garden:

He touched the cooling stone pillar. Finished, he thought, this once-illustrious palace, which had been the celebration of an age, had collapsed, and once it had collapsed, it was no more than so many pieces of stone. And he himself was just a little stone among them. There was nothing to be lamented; in the midst of a people’s deep suffering, individuals were negligible. (Bei 147)

These words resonate with the sequence in *The Drive to Win* in which Sha’ou is walking among the stones and recalls what Dawei told her, “All that can be burnt has been vanished to dust, only the stones stand.” However, whereas Bei Dao depicts the sorrow felt on touching the stone as a symbol of disillusionment with the infringement of personal dignity during the Cultural Revolution, Zhang avoids any direct allusion to the period in *The Drive to Win*. The stones, apart from acting as a metaphor for the loss of Sha’ou’s dream and the death of her lover, remind her of the national disgrace, inspiring her to rise above her personal losses. Dawei’s death is interpreted as an inevitable loss undergone during the
process of nation-building, and Sha’ou decides to devote herself to coaching the new women’s volleyball team as a way to purge her grief.

Parallel with what is said about stones in Bei Dao’s story, the film suggests that in the face of the rejuvenation of a whole people, Sha’ou’s personal suffering is negligible. The collective ideal of national rejuvenation requires the devotion of every individual, and therefore no fault is to be found in Sha’ou’s pursuing the success of her career. The contemporary audience of The Drive to Win would have been encouraged by the then-recent victory in 1981 of the Chinese women’s volleyball team over Japan to win the first gold medal in an international volleyball competition – a victory that meant a great deal to China after enduring the catastrophic years of the Cultural Revolution. The victory requires the sacrifice of people like Sha’ou, who shoulders the responsibility of devoting herself to the country as a patriotic athlete, in spite of her loss of personal love and, eventually, her physical paralysis. Near the end of the film, she confesses her disillusionment: “she is (therefore) nobody at all.” In Sha’ou’s mind, she can only identify with the desire to be a winner; in other words, she has no identity except as a winner. The only way to transcend her personal tragedy is to dedicate herself to the nation.

The drive to win is the drive to sacrifice oneself for the sake of winning honor for the nation. In other words, the film clearly implies that it is only through her recognition of her role as a sacrifice for the nation that her life takes on value. Love in this film is frustrated, not by any human power, whether by the feudal family or the Party, but by natural disaster. What sustains her life is her love for the nation.

4. Sacrificed Youth: Unbound Body vs. Disciplined Soul

If personal love in The Drive to Win is marginalized, Sacrificed Youth, a film made four years later, shows a greater concern for its main character’s romantic experience. Reflections on national tragedy shift to an examination of the influence an individual has received from the state’s history. This film is adapted from Zhang Manling’s novella A Faraway Place (You yige meili de difang, 1984). In an interview, Zhang Nuanxin told George S. Semsel,

I felt I had a lot in common with this young writer [Zhang Manling]. You want to be pretty, but you just hide your true nature; you love a man, a young boy, but you say emphatically NO! That’s something we Chinese women share in common. In addition, I’m very interested in the Dai culture and customs. There is a striking contrast between the Dai nationality and the Han. (124)

Zhang Nuanxin’s words reveal her aversion to the radicalism of the Cultural Revolution that obliterated the expression of personal desire. Unlike many films that reflect the life of Zhiqing through scenes of chaos and pathos and typical ultra-left images, Sacrificed Youth focuses on a woman protagonist who immerses herself in a memory that touches upon her most secret personal experience about love.

The similar settings and structure of King of the Children (Haizi wang, dir. Chen Kaige, 1987) and Sacrificed Youth suggest the possibility of drawing comparisons. King of the Children tells the story of a man, Lao Gan, one of the countless young people who was sent down to the villages during the Cultural Revolution, who first labors on a farm and is then suddenly assigned to teach in a nearby village school. If King of the Children refuses women’s
participation within the fraternity of male autonomy, as is illustrated in Lao Gan’s rejection of Laidi, the only woman in this film, who loves him and longs to be with him, in *Sacrificed Youth* Li Chun refuses any chance to establish a relationship with men. But she is not positioned in the same way as Lao Gan, who embodies the male intellectuals’ predicament in their historical reflection of Han culture and their thoughts on the relationship between culture and nature during the 1980s. *Sacrificed Youth*’s narration of a woman’s private memory would not be popular in an age of historical reflection and national enthusiasm, however. After *Yellow Earth* kicked off the “Golden Era” of the Fifth Generation directors, the films made from the middle to late 1980s showed no concern about personal discourse in a realist context, but, instead, pertained more to a national discourse with an allegorical style under the vision of a male elite stance.

Set during the Cultural Revolution, *Sacrificed Youth* tells the story of Li Chun, an urban girl who is sent to a remote Dai village in Yunnan province. Living with a local family there which includes Dadie (father), Ya (grandmother), and Dage (elder brother), Li Chun does farm chores with a group of Dai girls. Inspired by the Dai’s love of beauty and their lack of inhibitions regarding love, Li Chun adopts the local costume. She becomes involved in a love triangle with two men: Dage and Ren Jia, a male Han Chinese. She eventually goes back to the city alone. Many years later she returns to the village to learn that her Dai family, along with Ren Jia, has perished in catastrophic mudslides.

Zhou Xuelin remarks that “[o]n the pretext of challenging Confucian morality and body repression, filmmakers of the 1980s presented a parade of feminine beauties and female rebels against the patriarchal order” (131). Here, she addresses the issue of the representation of women in films made by men. Indeed, the representation of women’s sexual bodies on the Chinese screen witnessed a revival in the 1980s. These bodies could be denotations for the remaining feudal ideology (*A Good Woman*, *Liangjia funü*, dir. Huang Jianzhong, 1987), or sexual objects to arouse male desire (*Red Sorghum*, *Hong Gaoliang*, dir. Zhang Yimou, 1987). *Sacrificed Youth*, in contrast, indicates the way to realize the female self by confirming the beauty of human bodies, without avoiding an association with female sexuality that had been alienated in the public discourse of the past decade.

In contrast to the de-eroticized situations seen in the films made during the Cultural Revolution, *Sacrificed Youth* spares no effort to demonstrate the beauty of the Dai girls with their tight-fitting long dresses, forming an evident contrast with Li Chun’s Han style suit. Zhang Nuanxin frequently emphasized her identification with the Dai’s cultural values: “The Dai are not flooded with Confucian ideas, and they love beauty. Me, too” (Semsel 127). It is through the frustrations Li Chun encountered in the face of the Dai girls that her self-awareness is gradually acquired. She was treated with contempt by the Dai girls because of her desexualized Han costume, and she felt ashamed and envious of the Dai’s passion for beauty and love. The change to Dai costume is her way of, firstly, getting accepted by the local community, then essentially, going through the passage to gender identification. In Han culture that advocated a collective revolutionary ideal and dedication to the revolutionary cause, individual value was deemed to lie in one’s efficient work as a contribution to the state; on the other hand, private matters such as clothing, romantic love, and sex were devalued.
Compared with her joyous discovery of her feminine beauty, Li Chun shows an uncertain attitude toward her love. The two men with whom she might develop a relationship are a contrasting pair: one is her “comrade” who is sent down from the city (Ren Jia) and the other is a native Dai (Dage). Ren Jia, an intelligent, educated young man, comes from the same cultural background as Li Chun; hence a presupposed shared sense of identity makes it easy for them to become intimate. Their friendship is portrayed in a romantic way, which nevertheless is too ambiguous to be defined as either camaraderie or unspoken love.

In comparison, the scenes with Dage are depicted more clearly. Communication between Dage and Li Chun is mainly via bodily expression rather than language. Dage openly shows his crush on Li Chun immediately after he first sees her on the banks of a river when he is returning home from working in the mountains. He jumps down from the small bridge and approaches Li Chun who is washing her face by the side of the river. She spurns his wooing but still feels surprised with the magic of the beautiful Dai costume that makes her sexually attractive. She recalls: “Today is the most amazing day in my life […] It happens like the fairy tale of Cinderella who puts on the crystal shoes.” This is an interesting comment that reveals the influence of Western concepts of romantic love.

Shortly after this encounter, they meet each other again at Dadie’s house. She realizes that this man is her “Dage,” a great hunter. Their sensual encounter goes further in an incident when she gets lost in the forest on her way back from work. Dage goes to find her when she is terribly frightened in the darkness. The director creates an erotic atmosphere in the sequence in which Li Chun stays together with Dage who makes a fire in the woods and prepares food for her. Her hand is injured when she tries to find her way in the forest. Dage fetches some herbs for her, his naked body highlighted in the flickering light after he hands over his shirt to Li Chun in order to keep her warm. When he holds her hand to put the herbs on it, they make eye contact, which causes Li Chun to blush. Her voice-over accompanies the visual narrative: “But I did not want to admit at the time that he embraces something more than a brotherly affection.” After this incident she is increasingly aware of Dage’s love for her.

If Li Chun refuses Dage’s love by avoiding his staring, she shies away from Ren Jia’s tentative question. Both the images and voice-over narration of her staying with Ren Jia are ambiguous: when the image shows the obvious intimate relationship between the two people, the dialog and the voice-over tend to dispel the possibility of their relationship developing. In contrast, the images of them spending time alone by themselves are filmed in a romantic way that emphasizes the happiness they share. Joining the young Dai people who get together at night in an attempt to find a partner, they talk to each other along the lake. The atmosphere is charged with eroticism, with the young Dai men and women singing love songs and courting to the ones they choose as lovers in the woods. When Li Chun asks Ren Jia what they are singing about, Ren Jia answers that she must know – the love song is about a man making lovers’ talk, saying that the hand of his beloved is white and as cute as a banana. They continue to discuss the candid attitude of the Dai people toward love and Han people’s hesitancy when it comes to expressing their feelings. In the end neither of them articulates anything substantial and Li Chun suggests they go back home. In spite of the freedom offered by the sensual environment, these two urban young people finally give in to repression. When a Dai girl asks whether Li Chun is having a love
affair with Ren Jia, Li Chun feels surprised and defies her immediately, saying, “we Han people don’t fall in love in an early age.”

The ambivalence of Li Chun’s attitude toward Ren Jia illustrates the discrepancy between her bodily reaction and language well. Li Chun dismisses people’s speculation about her romantic love by referring to Han culture that will ensure the impossibility of her love. Moreover, she tells herself/the audience that when spending time with Ren Jia she “treated him as my best female friend,” pushing away her sexual desire from her consciousness by interpreting this love as pure friendship. The tension between two kinds of love intensifies fiercely when Ren Jia and Dage fight on the night of celebrating the harvest. Maintaining the balance between two cultures is no longer possible. As a direct result of this incident, Li Chun runs away and tries to “repress the feeling of missing the small family at the Dai village” after she moves to another village.

The ending of the film turns serious because of the loss of Li Chun’s dreamland. The attempt to enlarge the historical context is somehow in conflict with the atmosphere of the former part. The rosy color associated with the personal expression of a sensitive femininity gives way to white, black, red, and gray, so as to render a sense of desolation. These symbolic colors not only signify personal loss but also the loss of the Zhiqing generation. Li Chun eventually leaves for the city, though she once clearly refused Ren Jia’s suggestion of taking the upcoming national college entrance exam. Ren Jia, who is always eager to escape and go back to the city, mysteriously stays. No clue can be found either in the film or the novella as to their final choice.

Li Chun’s role as the protagonist reflects the repressive characteristics of Han culture. This was acceptable in the state ideology when the radicalism of the Cultural Revolution was officially condemned. Within this framework, Zhang incorporates a woman’s romance into a critique of the abnormality of Han society. It is through the interaction with the minority culture of the Dai people that she realizes her own repression by Han culture. Her uneasiness is especially demonstrated through her envy of the beauty of the local Dai girls and their flirtatious interaction with men. The discipline of nature obviously goes against Han culture, which stipulates, “unattractiveness is beauty” and advises women “not to fall in love at an early age.”

The ambiguity of Zhang Nuanxin’s cinematic narrative instills a feeling of regret for the failure of Li Chun’s romantic love. The fulfillment of this love was unlikely to be achieved at that specific moment when desire was silenced; however, individuals’ yearning for love could not be entirely obliterated. Whereas The Drive to Win was made to emphasize female agency instead of her love for a man, Sacrificed Youth highlights the possibility of inserting a personal expression into a carefully constructed narration. In spite of the protagonist’s difficulty in consummating her romantic relationship, this film bespeaks the untying of individuals from their repressive past.

5. Conclusion

Through a close examination of Zhang Nuanxin’s two films, this paper has discussed questions concerning the gradual change in cinematic expression of love in women’s cinema, which testifies to the process of untying individuals from the grand narrative of nationalism and the emerging of gendered consciousness. From The Drive to Win to Sacrificed Youth, the director enjoyed more freedom to include romantic love as an
emotional attribute of female subjectivity. The discussion of women’s film practice in China cannot be isolated from the characteristics of Chinese women’s cinema that was produced within China’s specific social-historical context and in accordance with its political agenda. In spite of the fact that the number of women directors increased in the post-Mao period when the national policy of equality between women and men was reinforced, their influence has been very limited if compared with male directors who were far more numerous. The cinematic practice of women directors provides a point of view for the exploration of the narrative about love that had been consistently modified and incorporated in the national discourse.

Although Chinese cinema in the post-Mao years experienced relative depoliticization, and the state seemed to allow filmmakers to turn toward the ideology of humanism, the expression of personal feelings on screen could never separate itself from the mainstream narration of national ideals or introspection. Zhang’s representation of women’s love expounded two ambivalent attitudes: on the one hand, the films embrace the discourse on emancipation of women’s personal feelings; on the other hand, the films subscribe to a dominant ideology sustained by official interests. Although the tendency toward entrenchment in mainstream discourse is obvious in Zhang’s films, it should be noted that the career of women directors in the film industry was only possible with institutionalized support from the state. While embracing love as an autonomous feeling, women directors would hold it natural to integrate personal love with national projects.

The decade after the Cultural Revolution has been generally remembered as a golden time for so-called idealists owing to its booming economy, dynamic cultural products, and spiritual liberation, encouraged by a comparatively relaxed political atmosphere, the power struggle in the party still remained complicated and exerted constant impact on the cultural sphere and personal life. In many cases, the representation of women’s love on screen in the early post-Mao China is justified through its association with the humanism which dominated post-Cultural Revolution literature and by an appeal to re-imported Western liberal thoughts that inspired a (re)pursuing of love as a personal passion. As is manifested in many films made by women directors, the reluctance to see love as sensual and purely individual demonstrates an ongoing negotiation with ideological supervision in a time when multiple forces were in play and undergoing constant collaboration and collision.

**Notes**

1. Scar Literature refers to the literature that dominated in China from the late 1970s and early 1980s. The term was derived from a short story entitled “Shanghen” (“The Scar,” by Lu Xinhua, 1978). Scar Literature mainly depicts tragic stories that resulted from the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and exposes “internal spiritual scars” of people during that time. For the discussion of Scar Literature, see Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen. *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature Volume 2: From 1375*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010, p. 651; Hong Zicheng. *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, translated by Michael M. Day, Leiden: Brill, 2007, pp. 293–294.

2. See Zhang Nuanxin (张暖忻). “How We Filmed The Dive to Win” (我们怎样拍《沙鸥》). *Film* (电影), 8 (1981):12–25; Zhang Nuanxin (张暖忻). “Soul is Precious and Courage is Needed” (可贵者魂，所要者胆). *New Films* (电影新作), 1 (1982): 80–89. Zhang Nuanxin (张暖忻). “Discussion of Directing Sacrificed Youth” (《青春祭》导演阐述), *Contemporary Cinema* (当代电影), 4 (1985): 134 –137.
3. Zhiqing (educated youth) refers to young people who went down to or were forced to do farm work in villages during the time from the 1950s to the end of the Cultural Revolution. Most of them graduated from middle schools and were encouraged to receive “re-education” through working with farmers.

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**Notes on contributor**

*Lidan Hu* received her PhD degree from the University of Edinburgh in the UK and is now teaching in the English Department of Sichuan University in China. She is undertaking post-doctoral study in the Chinese Department of Sichuan University. Her current research interests include gender and film.

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