

The Research on the Influence of Chinese Women's Social Pressure and Lack of Sex Education — Taking the Movie "Send Me to the Cloud" as an Example

Botuo Leng*

Film and Media Arts, American University, Washington, DC, United States

*Corresponding author. Email: bl5501a@american.edu

Abstract. Feminism has been a topic of interest in recent years. More and more women are able to stand up for their rights, but it is worth noting that although women have gained some rights, they still suffer from injustice in the workplace and at home. On the other hand, sex education in China is not yet widespread, and many people do not understand the most basic knowledge of sex and are even ashamed to talk about sex. Therefore, this phenomenon has led to very serious consequences, such as more and more women choosing abortion. This article will take "Send Me to the Cloud" as the research object and use the research method of secondary analysis to describe in detail where Chinese women suffer from inequality and explain why Chinese women still suffer from inequality. At the same time, the reasons and consequences of the lack of female sexual knowledge in China will be described in detail. In fact, the study results found that women suffered the most discrimination in the workplace and at home. On the other hand, the main reason for the phenomenon of "sex shame" in China is because China believes in Confucianism. Second, the findings found that the one-child policy is also a cause of discrimination against women because most families want a boy. Most importantly, this paper uses this film as an example to reveal the truth of life when people want to gain respect from others, they should first gain their own respect.

Keywords: Feminism, Social status, One-child policy, Sexual knowledge, Meaning of life.

1. Introduction

Recently, a news report in China about whether tampons should be sold on high-speed trains has attracted most people's attention. Some people think sanitary napkins should be sold on the high-speed train because if women suddenly menstruate on the high-speed train, they can buy hygienic napkins in time to avoid embarrassment. However, some think sanitary napkins should not be sold on high-speed trains because they occupy public health resources. Surprisingly, this statement is shared by many men who believe that women can carry tampons with them, and even a small number of men believe that women can stop menstruation. This absurd point of view points out the lack of sex education in China but also reflects that women's needs are not being taken seriously and that women's status still needs to be improved. In the film "Send Me To The Clouds" and this report, the status of Chinese women is well portrayed. On the other hand, the lack of sex education is also reflected. Therefore, this paper will use this film as an example to explore and analyze the reasons for the low social status of Chinese women and the consequences of the lack of sex education in China. In addition, this paper also analyzes the film "Send Me To The Clouds" in depth, explores the meaning of life, and reminds people that the most important thing is to gain their own respect and understand the true meaning of life.

2. Introduction to "Send Me to The Cloud"

"Send Me to The Cloud", shot by a Chinese female director Teng Congcong and a well-known Chinese female actor Yao Chen, has attracted worldwide attention. People's attention to this film is extremely high not only because the director is a woman but the film has been called the most crucial female film in China in recent years. The main reason is that this film breaks people's stereotypes about women and truly captures the perspective of Chinese women and the discrimination they face. The film is about a woman who is diagnosed with ovarian cancer, so she needs 300,000 RMB for

surgery. Unfortunately, the cost of the surgery was beyond her means. However, none of her friends or family could help her, so she had to go against her will and put herself down to write an autobiography for the father of a local entrepreneur. In the process, she went from someone who has opinions on everything to someone who knows how to be inclusive. As she confronts death and her own fears, she learns what life is all about, and she reconciles with the world and herself. Therefore, through the content of the film "Send Me To The Clouds" and the current situation of women in China, this paper will sort out the reasons why women suffer from injustice and where they are more likely to need help. At the same time, this paper will point out that China's lack of sex education achieves the purpose of popularizing sex education.

2.1 Women's Social Status

The film is not only a film that teaches people how to reconcile with themselves but also a film that exposes the pressures women face in modern society. Therefore, through the content of the film "Send Me to The Clouds" and the current situation of women in China, this paper will sort out the reasons why women suffer from injustice and where they are more likely to need help. At the same time, this paper will point out that China the lack of sex education achieves the purpose of popularizing sex education. The heroine is named Shengnan. Shengnan means "surpassing man" in Chinese [1], which means that Shengnan has been placed with a lot of hope and pressure since she was born. It was common for women to have high expectations in the context of the time, mainly because of China's one-child policy at the time. However, the one-child policy caused all families to expect a boy, not a girl. At the same time, the idea of patriarchal preference has also been pushed to its peak by the one-child policy. More precisely, having a boy over a girl is explicitly preferred in China, where gender inequity has long been evident. Daughters generally marry into another family and are consequently susceptible to a lower status, but sons in an agricultural setting offer more financial return and will continue the family line [2]. Therefore, due to the one-child-per-family restriction in China, females who had previously been assigned subordinate roles compared to their male counterparts saw their status rise. Responsibilities and resources that were once exclusively attached to the male heir were now partially shared by females, especially in nuclear families [2]. At the beginning of the film, two passersby talk about women over 27 being classified as leftover women while men are golden bachelors, and this is an officially certified statement. This dialogue exposed the unequal social status of women and men at the time. It is infuriating that society expects women to work hard and succeed financially, only to end up labeling these women as leftovers, marking them as women no man wants.

2.1.1. In the Workplace

Until now, women still face much injustice in the workplace. In terms of wages, the average income of women is only 71.57% of that of men [3]. In fact, many companies refuse to recruit unmarried women because of the opening of the three-child policy. Although the government has policies that do not allow discrimination against women in the workplace, many companies still refuse to recruit such women. Even though some companies recruit them, their salaries are still lower than the average male salary. According to the data, Women's involvement in the labor force has decreased from 73.02% in 1990 to 60.5% in 2019 [4]. Therefore, even though China's economy is enormous, the performance of women in the nation, as measured by the 2021 Global Gender Gap, is declining and is below the average for the world [4].

2.1.2. In Family

It is worth noting that while sexism has improved a little in the workplace, in the domestic sphere, women seem to still bear most of the housework. Three times as long as their male counterparts, Chinese women labor at home on average for 18 hours a week [5]. Even this gender gap is reflected in boys and girls. According to the survey, Children contribute significantly to household labor. A typical Chinese youngster between 10 and 15 spends around 4 hours each week doing chores. Even before children are shaped into separate housekeeping and breadwinning gender roles, the structure

of children's housework time mirrors the gender divide seen in adulthood. A Chinese girl between the ages of 10 and 15 spends longer each week on housekeeping than her male counterpart [5]. On the other hand, the notion that "women should give up their jobs to take care of their families" remains deeply ingrained. The main reason is that China was a patriarchal society a long time ago, so it was advocated those men were responsible for making money outside. At the same time, women took care of the family and children at home. However, the reason this perception persists is that some experts in China still call for women to focus on their families rather than work.

2.2 Expectations for Women

The background of this film is under the one-child policy, so it is a good interpretation of society's expectations of women. Because many families with the one-child policy want a boy, those who get a girl usually put a lot of pressure on the girl, hoping that the girl can be like a boy. This phenomenon is even more pronounced in rural areas. For some parents, when their son is sick, the parents usually feel more urgent to take their son to see a doctor. However, if it were their daughter who was sick, they would hesitate to take her to the hospital. Thus, during the 1970s and 2000s, while child survival slowly improved, gender inequalities between men and women widened to the disadvantage of girls. Data from the United Nations show that between 2005 and 2010, there were 18.0 deaths per thousand boys and 26.8 deaths per thousand girls among children under the age of one. This number might have been cut in half, however, if parents had provided their females with the same level of medical attention as their boys. Approximately 110,000 little girls died before turning one in each the 1990s. To this number must be added the 500–600,000 female fetuses that were aborted selectively each year during this time [6]. Take Shengnan's parents in this movie as an example. Shengnan is an independent and strong girl. On the bus, Shengnan's mother asked her to put a bag of fruit on the carriage. When she put the fruit on the carriage, her mother accused her of being too independent to seek help from other men. When Shengnan's father saw that his daughter was injured, his first reaction was not to care about her but to ask if she had won. After confirming that her daughter won, he complained that her daughter lacked femininity and did not look like an ordinary girl at all. These two examples are good examples of the oppression women faced under the one-child policy at the time and parents' obsession to get a boy.

3. Imprisonment and Bondage of Sexual Thoughts for the Woman

In this film, in addition to showing the inequalities Chinese women suffer under the one-child policy, it also exposes the lack of sexual knowledge among Chinese women. In this movie, when Shengnan knows that she had ovarian cancer, her first reaction was how could she have ovarian cancer if she had not had sex for many years, but what she didn't know was that ovarian cancer wasn't necessarily caused by sex. Secondly, because she is afraid of not being able to experience the pleasure of sex in the advanced stage of ovarian cancer, she frantically seeks sexual intercourse, which shows her lack of sexual knowledge. In fact, this is the status quo of most Chinese women. Sex seems to be a topic that can not be brought up in China. When children ask their parents about sexuality, parents will choose to avoid the topic because they feel too ashamed, so they refuse to answer or even reprimand their children. Therefore, for children, when they mention sexuality, will be scolded by their parents, and over time they will no longer bring up the topic of sex. In fact, it is challenging to provide sex education systematically or to have open discussions about it. Chinese authorities often refrain from using the word "sex education" explicitly due to the traditional conservative social and cultural context of sex in China. Because of shame or mistrust, instructors are hesitant to bring up the subject of early childhood sex education with parents in many schools [7].

3.1 Reason

Although China has developed rapidly in all aspects, some traditional Chinese culture has not disappeared because of development, such as refusing to talk about sex culture. The main reason is

that despite the fast change, Confucian and Taoist concepts that stress the procreation and social order components of sexuality continue to impact the Chinese sociocultural milieu. For more than 2000 years, Confucianism has been the mainstream thought in traditional Chinese culture. Thus, Confucianism is embodied in various fields of Chinese society, such as economics, philosophy, etc. In Confucianism, people can not talk about the topic of sex, and it is considered taboo [8]. Therefore, this is also the reason why Chinese women lack sexual knowledge. In addition, according to Confucianism, having sex outside of marriage is not acceptable since it is governed by legal agreements and ends with birth. Women are specifically expected to adhere to the virtue of chastity, which entails staying virgins before marriage and being faithful to One's spouses, whether they are living or dead. Women are expected to be less forceful and subservient than males during sexual engagement [8]. Finally, a large part of the reason for the lack of sexual knowledge among Chinese women comes from the lack of sex education at home and school. For parents, they feel humiliated to talk to their children about sexual expertise and feel that the children are too young to speak of sexual knowledge with their children. For teachers, sex knowledge and sex education are not in their teaching scope because they are only responsible for teaching students how to study and test. Therefore, sex is very foreign to Chinese students who have never been exposed to sex education.

3.2 Results

In fact, sex education is necessary for everyone because most of us experience sexual intercourse. Only by learning sexual knowledge can people better protect themselves, otherwise, it will bring more significant harm. The HIV infection rate in China has been rising rapidly due to the lack of sexual knowledge, according to the survey, HIV infections rose 30 percent between 1995 and 2000. However, rates soared by 58 percent in 2001 and by 122 percent in 2003 [9]. On the other hand, in addition to the sharp increase in the number of HIV infections. According to statistics, more and more young women choose abortion for birth control. According to official data, China performs more than 13 million abortions annually. However, experts claim this number is significantly understated since it excludes non-surgical abortions and abortions conducted in unregulated facilities [10]. In fact, the reason for this phenomenon is that women lack knowledge about contraceptive education. In their view, abortion is an easy way to get rid of birth control because abortion is advertised as a very convenient way. If women can be exposed to sex education from a young age, then they will also know how harmful abortion is and not only use abortion as a method of birth control but will choose a safer and less dangerous way to use contraception. Finally, the lack of sex education has resulted in some girls not even knowing they were being violated. For some little girls, they don't have a concept of their private parts because they don't know it's a place that can't be touched by others, so, if someone else felt their private parts, they wouldn't tell their parents or teachers, or even if they were raped by someone else, they didn't know to tell their parents. Therefore, in order to avoid this situation, sex education plays a very important role for everyone.

4. The Meaning of Life in the Film

In fact, in this film, director Teng Congcong not only exposed the lack of social status and sexual knowledge of contemporary Chinese women but also explored the meaning of life. People have to admit that the meaning of life is an extremely broad and elusive topic because everyone has different views and interpretations of the meaning of life. At the film's end, Shengnan finally finds meaning in her life. For Shengnan, in the beginning, she thought she was always right; there are only right and wrong things in this world. On the other hand, she was discriminated against in the workplace and at home, so what she wanted most at first was to gain the respect of her boss and parents, but after a series of events, her attitude towards life changed. In the background of the childbirth policy, she realized that only respecting herself is the most important thing. In order to better study the meaning of life, researchers divide the meaning of life into three ways: coherent purpose and meaning. Coherence is the quality of being comprehensible and having a cohesive existence. A feeling of

primary objectives, aims, and life direction is what is meant by purpose. A sense of life's intrinsic value and leading a worthwhile life are vital components of significance [11]. Although this film primarily focuses on the female perspective, it does not exclude the male perspective. In this film full of respect and love, the director exposes and presents some social issues to the audience through the perspectives of men and women. The director divides the meaning of life into two layers. In the following essay, the author will explain the meaning of these two layers of life respectively.

4.1 The First Meaning of Life

At the beginning of this movie, Shengnan is someone who insists on being who she is, she is always doing what she thinks is right. In Shengnan's view, the right thing is to work hard and not let his parents down. She believes that she must be an upright person in dealing with everything and can not betray herself and go against her will. In this film, Shengnan has ovarian cancer but still refuses to get 300,000 from the fake boss; it can be seen that Shengnan is a very real and honest person. Simply put, her worldview is black and white. She truly lives in her own world and has a set of her own concepts. Unfortunately, against the backdrop of that one-child policy, Shengnan's values and aspirations were utterly broken. Independent women have always been the goal that Shengnan has pursued. In the views of Shengnan, as long as she works hard enough, she will definitely succeed, but no matter how hard she tried and succeeded, she was still labeled a leftover girl by society. In the eyes of the people at the time, if a woman did not marry, she was leftover. That is to say, a woman abandoned by a man. On the other hand, the heavy reality hit Shengnan deeply. If she doesn't accept working with a fake boss, then she won't get enough money to treat her ovarian cancer. In the past, she could live in her utopia and avoid refusing to do things that went against her cognition and wishes, but in the face of the cruel reality, she had to accept and cooperate with a false boss. This cruel reality collided with the cognition in her mind, making her wonder if her values and what she thought was correct was right. In fact, Shengnan's experience seems to be empathetic to most people. Before stepping into the society, everyone believes that they are competent. If they work hard, one day, they will be successful and achieve their desired goals. Even some people think they get what they want. However, when they step into society, they find that it is not what they imagined at all because many things are not what they think they can do. From the anger of youth to the maturity of adults, they feel a deep sense of powerlessness. Therefore, in this film, director Teng Congcong exhorts people not to live in their own utopia. A person's life can not be 100% smooth, there will always be difficulties and obstacles waiting for people ahead. Therefore, what people need to do is to adjust their mentality and never give up when facing challenges.

4.2 The Second Meaning of Life

With the development of the plot, Sheng Nan's attitude towards life has undergone tremendous changes, from living in her own utopian world, to being confused about life, and finally to learning to respect and love herself. In fact, for Shengnan, the one-child policy is the main reason why she wants the respect of her parents and others who want her to be like a boy. At the same time, she was labeled as a "leftover girl" because she was beyond the marriageable year and did not get married, so she was not respected by others, so, in this movie, the audience can notice that the word "respect" is used constantly because everyone wants to be respected. For example, Shengnan wants to be respected by her parents, Simao wants to become a rich man because he wants to be respected by others, Liping wants to use the money to gain respect from Shengnan, Guangming Liu wants to be respected by his father-in-law, so he posted the photo in front of the shoe cabinet, when the father-in-law bends over to change his shoes, it is like giving him a bow. Therefore, when everyone is obsessed with gaining the respect of others, they forget that it is also essential to earn their own respect. "Eros is the door to life and death, and it returns to where it comes from." This sentence runs through the entire movie. In other words, everyone has their own desires, and unbalanced desires make people lose themselves. Just as Shengnan frantically seeks sex because she may be about to lose her feelings for sex, desire makes her lose herself and make her lose respect for herself. This view is also

confirmed in the second half of the film. When Sheng Nan gets her to wish and has sex with her friend, she realizes that masturbation can truly make her fulfilled and happy. The change in her attitude towards sex also reflected the change in her attitude toward life, so she stopped thinking about how to make others respect her. Therefore, director Teng Congcong warned women through this film that they should adjust their mentality when women are subjected to sexism, and their respect is the most important thing. Women must earn their own respect before they can earn the respect of others.

5. Conclusion

What people have to admit is that Chinese women are still in a disadvantageous social position in contemporary society. Not only do women experience discrimination in the workplace, such as refusal to recruit women who have never been pregnant, but women still do most of the household chores in the family. A large part of the reason is not only because China belongs to a patriarchal society but also because China advocates Confucianism. In Confucianism, women should educate their children at home, not work. On the other hand, both Chinese women and men lack basic sex education, which is in fact a consequence of traditional Chinese thinking. Therefore, the lack of sex education has led to an increase in the abortion rate in China. Parents and schools should provide sex education to their children on time so that children can establish a correct concept of sex. In addition, people should learn to respect themselves and not lose themselves because of their desires. However, this paper lacks specific qualitative research. Through in-depth interviews, people can better understand the living conditions of Chinese women and their grasp of sexual knowledge. At the same time, scholars in the future can pay more attention to strategies to solve the current situation of women so that more women can be respected and enjoy the rights they deserve in society, and avoid the incidents that happened because of sex education.

Reference

- [1] Emily, H, Review: "Send me to the clouds" is a feminist exploration of expectations versus reality, *Cinema Escapist*, 2019, September 23, retrieved September 21, 2022, from <https://www.cinemaescapist.com/2019/09/review-send-me-to-the-clouds/>
- [2] Yijie, W., & Yanan, Z, "as good as a boy" but still a girl: Gender equity within the context ... 2022, March 15, retrieved September 11, 2022, from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/21582440221082097>
- [3] Bai, W., Lee, Y.-L., Liao, J., Wu, L., Xie, M., & Zhou, T, The gender pay gap in China: Insights from a discrimination perspective. *arXiv.org*, 2022, June 19, retrieved September 11, 2022, from <https://arxiv.org/abs/2206.09306>
- [4] Ani, Women in China suffer patriarchal oppression, gender discrimination, *ThePrint*, 2022, March 5, retrieved September 11, 2022, from <https://theprint.in/world/women-in-china-suffer-patriarchal-oppression-gender-discrimination/860150/>
- [5] Qin, A, A prosperous China says 'men preferred,' and women lose, *The New York Times*, 2019, July 16, retrieved September 11, 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/16/world/asia/china-women-discrimination.html>
- [6] Attané, I, Being a woman in China Today: A demography of gender, *China Perspectives*, 2012, December 7, retrieved September 11, 2022, from <https://journals.openedition.org/chin perspectives/6013>
- [7] Shi, W., Lin, Y., Zhang, Z., & Su, J, Gender differences in sex education in China: A structural topic modeling analysis based on Online Knowledge Community zhihu. *Children (Basel, Switzerland)*, 2022, April 26, retrieved September 11, 2022, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9139772/>
- [8] Gao, E., Zuo, X., Wang, L., Lou, C., Cheng, Y., & Zabin, L. S, How does traditional Confucian culture influence adolescents' sexual behavior in three Asian cities? *The Journal of adolescent health : official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 2012, March, retrieved September 11, 2022, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4235616/>
- [9] Lieber, E., Chin, D., Li, L., Rotheram-Borus, M. J., Detels, R., Wu, Z., Guan, J., & National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Collaborative HIV Prevention Trial Group, Sociocultural contexts and

communication about sex in China: Informing HIV/STD prevention programs. *AIDS education and prevention* : official publication of the International Society for AIDS Education, 2009, October, retrieved September 11, 2022, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2946181/#R6>

[10] Griffiths, J., Fang, N., & Wang, S, China's lack of sex education is putting millions of young people at risk. CNN,2016, December 6, retrieved September 11, 2022, from <https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/30/health/china-sex-education-world-aids-day>

[11] Frank, M., & Michael, S. (n.d.), *The three meanings of meaning in life: Distinguishing coherence, purpose, and significance*, Taylor & Francis. Retrieved September 21, 2022, from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17439760.2015.1137623?journalCode=rpos20>