

Syracuse University

SURFACE

Dissertations - ALL

SURFACE

December 2015

Dancing With Gender: A Reception Analysis of Chinese Women's Viewing Experiences of Ann Hui's The Golden Era

Li Chen

Syracuse University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://surface.syr.edu/etd>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Chen, Li, "Dancing With Gender: A Reception Analysis of Chinese Women's Viewing Experiences of Ann Hui's The Golden Era" (2015). *Dissertations - ALL*. 363.

<https://surface.syr.edu/etd/363>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the SURFACE at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations - ALL by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

Abstract

The issue that this study addressed was the unprivileged status of women audience members and women directors in the male dominated Chinese film industry. To investigate this problem, the purpose of this study was to explore how Chinese women audience members produce different meanings in terms of gender identity and gender relations through viewing *The Golden Era* (2014), directed by a female filmmaker Ann Hui. To deeply understand the viewing experiences of Chinese women audience members, this qualitative research project was designed as a reception analysis. To gather data, interviews with 18 Chinese women with viewing experiences of this film were collected from December 2014 to January 2015. The transcribed interviews were translated and analyzed. Under the framework of feminist cultural studies, the portrayal of gender roles and gender relations in this film incited various reactions and reading practices of Chinese audience members throughout these data. Through feminist standpoint theory, these findings were useful for subtly recognizing how Chinese women's multiple reading practices problematize and complicate the oppressor/oppressed binary of the power relations in terms of gender.

**DANCING WITH GENDER:
A RECEPTION ANALYSIS OF CHINESE WOMEN'S VIEWING EXPERIENCES OF
ANN HUI'S *THE GOLDEN ERA***

By

Li Chen

B.A., Renmin University of China, 1999
M.A., Nanjing University, 2002

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in *Media Studies*

S. I. Newhouse of Public Communication
Syracuse University
December 2015

Copyright © Li Chen 2015
All Rights Reserved

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the faculties and my colleagues in the S. I. Newhouse of Public Communications, especially Professor Carol M. Liebler, my advisor, who gave me enormous advice and support during my two years Media Studies program. I'd also like to thank my committee members, Professor Tula Goenka, with whom I could enjoy women-centric films together, and Professor Yingyi Ma, who provided guidance from a sociological viewpoint. Thanks, too, to my defense chair, Professor Roy Gutterman, for his continuous encouragement and precious time. Moreover, thanks go to every faculty member in Newhouse, who always offer me immense help and warm smiles. I am indebted to my beautiful and dear friends here, with whom I shared a hardworking time, lots of laugh and tears, fantastic scenes on campus, and a sweet friendship forever. Finally, special thanks to my family, whom I missed, and who missed me, and for whom I felt so so so sorry. Love all of you. Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENT

| | |
|--|-----------|
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| ANN HUI'S SUCCESS | 2 |
| WOMEN AUDIENCE MEMBERS OF ANN HUI'S FILMS | 3 |
| <i>THE GOLDEN ERA (2014)</i> | 4 |
| GENDER PRACTICES THROUGH VIEWING FILMS | 7 |
| INVESTIGATING CHINESE WOMEN AUDIENCE MEMBERS' VIEWING EXPERIENCES | 8 |
| CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW | 11 |
| FEMINIST CULTURAL STUDIES | 11 |
| RECEPTION STUDIES | 12 |
| FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY | 14 |
| GENDER PRACTICES | 15 |
| CHINESE WOMEN AUDIENCE MEMBERS | 16 |
| THE MALE-DOMINATED FILM INDUSTRY | 18 |
| ANN HUI AND HER FILMS | 19 |
| PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON ANN HUI | 20 |
| SUMMARY | 21 |
| CHAPTER 3: METHOD | 22 |
| OVERVIEW | 22 |
| SAMPLING | 23 |
| THE PARTICIPANTS | 24 |
| DATA COLLECTION | 26 |
| DATA ANALYSIS | 27 |
| RESEARCHER'S ROLE | 28 |
| THREATS TO VALIDITY | 29 |
| CHAPTER 4: RESULTS | 30 |
| FINDING I: DECODING ANN HUI | 31 |
| <i>Decoding Ann Hui's experimental film language in The Golden Era (2014).</i> | 32 |
| Preferred reading - satisfaction. | 34 |
| Negotiated reading - skepticism. | 36 |
| Resistant reading - antagonism. | 37 |
| <i>Decoding Ann Hui's directing skill in portraying ordinary lives in fragmented detail.</i> | 39 |
| Preferred reading - satisfaction. | 40 |
| Negotiated reading - skepticism. | 41 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Resistant reading - antagonism. | 42 |
| <i>Perceiving Ann Hui's gender identity: beyond the encoding/decoding model.</i> | 43 |
| “Xing Bie”: gender or sex? | 45 |
| When “Xing Bie” means “sex.” | 47 |
| When “Xing Bie” means “gender.” | 50 |
| Overlook “Xing Bie.” | 52 |
| <i>Summary.</i> | 52 |
| FINDING II: DECODING XIAO HONG | 55 |
| <i>Decoding a polysemic Xiao Hong.</i> | 57 |
| Preferred reading - satisfaction. | 57 |
| Negotiated reading. | 57 |
| Resistant reading - antagonism. | 58 |
| <i>An historical analytical model.</i> | 59 |
| <i>The perception of “Zuoyi Wenxue Nv Zuo Jia.”</i> | 63 |
| Rejecting the label of “Zuo Yi.” | 65 |
| The comparison between Xiao Hong and Ding Ling. | 70 |
| <i>A woman's private life in the popular culture discourse.</i> | 73 |
| Gender inequality. | 75 |
| The possibility of Xiao Hong's agency. | 77 |
| <i>Summary.</i> | 81 |
| CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION | 83 |
| CONCLUSION | 83 |
| LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH | 89 |
| REFERENCES | 92 |
| APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL | 105 |
| APPENDIX B: SAMPLE QUESTIONS | 106 |
| APPENDIX C: ANN HUI'S FILMOGRAPHY | 108 |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIALS

| | |
|---|----|
| FIGURE 1. CHARACTERS IN <i>THE GOLDEN ERA</i> (2014) AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS AROUND XIAO HONG. (M) MEANS THAT THE CHARACTER IS MALE; (F) MEANS THAT THE CHARACTER IS FEMALE. NAMES IN RED MEANS MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE FILM. DRAWN FROM HAN, S., KONG, W., MEI, Y., QIN, H., XU, T. (PRODUCERS), & ZHANG, J. & HUI, A. (DIRECTOR). (2014). <i>THE GOLDEN ERA</i> [MOTION PICTURE]. CHINA: STELLA MEGA FILMS, CHINA FILM GROUP, EDKO FILMS, CHEERLAND ENTERTAINMENT ORGANIZATION, & CHINA FILM CO... | 5 |
| FIGURE 2. THE RECEPTION MODEL OF XIAO HONG IN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT. DRAWN BY THE RESEARCHER. ACCORDING TO HALL'S ENCODING/DECODING PARADIGM (1980 [2002], P. 165)..... | 60 |
| FIGURE 3. THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS' READING TYPES. DRAWN FROM THE ANALYZING RESULTS. | 84 |
| TABLE 1 | 25 |

Chapter 1: Introduction

I work on the edge of mainstream. — Ann Hui (2011)

The Golden Era mirrors my entire philosophy and aesthetic value. — Ann Hui (2014)

In the summer of 2006, I was alone watching *The Postmodern Life of My Aunt* in a cinema. I felt extremely panicked when I saw that the aunt on the screen ended in a dirty, lonely, unhappy, hopeless, and dependent life. Although I was a reporter with a steady income and happily lived in big Beijing, I still felt uncertain of my future. I so identified with the aunt in that story who wanted to pursue independence and happiness but lost all her money and self-respect because of falling in love with a fraud. At that time I don't know why, but I felt there was a force in society pushing women to rely on men, not on women themselves. Otherwise, women would be punished, like the aunt in the film.

The Postmodern Life of My Aunt, a women-centric film, was directed by Ann Hui, a Hong Kong woman director. It was astonishing for me that a Hong Kong woman director could portray a Mainland China woman's life and psychology in such a detailed and realistic way. This film urged me to rethink my own gender identity and the contemporary gender situation in China. My strong feelings for this film provoked me to consider Chinese women's viewing experiences of Ann Hui's films as a research topic. Scholars have discussed globally that women occupy unprivileged positions in the male-dominated media industry, including Chinese contexts (Bielby, 2009; Bielby & Bielby, 1996; Byerly & Ross, 2006; Stanworth, 2000; Dai, 1994; Wang L., 2012).

The issue that this study addresses is the unprivileged status of women directors and women audiences in the male-dominated film industry in China. To elucidate this problem, the purpose of this study is to explore the gender practices of Chinese women audience members as they make sense of one of Ann Hui's films—*The Golden Era* (2014). Under the framework of

feminist cultural studies, this study uses a reception analysis as the research method. Using feminist standpoint theory, gender practice is conceptualized as constructing gender identity and practicing gender relations through multiple viewing experiences of Chinese audience members.

Ann Hui's Success

Hong Kong woman filmmaker Ann Hui fascinates me as a research subject not just because she is a woman director but also because she is prolific and accomplished. By 2014, Ann Hui, born in 1947, had directed 29 films and also worked as a producer, an actress, and a screenwriter in the Hong Kong film industry (HKMDB, 2015). Since 1997, her films have been produced and released both in Hong Kong and Mainland China. She has been nominated 42 times in various film festivals and has won awards 39 times by 2015 (IMDB, 2015). Film reviewers have suggested that she is the most important female director in the contemporary Chinese film industry (Forster, 1995; Perks, 2009; Taylor, 2011).

Aside from these artistic achievements in the film arena, her most commercially successful film (Bai, 2012) was *A Simple Life* (2011), released from March 5 to June 16 in 2012, which grossed over 70.14 million RMB in Mainland China (Entgroup, 2012) and HK\$27.87 million (MPIA, 2013) in Hong Kong. This film also won several awards in 68th Venice International Film Festival, Asian Film Award, and Hong Kong Film Awards (Mtime, 2015; HKMDB, 2015). Some reviews acclaimed it as a commercial victory for art films in China (Mtime, 2012). However, Ann Hui never restricted her films to the boundary of art films. She also made several commercial films during her career. Once, she was interviewed and said, "I am definitely not avant-garde. I think I work on the edge of the mainstream" (Cheung, Marchetti, & Tan, 2010, p. 68).

Women Audience Members of Ann Hui's Films

Ann Hui's claim of working on the edge of the mainstream indicated that she followed the market rules of the film industry in which audiences are indispensable because they are critical sources of film profits (Gripsrud & Lavik, 2008). A director with determination to survive in the mainstream film industry need to prove his or her capability of attracting audiences (Gripsrud & Lavik, 2008). However, the box office performance is difficult to predict especially when the Hong Kong female director Ann Hui hoped to achieve success in the Mainland China film market due to the cultural and historical difference between Hong Kong and Mainland China. Although Ann Hui has several films using Mainland China as the cultural background, she still claimed that it was hard for her to predict Mainland China audiences' responses (Fan, 2010). Therefore, this project addresses the uncertainty of how Ann Hui's audiences understand and accept/reject Ann Hui's films.

In addition, Ann Hui said that she works on the edge partly because her films have some particular characteristics that are not compatible with the logic of commercial pleasure: some of her films are centered on unpopular topics, such as social issues, marginal social groups, and female subjectivity (Cheung, Marchetti, & Tan, 2011). Ann Hui working on the edge of mainstream is to some degree the practice of "women's cinema as counter cinema" that Clair Johnston declared in 1973 (Cheung, Marchetti, & Tan, 2011, p. 24). Johnston (1973) emphasized the force of the women directors in the mainstream film industry while other scholars also suggested that women filmmakers behind the screen had an impact on gender representation on screen (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999). Hence, this project discusses the experiences of Chinese women audience members when they are confronted with a "counter cinema" (Johnston, 1973) and investigates how these women experienced the probably distinctive gender representation depicted by a female director.

Film scholars have discussed Hui's films through a variety of aspects: self-identity in relation to Chinese diaspora (Yue, 2010), as representative of Hong Kong New Wave Cinema (Ho, 2001; Marchetti, 2009), in relation to everyday life in the context of Chinese history (Erens, 2000; Szeto, 2011), and as a lens of female subjectivity (Erens, 2000; Marchetti, 2009; Perks, 2009). However, no empirical research exists that analyzes women audience members of Ann Hui's films, which was the research focus of this project.

The Golden Era (2014)

This project selected *The Golden Era* (2014) to investigate how Chinese women audience members make sense of Ann Hui's films. Ann Hui declared that *The Golden Era* (2014) mirrored her "entire philosophy and aesthetic value" (Mao & Li, 2014). The significance of this film for this project lied in its two characteristics: the central subject that the film addressed (e.g. An, 2014; Mao & Li, 2014; Li, 2014; Ren, 2014) and the shocking failure of its box office (e.g. An, 2014; Chen, 2014).

The subject of *The Golden Era* (2014) is Xiao Hong, a Chinese female writer of the 1930s, who was famous for both her literary talent and her displaced and painful life (Mao & Li, 2014; Li, 2014). The story delineated her whole life: her childhood in Hulan, her unwilling displacement in more than ten cities during ten years, and her final days in Hong Kong against the backdrop of World War II. Figure 1 shows the complicated social relations of Xiao Hong depicted in *The Golden Era* (2014).

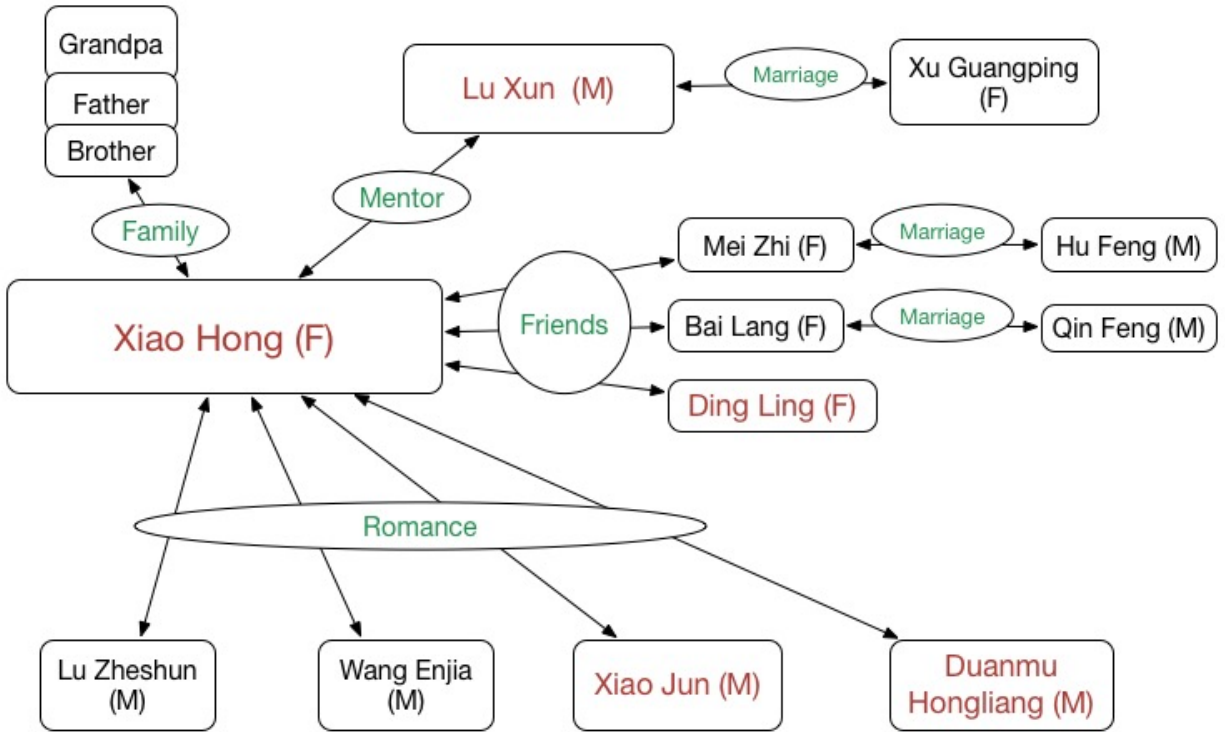


Figure 1. Characters in *The Golden Era* (2014) and their relationships around Xiao Hong. (M) means that the character is male; (F) means that the character is female. Names in red means main characters in the film. Drawn from Han, S., Kong, W., Mei, Y., Qin, H., Xu, T. (Producers), & Zhang, J. & Hui, A. (Director). (2014). *The Golden Era* [Motion picture]. China: Stella Mega Films, China Film Group, Edko Films, Cheerland Entertainment Organization, & China Film Co.

Aside from the story of Xiao Hong's mysterious life, Ann Hui invited Tang Wei to play the heroine. Tang Wei became a widely acclaimed star through Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution* (2007), and the government banned her from mass media for at least three years because of "the explicit and brutal relationship between two leading characters" in *Lust, Caution* (Rosen, 2012). Therefore, Chinese audience members had already paid attention to and had an expectation of *The Golden Era* before the film's shooting, because it showed an exciting combination: the director being one of the best female directors in contemporary China, the subject being a symbolic female writer in the 1930s, and the protagonist being one of the most popular female stars in recent years (An, 2014; Ren, 2014).

The Golden Era (2014) invoked a considerable discussion on the representation and the interpretation of independent women in China (An, 2014). For instance, on the film's discussion board of DOUBAN.com, one of the most popular movie data websites in China since 2005 with over 62 million claimed registered users (Tech.163.com, 2012/08/17), there were over 1,593 lengthy comments and over 35,149 short comments (DOUBAN.com, 2015/08/23). An essay named as "*Xiao Hong: The Hungry Bitch*" (Zhou, 2014), as a response to the film, had been reviewed over 100,000 times through the Chinese instant messenger, WeChat, in the first month after the film's release.

Although Ann Hui had implied that *The Golden Era* would use some experimental artistic approaches, the promotion of this film still abided the strategy of commercial films: the considerable investment of \$11.45 million, the expected popularity of over 30 film stars, and the wide promotion on mass media and social media (An, 2014). However, after screening 19 days, *The Golden Era*'s box office ended up with \$8.01million, which was far less than the expected

\$32.71 million (Chen, 2014; Yang, 2014/10/15). Among different explanations of this shocking failure, such as due to the form of artistic film, the boring length of three hours, or the inappropriate screening period (Yang, 2014/10/15), some film reviews pointed out the possibility of the unfulfilled expectation of gender identity and gender relations that Chinese audience want to get from this serious film (DOUBAN.com, 2015/08/23). If this film's audience wanted to enjoy the trivial gossip of regarding Xiao Hong as an affected "Nv Wen Qing" (a young female who likes literary and art), they would be disappointed because this film focused on how to explain Xiao Hong's incredible talent (Shuimuding, 2014/10/04).

Therefore, the reason that I chose *The Golden Era* as a lens to understand Chinese women audience members' viewing experiences is that this film is a woman-centric story produced by a female director. Moreover, this film has incited considerable discussion of women's independence among the Chinese audience. Its mainstream commercial film promotion strategy complicated its influence and made it particularly appropriate for this project.

Gender Practices through Viewing Films

Gender, as a vital concept in feminist scholarship, refers to disparate roles and functions that men and women take in a specific society (McDowell, 1999). Gender is regarded as socially constructed while sex is seen as biological difference. However, gender is not fixed and universal according to Butler (1990); in contrast, gender is performed through personal practices and contextualized within the distinctive social systems. Davis (1996) observed that the trend of using gender as a verb indicated that gender is conceived as an ongoing process, not a fixed or still status. For Connell (2009), masculinity and femininity can be a continuum of social practices related to being a man or a woman.

Practicing gender includes constructing gender identity and gender relations through both one's personal life and on a social level (Connell, 2009). If the mediated media world can be a symbolic instrument for women to practice gender (Connell, 2009), then female subjectivity portrayed by Ann Hui's films might have influences on women audiences' gender practices. Unfortunately, empirical studies have never addressed the issue of women audiences in the research of Ann Hui's films. Now she has achieved popularity among Chinese audiences, and it is possible for more women audience members to view and respond to her expression of female subjectivity in her films.

In terms of contemporary China, feminist researchers have introduced the concept of gender into Chinese feminism scholarship as "Shehui Xingbie" to distinguish gender from sex ("Xingbie") in Chinese (Wang, 2004). However, it is still unclear that how average Chinese women understand the concept of gender. On the other hand, Meng and Dai (1990) argued that the prominence of class difference has overshadowed the existing inequality and hierarchy within gender relations in the Maoist era. Moreover, in the post-socialist era, the economic reform has pushed the increasing expression of desire and the commodification of gender relations (Roefl, 2007). The transformation of the landscape of Chinese women's gender identity and gender relations is embodied in the everyday life of Chinese women. Therefore, film-viewing activities as part of everyday life also serve this changing process of gender identity construction and the practice of gender relations.

Investigating Chinese Women Audience members' Viewing Experiences

Based on these reasons, the current project did a qualitative research to investigate Chinese women audience members' responses, attitudes, and meaning productions involved in and affected by Ann Hui's *The Golden Era* (2014).

This project addresses the following research questions:

Main RQ: How does gender play a role in Chinese women audience members' viewing experiences of Ann Hui's *The Golden Era* (2014)?

RQ 1: How do Chinese women audience members perceive Ann Hui as a woman filmmaker?

RQ 2: How do Chinese women audience members identify with women's portrayals in this film, and especially Xiao Hong?

RQ 3: In what ways might Ann Hui's gender portrayal in films influence Chinese women audience members' perception of gender relations?

To answer these research questions, this project uses reception analysis as the research method and employs cultural studies and feminist standpoint theory as my analyzing framework. Originating from British cultural studies, reception analyses insists that audiences are active in creating the meaning of mass media artifacts, and that the social contexts, such as gender, age, and education of the audience members, will influence their reading process (Schroder, Drottrier, Kline, and Murray, 2003). Focusing on audience members' viewing experiences of a particular film, a reception analysis framework is appropriate for this project.

Feminist cultural studies analyses are used to concentrate on women's everyday life experiences (Meagher, 2005; Thornham, 2000) while feminist standpoint theory insisted that women's lived experiences are privileged in understanding the oppressed situation of women in a patriarchal society (Hartsock, 1983, 1998). Regarding mass media, feminist cultural studies attempts to find the ideological hierarchy in mass media messages and also uphold that the women audience members are actively, instead of passively, engaged in the reading process (Meagher, 2005). Although many feminist cultural analyses and feminist standpoint theory have

been applied in the Western, white woman context, this project utilizes these two interpretive frameworks to detect the uniqueness and variety of women audiences in the Chinese context through their viewing experiences of Ann Hui's *The Golden Era*.

The issue of women audiences' viewing experiences will be delved into more deeply in the following chapters. Chapter 2 will provide a literature review concerning the following: feminist cultural studies, reception analysis, gender practices, feminist standpoint theory, Chinese women audience research, the male-dominated film industry, and research on Ann Hui's films. Chapter 3 will elaborate on the design and the rationale of the methodology this reception analysis employed. Chapter 4 will demonstrate two major findings and suggest one analytical model according to the research questions. Chapter 5 will summarize the findings of the current study and identify study limitations and suggest future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 deals with the scholarship of gender and film audience research I use to build up the theoretical basis of my research. This thesis is designed to explore Chinese women audience members' gender practices through viewing Ann Hui's film, *The Golden Era* (2014). To clarify key concepts and their connections in the domain of a gendered film audience research, I focus on the contributions in relation to film audience and gender practice from Chinese film studies, feminist cultural studies, reception research, and gender theories.

Therefore, the literature review: (a) introduces how feminist cultural scholars use the concept of active audience in reception studies and why this framework is appropriate for this project; (b) addresses gender as a contributing factor to reception studies and how feminist standpoint theory emphasizes women's lived experiences; (c) incorporates the concept of gender practice and elaborate the possibility of exploring Chinese women audience members' viewing experiences; (d) summarizes research on the male-dominated film industry and Ann Hui's films to detect the deficiency and necessity of audience research on her films.

Feminist Cultural Studies

This project seeks to explore how women audience members understand a female filmmaker's film in the Chinese context. Thus, women audience members' experiences and a particular cultural context are the two emphases of this project. Feminist cultural studies is a suitable analytic framework because women's experiences have a vital position in cultural studies.

Using this framework, this project analyzes Chinese women audience members' viewing experiences—in other words, how they consumed Ann Hui's films, in this instance *The Golden Era* (2014). Previous classical works in feminist cultural studies domain have shown that women in developed countries such as America, Britain, Netherlands, and Australia might have varied reactions and attitudes towards the same media text and that their responses might not fit

the expectations of media producers (Ang, 1985, 1996; Brown, 1994; Kuhn, 1984). Feminist cultural scholars have argued that media texts such as soap operas, romance novels, and women's magazines encode ideological gender relations, but women audiences might have different positions other than conforming to the reading that producers preferred (Thornham, 1999). Scholars have also applied this analyzing framework into other cultural backgrounds, such as Africa (Mayne, 1993).

Most of the feminist cultural analyses about media and audience have used two approaches: textual analysis, in order to disclose the ideology encoded in media texts; and qualitative audience research, in order to explore the variety and diversity of audience members' viewing/reading experiences (Meagher, 2005). In terms of a particular media form such as Chinese films, most analyses lie in the former area of close readings of film texts (Chen, 2012); just a few empirical studies have been done on audiences (Wong, 2005; Rosen, 2012; Zhou, Song, Liu, Wang, Jiang, & Wu, 2008). Wong (2005) used feminist cultural analysis to investigate how women audience perceived the mainstream cinema and stars in Hong Kong. However, no empirical studies have been found to explore women's distinctive sense-making process of Ann Hui's films. Therefore, this project seeks to fill in this research gap: using a qualitative reception analysis, this project analyzes Chinese women audience members' unique viewing experiences of *The Golden Era*.

Reception Studies

Reception studies suggest that context influences text; it prefers active audience to passive audience; and it argues that meaning is produced through "reading," not pre-determined by texts. The word "reading" is used, rather than viewing/listening, to imply an active process. Hall (1980) emphasized the concept of ideology in any reading process and he argued three

ideological positions for reading: dominant-hegemonic position, negotiated position, and oppositional position. He argued that when audiences decode media texts, their various cultural backgrounds put them into a discursive position in the reading process and the audiences might be able to change the meaning of media texts through their perceptions. For Hall, producers were “encoding” media texts while audience were “decoding” them. The ideology of encoding and that of decoding could be incongruent. That means, audiences’ readings may fully, partly, or not at all compliant with the ideology depicted by the texts. In terms of gender, it suggests audience members’ perceptions of the film’s portrayal of gender roles and gender relations might be fully, partly, or not at all accord with the filmmaker’s encoding.

Previous reception studies have shown that gender is a vital, key frame in reception studies. During the 1980s, film studies took a cultural turn, following the steps of television reception studies (Ang, 1985; Morley, 1980). Feminist film scholars, such as Gledhill (1988), combined the ethnographic method and textual analysis through the cultural studies lens to investigate the relationship between female spectatorship and Hollywood cinema. In this way, the spectatorship became an activating space for constructing meaning, rather than passive receiving, and gender can play an important role in this reading process of acceptance, negotiation and rejection (Bobo, 1988; Stacy, 1994). The concept of gender here is ideological and steeped in power relations (Mayne, 1993). Aside from passively accepting the reading position as male gaze or female spectator decided by texts, women audience members can have more textual negotiations through the reading process (Gledhill, 1988). Women can share the reading experience to construct interpretive communities (Bobo, 1988; Brown, 1994). Studies analyzing women’s active reading have come across various areas of mass media and popular culture, such as women’s genres (Ang, 1985, 1996; Brown, 1994); film star gazing (Stacey,

1994; Wong, 2005); romance novels (Radway, 1984); advertising (Sender, 1999); political news (Mueller, 2010); comic-cons (Kohnen, 2014); and mainstream films or prime-time television (Bobo, 1988; Kuipers, 2011).

Austin (2002) adopted a multi-dimensional approach to investigate the interaction between audience and popular films. His approach combined the political economy of Hollywood in the 1990s, reception studies techniques, and empirical audience research. The key question of his study, especially in the method part, is how empirical audience research can play a role in understanding contexts of a film. He pointed out the "viewer agency" (p. 21), which means the viewers' role in developing pleasures and meanings in-between film texts. During this viewing and meaning-producing process, audiences' gendered, aged, and sexual identities will be "(re)produced" (p. 20).

For these reasons, this study uses reception analysis as the methodology to understand how Chinese women audience members make sense of Ann Hui's *The Golden Era* and how their perceptions may influence their own gender practices.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist cultural studies put particular emphasis upon gender into cultural studies. Thus, how to explain gendered experience in various cultures was one vital question for the current study. This project employed feminist standpoint theory because this theory focuses on and foregrounds women's lived experiences. This emphasis fit my research goal of investigating Chinese women audience members' unique viewing experiences in everyday life.

Defined by Harding (1986), a standpoint is "a morally and scientifically preferable grounding for [the] interpretation and explanation of nature and social life" (p. 26). In this sense, Chinese women audience members might take a special standpoint to interpret Ann Hui's films

in this project. Feminist standpoint theory notes that women's lived experiences could form women's own epistemological language, different from the dominant hegemonic discourse, to comprehend their positions within social relations. Hartsock (1983, 1998) argued that women's lived experience as a standpoint was crucial to the production of public knowledge. As an unprivileged and oppressed group, women have the chance to develop a distinctive worldview from the male-dominated cultural hegemony. In this way, Ann Hui's films could be seen as a carrier of public knowledge, and women audience members' viewing experiences indeed become a battlefield for power relations to produce and reproduce the ideology in terms of gender, class, race, and ethnicity.

Gender Practices

It should be noted that in early feminist film scholarship the gendered audience (male gaze or female spectatorship) is based on the sex difference. Male and female are regarded as two fixed subject positions that are enforced by mainstream film texts (van Zoonen, 1994). However, the gender concept this research mentioned is socially constructed. The assumptions here are that gender is a socially constructed concept and that gender practice is a continuing, fluent process. Feminist scholars regard gender as a socially, rather than biologically, constructed concept. That is, women and men recognize and achieve their own gender identities through socialization from social activities, their everyday lives, and their interactions between the inside and outside of human beings.

In addition, Connell (2009) argued that gender is not even fixed after the social learning process; instead, gender is continually changed during an individual's entire life. A woman can both have masculinity and femininity, as can a man, through gender practices. In this sense, a female's gender identity can be explained as how a female individual is identified with

femininity and masculinity. Thus, gender relations can exist in the relations between men and women, but also in the relations inside an individual's innermost self. Therefore, the process of a woman viewing another woman's gender practice through films will be complicated by dealing with masculinity and femininity in the connection between a woman filmmaker and women audience members, as well as among women audience members—this is exactly what this research seeks to explore.

Chinese Women Audience Members

The agency of viewers, as defined by Austin (2002), means that the social-economic-status and cultural background of Chinese women audience members are supposed to put them into different reading process, and produce distinctive ideological positions as Hall (1980) suggested. Scholars have recognized the development of the Chinese film industry and the increasing market of Chinese film audience during the past two decades (Rosen, 2012; Zhang, 2002, 2012). Yingjin Zhang defined this market advancement as “box-office boom” (Zhang, 2002) and compared it with the status quo of Chinese economy that has been the world's second largest according to China's GDP (Zhang, 2012). According to Yin and Feng (2015), the box-office figure for 2014 reached over RMB 29.64 billion while the top film of the year, *The Breakup Buddies* (dir. Ning Hao, 2014) climbed to RMB 1.16 billion. Rosen (2012), after examining two public surveys of Chinese film audiences, concluded that the Chinese film audience in large cities generated most of film revenue and a small number of films produced most of the box office in China. This conclusion suggests a necessity of investigating detailed information of the social economic status of Chinese audience members and how this status will have an impact on their viewing experiences.

However, most of the Chinese film audience research currently focuses on quantitative methods such as survey (e.g. Zhang, 2009; Zhou, Song, Liu, Wang, Jiang, & Wu, 2008). Indeed, audience research did not occupy an important role in Chinese film studies (in Chinese), as Chen (2012) suggested, which was mostly attentive to history, criticism, and theory. Berry (2012) pointed out, after Leyda (1974) and Jarvie (1977), lack of academic attention (in English) has been paid to Chinese film audience research due to the institutional text-oriented trend. In this project, I used the term of “Chinese audience members” to indicate the individuality of audience members, to replace the term of “Chinese audience” with a collective and generalized implication.

In addition, addressing the Chinese cultural background of women audience members will be difficult if we take into account the unequal economic and social development in different regions of China. The globalization of the film industry and the development of media technology have made it possible for people from different regions to enjoy the same media text. Although some of Ann Hui’s films might have only been released in limited areas, DVD, the Internet, and film festivals can spread them to other regions. The fact that the audience members may have originated from different areas with different social economic status means that, when they perceive Ann Hui’s films, they will use different cultural contexts and gender equality situations to explain what they view, produce different meanings, and choose different attitudes towards the film’s portrayal of gender identity and gender relations. Indeed, this variety is important for reception research under the framework of feminist cultural studies, because as Hall (1980) emphasized, the reason that audiences might choose different reading positions is due to the unique social, cultural and historical backgrounds they bring into the reading process.

The Male-Dominated Film Industry

Studies have found that gender inequality is obvious and extreme in the film industry, not only in Hollywood, but also in other countries. Sociologists indicate the sex segregation in the profession of directors or other filmmakers (Biegly, 2009). Feminist media scholars have argued that the small portion of women workers in senior position is a common phenomenon in the entire media industry such as television, film, even new media (Byerly & Ross, 2006; Stanworth, 2000). Based on Gramsci's ideology and hegemony theory (republished in 2011), the male-dominated industry will produce male-preferred ideologies through the films to make male dominance natural and unchanged.

Women filmmakers now create both art films and commercial films in the mainstream industry. However, women directors occupy the seats in top grossing films at a very low ratio, such as two percent in 2010 in America, and most of them are romantic comedy or drama (Lauzen, 2011). Rollet (2002) pointed out sex differences in France affect the whole filmmaking process. Feminist film studies scholars pointed out, from psychoanalysis viewpoint, the female spectator position for Hollywood films is invisible or masculinized (Thornham, 1999). In terms of Chinese context, Wang (2012) has observed that both scholars and public have not paid much attention on Chinese women's film practices. Through textual analysis, Dai (1994) argued that both Chinese women filmmakers and women audience were invisible. Pang (2005) articulated various masculinities in Hong Kong cinema, which echoed in other scholars' articles (Ho, 2001; Perks, 2009; Szeto, 2011).

Ann Hui's films will be a special case in Chinese male-dominated film industry since she is a rare female director who has survived for over 30 years in the profit-oriented Hong Kong film industry. Moreover, she insists that she is on the margins of the commercial world: she is not an independent filmmaker, but she is not interested in easily predictable commercial films. In

other words, she considers popularity but also insists on her own voice in her films. This is important for calling attention to women activities because, as Mayne (1990) indicated, a woman director in the mainstream film industry might have an impact on changing its male-dominated landscape.

Ann Hui and Her Films

This study employed Ann Hui's latest work, *The Golden Era* (2014), to understand the richness of Chinese women's individual viewing experiences. Ann Hui and her films are suitable for this study for the following reasons.

First, Ann Hui is one of the few women directors in the Chinese film industry. Although this industry is traditionally a male-dominated domain, Ann Hui has achieved a great reputation and increasing popularity. As tackled previously, Ann Hui has insisted that she was not avant-garde but worked in the margins of the mainstream film industry. She also rejected the reviews valuing her as a political advocate or a feminist filmmaker (Cheung, Marchetti, & Tan, 2011). One reason that she denied these labels has been implied in another interview: in her opinion, survival in the competitive Hong Kong film industry comes above all other things (Li, 1982). Surviving in the profit-oriented Hong Kong film industry (Kleinhans, 2009; Yau, 2001) also means that she wanted to be involved in mainstream cinema, which might bring out some negotiations during her filmmaking process (Szeto, 2011).

Second, Ann Hui's films have been steeped in several female subjectivity topics. In addition, Ann Hui's own gender practice is intriguing and has been noticed both by academics and movie reviewers. As some film reviewers have mentioned (Perks, 2009; Yue, 2010), although Ann Hui has rejected being labeled as a feminist director, her works—such as *Song of the Exile* (1990), *Summer Snow* (1995), and *Ah Kam* (1996)—have some women-centric

characteristics. This trend is more visible than before through her recent well-known films, such as *Goddess of Mercy* (2003), *The Postmodern Life of My Aunt* (2006), and *A Simple Life* (2012). Her latest film *The Golden Era* (2014), disclosed to portray the independent and brilliant woman writer Xiao Hong of 1930s in China, also a women-centric work.

Lastly, although many essays have analyzed the aesthetic characteristics and gender portrayals of Ann Hui's films, no empirical studies have been done on her audiences. However, from a feminist cultural studies viewpoint, audience research is typically important because, as Connell (2009) indicated, in a symbolic world, mass media texts are vital instruments for audiences to perform gender practices. According to Gripsrud and Lavik (2008), without audience, films will lack social significance from the outset.

Previous Research on Ann Hui

Scholars point out that the position of women directors in the mainstream film industry is controversial (Mayne, 1990; Butler, 2002; Thornham, 2012). The position of Ann Hui in the mainstream industry is, as Ann Hui said, on the edge (Szeto, 2011). Ann Hui rejected identification with feminist filmmaking (Ho, 2001; Perks, 2009), and her films span different genres including horror films, social issue films, martial arts films, and also melodrama films (Erens, 2000; Szeto, 2011).

Many scholars have done research on various aspects of gender and Ann Hui's films, including gender and politics (Marchetti, 2009; Yau, 2007); the history and role of Hong Kong's women filmmakers (Ho, 1998; Perks, 2009); women and Hong Kong modernity (Ho, 2001). Ho (1998) elaborated the history and the aesthetic achievement of Ann Hui's films. Ann Hui's films disclosed different marginal women's life stories and touched the serious issues. Yue (2010) discussed Hong Kong's diasporic identity through the analysis of *The Song of Exile* (1990).

Marchetti (2009) explicated the gender politics when neoliberalism flourished in Mainland China, in *Postmodern Life of My Aunt* (2006). Ho (2001) traced the Hong Kong history and get across the women's marginal modernity reflected in her films.

Textual analysis of film texts is the prevailing approach adopted in feminist film studies to study women directors (Butler, 2002). When scholars have discussed the gender factor through analyzing Ann Hui's films, more attention was usually paid to Ann Hui as a female filmmaker and the portrayals of women in her films. Most studies regarded audiences and the viewing process as an imagined position and ignored their actual impact on gender construction. This study sought to fill this research gap. The vital question in this project is that how the audience perceives Ann Hui as a woman director and how an audience member perceives her films as the works of a woman director in the context of mainstream film industry of Hong Kong and Mainland China.

Summary

Through the framework of feminist cultural studies and feminist standpoint theory, using the method of reception analysis, the current project explored the gender practices of Chinese women audience members' viewing experiences of *The Golden Era*. The uniqueness of Ann Hui as one of the few female directors in male-dominated film industry and her films' attention to both serious women issues and popularity contribute to this project's significance. In the next chapter, I will elaborate the detailed procedure of how I used reception analysis to conduct this project.

Chapter 3: Method

Overview

Within the theoretical framework of feminist cultural studies, this project applied a qualitative reception analysis. I aimed to describe the nuance and richness of Chinese women's viewing experiences in Ann Hui's film, *The Golden Era* (2014). A qualitative reception analysis fit the purpose of my project, providing a procedure of data collection and analysis to answer my research questions.

According to Schroder, Drotner, Kline, and Murray (2003), reception analyses mostly employ in-depth interviews as the major method that help dig into audiences' historical memories and current experiences. Ann Hui's films have been produced and released since 1979; thus, the audience members' experiences have potentially accumulated over many years, weaving the past and present together. In addition, in-depth interviews are suited for probing into the personal topics in terms of gender identity and gender relations. Therefore, in-depth interviews are suitable for me to understand the complicated feelings of Chinese women audience members.

In order to collect rich data, this project used semi-structured in-depth interviews as the major method of data collection. As Schroder, Drotner, Kline, and Murray (2003) have indicated, reception studies need an approach to allow audiences to demonstrate their media reading experience from their own social and cultural backgrounds using their own interpretive categories and habits. Individual in-depth interviews can help researchers to carefully and thoroughly look into audiences' interpretations and attitudes towards their media reading (Schroder, Drotner, Kline, & Murray, 2003).

Among the different types of interviews (e.g., structured or open-ended; see Schwandt, 2007), this project used semi-structured interviews because this interview type allowed me to use

prepared but adaptable questions and follow-up questions to search for both tentative answers and deep perceptions from the participants within a particular discipline. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to interpret and express their own viewpoints flexibly within the researcher's broad and systematic framework (Creswell, 2013).

Sampling

This project used a purposive sampling strategy for locating a particular population (Creswell, 2014). Certain participants' perceptions and expressions are crucial to this project; thus, identifying qualified persons was vital for the current qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). The participant for this project was a Chinese female individual who had viewed *The Golden Era* (2014).

After the approval by the Institutional Review Board in Syracuse University in December 2014 (See Appendix A), I started recruiting the participants. Participants were recruited by a snowball strategy through my personal network. First, I identified some female friends and acquaintances who had watched *The Golden Era* as the starting point of my snowball. Then I asked them if they were willing to accept my interview inquiry and if they could recommend other female friends for me. I eventually interviewed 18 Chinese women who viewed the film.

I stopped at the sample size of 18 participants because I concluded that the data collected from those participants had already met the requirements of the saturation. As Creswell (2014) suggested, the number of participants is not restricted—qualitative research can use the concept of saturation to determine when the participant searching process can stop. This concept means that the researcher can terminate the recruiting process when no more fresh insights, themes, or patterns will emerge from the data (Creswell, 2014).

The Participants

Using the snowball sampling strategy, I recruited 18 Chinese women audience members to participate in this research. Table 1 shows their basic information of their pseudonyms, age, current locations and birthplaces, profession and educational background.

These participants held at least a college degree, or still studied in college, which means a relatively high educational background. This situation is possibly due to the film's focus: a biography of a female writer of the 1930s. Without any knowledge of this female writer or reading of this writer's work, audience members might not show any interest in this film. Indeed, three of the participants mentioned that particular knowledge preparation would be necessary to comprehend this film (Participant Dan, Dong, & Hui).

In terms of professions, two of the participants were students, four of them were housewives while 12 of them were white-collar workers. This situation is corresponding with their educational backgrounds. The range of age of the participants varied from 21 to 42, with 13 participants in their 30s. Interestingly, one participant indicated that only those with a certain age and having some life experiences could understand this film (Participant Tian).

All participants came from a large city in China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, or Hong Kong. Due to the film's distribution strategy and the market response to the film's screening, this film did not have a vast screening in the remote cities in China (Yang, 2014/10/15). Most participants had migrated from their hometowns to major cities for better lives.

*Table 1**The Demographic Information of Participants*

| Pseudonym | Current Location (Birthplace) | Age | Profession | Education |
|-----------|----------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Ming | Beijing (Sichuan) | 37 | Documentary Producer | PhD |
| Dan | Beijing (Jiangxi) | 30 | Human Resource Manager | B.A. |
| Shui | Beijing (Shanxi) | 22 | Student | College student |
| Lian | Beijing (Sichuan) | 36 | Strategy Manager | M.A. |
| Tian | Shanghai (Heilongjiang) | 42 | Housewife; Volunteer priest | College |
| Yue | Shanghai (Anhui) | 38 | Company manager | College |
| Dong | Shanghai (Tianjin) | 42 | Housewife | B.A. |
| Cui | Beijing (Shandong) | 40 | Associate Professor in literature | PhD |
| Yezi | Beijing (Hunan) | 37 | Housewife | M.A. |
| Xiao | Beijing (Guizhou) | 32 | Promotion Manager | B.A. |
| Hui | Beijing (Anhui) | 36 | Embassy officer | M.A. |
| Meng | Beijing (Beijing) | 34 | Marketing manager | B.A. |
| Mian | Beijing (Guizhou) | 23 | PR | B.A. |
| Jia | Beijing (Beijing) | 34 | Editor | B.A. |
| Wu | Shanghai(Zhejiang) | 32 | Freelance lawyer | B.A. |
| Song | Shanghai(Shanghai) | 21 | Student | College Student |
| Yao | Beijing (Anhui) | 34 | Company manager | B.A. |
| Xin | Hong Kong(Anhui) | 36 | Housewife | M.A. |

Note. Information derived from the interview transcripts. Allowed by the participants.

Data Collection

I launched the interviews in December 2014 when I traveled back to Mainland China. The setting of the in-depth interviews were face-to-face in person interviews or online interviews, depending on the availability of the participants. Schroder, Drotner, Kline, and Murray (2003) suggested that setting arrangements might be meaningful in social interaction. A comfortable environment for the interviewee will increase the possibility of carrying out a deep conversation. Therefore, these interviews were operated upon the convenience of the participants in settings such as coffee houses or their homes. 14 face-to-face interviews were conducted in three major cities (Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing). Additional four interviews were completed online by Skype, audio-taped. Compared with face-to-face interviews, online interview were shorter in length since it was hard for the researcher to catch the improvised face impression and feeling transformation during the Skype audio interview.

The instrument of the in-depth interviews contained 10 major questions with follow-up questions developing as the conversation ensued. These questions focused on the following parts: the reason for watching this film; the process of watching this film; the perception of the gender portrayal of this film; the perception of the filmmaker Ann Hui; the perception of the discussion in terms of gender after the film screening. The examples are “Why would you want to watch this film?” “How do you feel about the portrayal of Xiao Hong (the main female character) in this film?” (See Appendix B for a full list of sample questions)

Each face-to-face participant signed a hard copy of the consent form while online participants signed an electronic copy. Participants’ identities were not disclosed to any person other than me through the entire data collection and analysis processes. Interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes respectively. I audio recorded the conversations upon the approval of the participants and stored the recordings on my laptop. I made sure that the atmosphere of the

conversations was comfortable and relaxing in order to probe deeper into the women's thoughts. After each interview, I wrote field notes, concerning the descriptions of the settings and the noise, the fluency of the interviewee's narrative, and the hesitance and facial expressions of the interviewees. These details helped me better understand the interview transcripts later. The interviews were conducted in Chinese, the native language of the participants. I transcribed all 18 interviews in Chinese by myself. To protect the privacy of the participants, I used pseudonyms to refer to them in my results and quoted them without disclosing their information of identification.

Data Analysis

Feminist cultural studies and feminist standpoint theory were used as the interpretative framework for this reception analysis. As Creswell (2013) has suggested, distinct philosophical assumptions will lead to different characteristics in qualitative research. In terms of this project, feminist cultural studies assumes struggles regarding gender identity and gender order (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) while feminist standpoint theory preoccupies the position of women as an oppressed social group (Hartsock, 1983). This interpretative framework supported the concepts of power and hierarchy, freedom and oppression, and diversity of values (Creswell, 2013; Pilcher, Whelehan, & Credo, 2004; Thornham, 2000). By using this theoretical lens to understand the gender practices of Chinese women audiences when viewing woman filmmaker Ann Hui's *The Golden Era*, this project assumed that both Ann Hui's films and Chinese female audiences members might have struggles with gender identity and power. Moreover, it assumed that Chinese women audience members would have diverse experiences and attitudes towards Ann Hui's films.

Under the feminist cultural studies framework, the present study investigated how gender plays a role in women audience members' perceptions of *The Golden Era* (2014). This qualitative reception analysis used Hall's encoding/decoding paradigm to scrutinize the participants' interviews and the researcher's field notes.

I used the NVivo program for the data analysis of this project. NVivo has a good reputation of qualitative analysis abilities and support to research arrangement (Bandara, 2006), so it was qualified to deal with the enormous data of 18 semi-structural interviews. All transcribed data were input into NVivo throughout the data collection process. I conducted coding and analysis as well during the course of data collection. Every interview was input into the software as soon as transcriptions were done. In doing so, I was aware of the timely emerging patterns, categories and themes. During the data analysis, major patterns, categories and themes were identified and coded in terms of research questions. After I concluded which statements were significant to answer the research questions, I translated them into English.

Researcher's Role

Brennen (2012) elucidated that the researcher's role is one difference between qualitative and quantitative research, in that a researcher can have an active role both during and after qualitative research. In this sense, clarifying the researcher's role is important for qualitative methodology. As the only researcher in this project, I am familiar with most of Ann Hui's films and capable of understanding other audiences' comments on her films; but I also might use my viewing experiences to lead the discussion. As a Chinese woman, I can understand the Chinese social and cultural contexts' impact on women's viewing experience. The strength of this identity is that I can easily make connections with other Chinese women audience members, since we share the same culture to an extent; the weakness is that I might take some things for granted and lose

insights into those things. My position as a trained gender studies scholar allows me pinpoint the invisible women-centric experiences during the interviews.

Threats to Validity

Threats to internal validity might come from the sampling strategy of this project. Since this project will employ the purposive and the snowball sampling strategy, this strategy might lead to the homogenous characteristic of the participants such as education background and urban/rural background (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, I paid more attention to the demographic information of the participants to make sure this project can maximize the spectrum of Chinese women audience members.

Chapter 4: Results

This study was a reception analysis of women audience members' perceptions of *The Golden Era* (2014). I raised the main research question based on the literature review:

Main RQ: How does gender play a role in Chinese women audience members' viewing experiences of Ann Hui's *The Golden Era* (2014)?

RQ 1: How do Chinese women audience members perceive Ann Hui as a woman filmmaker?

RQ 2: How do Chinese women audience members identify with women's portrayals in this film, and especially Xiao Hong?

RQ 3: In what ways might Ann Hui's gender portrayal in films influence Chinese women audience members' perception of gender relations?

The purpose of the data analysis was to identify how gender played a role during the viewing experiences of the participants. Being a female director in the male-dominated film industry, Ann Hui's gender performance overlapped her professional performance of a marginal director working on the mainstream market. The features of the gender portrayal in *The Golden Era* (2014) partly resulted from her distinctive directing skills, for instance, her persistence in experimental film language, her abnormal focus on ordinary people, and her female/humanistic perspective. The present study found that Chinese women audience members had various perceptions of Ann Hui and her film, including satisfaction, skepticism and antagonism. Moreover, these participants' perceptions showed a multiple-layered reception process of historical figures. During this multiple-layered process, gender played a role in the participants' attitudes towards films, histories, and women. Most importantly, gender played the role in a way that was not inflexible and abstract, but historical and contextual.

This chapter consists of two sections:

1. Explicating how the participants interpreted the famous female director Ann Hui, aiming to answer RQ 1.
2. Elucidating the model of multiple-layered reception processes of historical figures and explaining how the participants perceived Xiao Hong's gender performance and gender relations, aiming to answer RQ 2&3.

Finding I: Decoding Ann Hui

To answer RQ1 about how the participants perceived Ann Hui both as a director and a woman, three aspects of Ann Hui as a female filmmaker were addressed: (a) Ann Hui as a director situated on the edge, even in a competitive film market, and yet adopting an empirical technique to express this famous historical figure; (b) Her film shooting style focusing on detailed fragments of everyday life, which also influenced the gender representation, and is further evidence for her status of being on the edge; and (c) Ann Hui as a woman surviving in the male-dominated film industry in relation to the participants' viewing experiences. The results suggested that although the participants acknowledged that Ann Hui as a woman filmmaker created many women-centric films, they tended to ignore the function of her gender in her decision in how to shoot a film.

The audience members' expectation of the director maintains one motivation for film-going (Moul, 2007; Gazley, Clark & Sinha, 2011). Among 18 participants of the present study, 10 of them showed a predilection for Ann Hui and her work: "I like her very much" (Participant Ming, Dan, Cui, Yezi, Jia, & Xiao); "She is my favorite director" (Participant Shui & Wu); and "I like her films" (Participant Yan & Yao). In addition, three of them considered Ann Hui as an "important" (Participant Xin) or a "pretty good" (Participant Hui) director so that they wanted to view Ann Hui's expression in *The Golden Era* (Participant Mian). However, five of the

participants showed no particular interests in Ann Hui, but focused more on the representation of *The Golden Era* (Participant Lian, Tian, Dong, Meng, & Song).

Under the encoding/decoding model (Hall, 1980), the present study found that all 18 participants attempted to decode Ann Hui through her directing performance in *The Golden Era* (2014). Ann Hui created this film in two ways: the experimental approach of characters' directly addressing the audience (Shi, 2014/10/06) and her distinctive directing skill in portraying ordinary lives in fragmented detail (Szeto, 2011). Below, I first investigate how the participants interpreted these two approaches Ann Hui adopted. Then I elucidate how the participants interpreted Ann Hui's public image as a famous female director, which I conclude goes beyond Hall's encoding/decoding model.

To a certain degree, the three parts of Ann Hui — her experimental spirit, her focus on ordinary lives, and her public image as a famous female director — all illustrate her claim of being “on the edge of the mainstream” (Cheung, Marchetti, & Tan, 2011, p. 68). As Szeto (2011) explicated, both experimental film language and the skill in shooting ordinary lives are unusual in the genre-based commercial film industry. As a female director, Ann Hui also “resists being limited by set themes or genres expected of a woman filmmaker” (Szeto, 2011, p. 51). In this sense, Ann Hui's gender performativity was intersected with her professional practices on the borderlines of the mainstream film industry.

Decoding Ann Hui's experimental film language in *The Golden Era* (2014).

First of all, the participants' understanding of Ann Hui through *The Golden Era* (2014) included how to perceive the most critical filming technique she employed in this film. Ann Hui intentionally used an experimental approach to urge the audience to recognize Xiao Hong without inescapable conclusions on who Xiao Hong was. Ann Hui continuously explained her

“experiment” of film language during interviews before the release of *The Golden Era* (2014) in mainland China.

I want to do something new—through the *experiment* of the film structure, using an intuitive form to depict Xiao Hong’s life. This approach is not logical; on the contrary, it is *abnormal*. Hence, the film will display a human life in an abnormally cognitive way. (Ann Hui, 2014/10/06, p. 87; highlighted by the researcher)

Ann Hui referred to this experiment as “characters directly speaking to the camera” (Shi, 2014/09/06). That means, the storyline was irregularly disrupted by “the prediction comments” of the historical characters: they commented on Xiao Hong as predicting her life in advance (Shi, 2014/09/06). The predictive comments disconnect the normal timeline, thus causing the distance between the story and the audience. It was the first time for Ann Hui to use this experimental technique in a feature film.

Through Ann Hui’s experimental film language, the audience was inspired to jump into and out of the story in order to comprehend Xiao Hong from the various viewpoints of Xiao Hong’s friends, partners, family members, and Xiao Hong herself. These viewpoints shared certain commonalities but also showed controversy. Ann Hui wanted to use this experimental language to break up the “normal” narration of Xiao Hong, a famous historical figure whose portrayal ordinarily reflected the authors’ judgments. In contrast, Ann Hui aimed to construct an “abnormal” description in which there was a lack of firmly-concluded judgments about Xiao Hong. Ann Hui intended that using this experimental language could impel the audience not to jump to a conclusion too smoothly, but to observe Xiao Hong from their distinctive standing points embedded in their personal life experiences. “To depict the conundrum of how to understand Xiao Hong” was Ann Hui’s purpose regarding to this film (Wei, 2014/09/29).

The present study investigated how the participants interpreted Ann Hui's experiment in *The Golden Era* (2014). The results showed that, first of all, every participant showed a notion of this experimental attempt. They observed that sometimes film characters were directly "talking to the camera" (Participant Ming) and this talking made the film "jumping into and out of" its narrative (Participant Jia). The characters' comments on Xiao Hong looked like "interviews" (Participant Xin), "a documentary" (Participant Ming, Yue, Mian), "a fake documentary" (Participant Song), or "a film in a documentary fashion" (Participant Shui). Referring to the experimental film language as a documentary indicated that the participants thought that using this film language was unusual for a feature film.

Although they all recognized Ann Hui employed the experimental film language, the participants construed this strategy based on various codes. According to Ann Hui's intention of encoding this experimental language as a goad to induce an inconclusive reading of the historical figure Xiao Hong, the participants' reactions could be categorized into three types: the preferred reading with satisfaction; the negotiated reading with skepticism; and the resistant reading with antagonism.

Preferred reading - satisfaction.

Half of the participants in this category related this experimental strategy to the "inconclusive" reading of historical figures, as Ann Hui intended. Those participants presented their satisfaction with Ann Hui's experimental language and its value to certain degree. Due to Hall (1980)'s model, the preferred reading interpreted the producers' encoding mostly as the encoder planned, thus those satisfied readings could be categorized as the type of preferred reading.

The participants with a satisfied reading interpreted Ann Hui's experimental film language as "abiding by the historical documents of Xiao Hong and her friends" (Participant

Dan), “using historical figures’ memory to delineate Xiao Hong’s life” (Participant Xin), not looking for “reason and truth” (Participant Lian), not making “a conclusion” (Participant Yezi, Xiao), and not trying to “speculate” (Participant Dan, Dong). Consequently the audience could see “various viewpoints” (Participant Wu) and understand “the historical context” (Participant Yao).

Participant Tian thought that Ann Hui’s perspective was as an observer, not an intervener and she concluded:

This way can let me understand them [Xiao Hong’s friends] and their possible thoughts in certain historical context. In the historical narration, behind every scene are real, vivid persons... If I were her [Xiao Hong’s] friend, someday when I recalled what happened to her, I would be very struggling. Sometimes I thought she ruined her life, and she deserved all bad things she got. But sometimes I would feel that this woman lived a terrible life so it was very sad for her to end up like that. I believe that these comments are more realistic than what we think. Therefore, I like the style of jumping out the narrative. This style spurred me on to develop empathy for Xiao Hong. (Participant Tian)

Through the interpretation of this film language, Tian grasped what Ann Hui described as the conundrum of understanding human beings. Compared with judging Xiao Hong as an intervener, Tian appreciated Ann Hui’s “warm-hearted” depiction as an observer. Also, as Participant Dong noted, this observer attitude could:

It tells you, at that time, what the lifestyle of this legendary woman was. Why did her life look like that? This film used some historical documents, trying to reconstruct her life and speculate who she was. At least now I have an accurate notion of Xiao Hong, not an abstract imagination. (Participant Dong)

Both Tian and Xiao were satisfied with Ann Hui’s usage of multi-angle historical documents. They believed that Xiao Hong’s life experiences were diverse and controversial, therefore a film about Xiao Hong should not become the filmmaker’s personal judgement on her. This type of

reading precisely illustrated what Ann Hui intended to construct: an inconclusive interpretation of historical figures. As Participant Xiao said,

Normally a film biography would make a conclusion about the main character and try to create a perfect historical personage. However, Ann Hui, from her personal viewpoint, seems like unwilling to make a conclusion of this person as 'I conclude that she must be what-what'. Therefore, I think the unique characteristic of this film [*The Golden Era*] is that she provides various viewpoints at diverse moments. (Participant Xiao)

Negotiated reading - skepticism.

Participants with skeptical reading noted the connection between the experimental language and the “inconclusive” reading of historical figures; however, they thought Ann Hui had not achieved her goal and should contribute more than the present. This skeptical decoding showed the feature of negotiation with the encoders (Hall, 1980). These participants did not straightforwardly and completely relate the experimental language to Ann Hui’s encoding.

Participant Mian thought this style was appropriate to “reconstruct the writers of that time,” but was too “objective” since she believed Ann Hui should offer the audience “a right viewpoint of how to be a female.” Participant Hui appraised Ann Hui’s experimental strategy of “not trying to find a conclusive answer,” but she also felt that this approach was “not exceptionally precise.” In this way, these participants thought that, though it was acceptable, the experimental film language could not clarify the reasons of Xiao Hong’s life choices.

Although Participant Yue understood that Ann Hui “used historical figures’ comments to construct the film,” she could not relate this strategy to Ann Hui’s encoding of an inconclusive reading of historical figures. In contrast, she thought this approach could only show “people come up when they should come up, and people disappear when they should disappear.” In this way, the role and function of these historical figures were not elucidated, something she found

necessary for a director in shooting a biographic film. Participant Jia also felt uncomfortable with Ann Hui's strategy of "not telling the reason just telling what happened."

Participant Cui enjoyed the "objective" approach because Ann Hui's experimental style "correctly reconstructed the historical context." Still, she thought Ann Hui had hidden herself too deeply, and she wanted to know Ann Hui's view of Xiao Hong.

I think something is missing here. As long as she wishes to shoot this film biography, it is impossible to reconstruct the history so accurately as the history is. Unless she can make various versions at every vital moment. She did not do that. Then I hope that she could highlight this character. I felt that a generalization was missing here. (Participant Cui)

Interestingly, Participant Shui perceived this experimental language in contrast to Participant Cui. Shui believed that, although Ann Hui did not emphasize what Xiao Hong was thinking about and didn't judge the logic of Xiao Hong's activities, the director still showed "an obvious tendency to identify with Xiao Hong," and "it cannot be told whether the narrative had been refined or not." In her interpretation, Ann Hui's film language did not achieve her intention of sufficiently disguising herself but showed the "obvious" judgments as identified with Xiao Hong and thus she even showed the doubts about the historical credibility of the film's narrative.

Resistant reading - antagonism.

Participants with antagonized reading took nothing from Ann Hui's "inconclusive" construction of historical figures; on the contrary, they were not able to understand why Ann Hui chose this film language. Participants of this category showed hostility to a certain degree; hence, their readings were categorized as a resistant antagonism. Some of them related this strategy to the judgments of Ann Hui's directing skills in that they considered it was meaningless for Ann Hui to adopt the experimental film language.

Participant Meng thought that the experimental language was “weird” while Participant Song described it as “superficial.” Participant Ming referred to this strategy to “childish”, not matching Ann Hui’s identity as a master of Chinese film directing. The only consequence of this approach was “to alienate audience,” making it difficult for her to “step into the narrative.”

This film was like that, contemporary people went back to that time and interviewed with people of that time. As to me, it was hard to regard it [*The Golden Era*] as a feature film. I felt the distance. But I sincerely wanted to watch a film that made me quiet, deeply staying into it. Only in that way I could understand the spirit of Xiao Hong. But what Ann Hui did was the alienation. I could not step into the narrative all along. Whenever I wanted to step in the narrative, she made me jump out of it. (Participant Ming)

As a documentary filmmaker, Participant Ming considered this film more like a documentary than a feature film. In this sense, Ann Hui’s experiment did not meet her expectations. Especially because she had some notion of Ann Hui’s reputation as a master director, she thought that the gap between her expectation and this film was too vast to surmount. In the case of Participant Ming, her background knowledge did not help her to comprehend the film; on the contrary, the knowledge about the difference between documentary and film hindered her further perception.

Participants of this category all showed an inflexible vision of what a feature film or a commercial film ought to be. Therefore, although Ann Hui saw *The Golden Era* (2014) as an “abnormal” experiment of a film biography, these participants could not appreciate the possibility of “the abnormal” in a certain domain of feature films or commercial films. On the contrary, they more or less attributed the ambiguity of the film caused by this “abnormal” strategy to Ann Hui’s directing ability, such as “a pupil” (Participant Ming), “incapable of choosing an appropriate cast”(Participant Song), or “a parody with no good”(Participant Meng).

Decoding Ann Hui's directing skill in portraying ordinary lives in fragmented detail.

The second part of how the participants perceived Ann Hui focused on another directing feature she used in this film -- the fragmented portrayal of Xiao Hong's everyday life. This technique was part of Ann Hui's aesthetic style, continuously used in her films (Szeto, 2011). Erens (2000) called this technique a "preference for fragmented narrative structures" (p. 180). This technique foregrounded the disconnected paltry events in ordinary lives, showing the characteristic of detailed fragmentation. Szeto (2011) called it "the cinematic of everyday life" which illustrates "the poetic of insignificance" (p.53). Ann Hui used this fragmented narrative to scrutinize everyday lives, paying attention to details in routine life such as eating, small talks, and walking. These features looked like broken pieces of lives, but Ann Hui insisted that the portrayal of these fragmented pieces actually could reflect the essence of the real and complete life.

Except for her persona and her relationships, I opened various doors for the audience through *the details* that I believe mostly reflect Xiao Hong. In doing so, the audience could feel what kind of a person she was. Still, *no firm conclusions*. (Ann Hui, 2014/10/06, p. 87; highlighted by the researcher)

In this interview, Ann Hui explained this fragmentation technique as not "dramatic," maybe "drone," but it was "the complete life of Xiao Hong" (Shi, 2014/10/06). This strategy revealed Ann Hui's suspicion that life did not just consist of vital moments, and she therefore focused more on the trivial events to construct a person's life and history (Erens, 2000). That means using the fragmented narrative put more emphasis on Xiao Hong's experience of being an ordinary woman on the one hand and fewer judgments on her literary achievements on the other hand. In other words, Ann Hui used the fragmented narrative to illustrate Xiao Hong's everyday experiences as a woman, but did not highlight dramatic plots of Xiao Hong's life to generalize this historical figure. From Ann Hui's viewpoint, the fragmented details represent a women's

everyday life, and they are the most important in constructing a historical figure's completeness. In this way, Ann Hui encoded the fragmented narrative as an illustration of individual details of Xiao Hong that could most reflect who she thought Xiao Hong was.

The present study provided a description of how the participants interpreted this technique of representing everyday life but not its main events. Against Ann Hui's intention of encoding the fragmented narrative as the representation of Xiao Hong's life as a whole, the participants could again be categorized as three types of reading with satisfaction, skepticism, and antagonism.

Preferred reading - satisfaction.

Nine participants thought this fragmentation style was the best way to understand Xiao Hong as a real person. In this category, most participants watched Ann Hui's work from almost ten years ago and could relate this fragmented style to Ann Hui's continuous film practice. Therefore, their readings could be categorized as a type of satisfied reading.

I think this [fragmented narrative] is Ann Hui's directing characteristic. Many films of Ann Hui, like Du Qifeng [another Hong Kong director]'s, were especially fond of demonstrating the scenes of eating. I agree with the importance of eating. Our everyday life is made up of working and eating, right? Otherwise, sleeping. Eating embodies our feelings. Characters' personalities are also embodied. So I feel that this fragmentation skill of shooting everyday life is very intriguing. (Participant Xiao)

Participant Xiao's interpretation was representative in this category. Participants were intrigued by the detailed description of Ann Hui's fragmentation style. They thought this style of "shooting ordinary lives" (Participant Cui) was "straightforward" (Participant Lian), "warm-hearted" (Participant Tian), "peaceful and sweet" (Participant Yezi), "without affectation" (Participant Xiao), "calm" and "undoing dramatic performance" (Participant Wu). The details in Ann Hui's description depicted "everydayness" and were "touching" (Participant Yao). The style

“entirely reflected Xiao Hong’s reality” (Participant Dan) and “explicitly told the whole story of Xiao Hong” (Participant Dong).

Negotiated reading - skepticism.

Some participants understood the fragmented narrative as Ann Hui’s distinctive directing characteristic but showed doubts that it was the most appropriate way to depict Xiao Hong’s complete life. Most participants in this category also showed great familiarity with Ann Hui’s films but did not have a close affinity to her films. They all showed uncertainty for the adoption of the fragmented narrative in this film. Therefore, this type of reading was categorized as skepticism.

Participants among this category thought this style reflected “the truth” (Participant Shui, Hui, Mian) or “ordinary lives” (Participant Jia, Xin). Although this form introduced them into a real Xiao Hong’s life experiences, the rhythm of the film was too “slow” (Participant Hui), “boring” (Participant Shui, Jia) and “long” (Participant Xin). Controversy existed in this category: Participant Jia thought this style was “incomplete to reflect Xiao Hong’s whole life” while Participant Shui thought this style was a “complete” life document. Even Participant Shui completely comprehended Ann Hui’s shooting strategy, was uncertain of whether this was the best way to film Xiao Hong as a commercial film.

Participant Mian was impressed by one detail Ann Hui portrayed. The detail emerged when Xiao Hong was sick, lying in the bed of a hotel in Hong Kong. When her husband Duanmu came back after disappearing for an entire week, he put two apples on the table near Xiao Hong’s bedhead. A small smile came upon Xiao Hong’s face. She grasped the apple and gave a big bite.

I feel this detail was like a mystery. Like, someone [Xiao Hong] was dying but showing a momentary recovery of consciousness just before death. She [Xiao Hong] looked like suddenly recovered. I feel this detail is so ‘Ann Hui’. Shoot a very ordinary aspect of

everyday life. Not that meaningful, even to the narrative of the film. But she likes grasping this kind of moments in life. (Participant Mian)

In this way, Participant Mian was intrigued by the detail that Ann Hui described, but she also thought this detail was meaningless. From her interview, Participant Mian claimed that this style “was too experience-oriented, too straightforward, and showed too much understatement.”

Resistant reading - antagonism.

Some participants regarded this fragmentation style as insufficient to portray a historical figure’s life; in contrast, Xiao Hong’s entire life could only be represented as important events judged by Ann Hui or the “true” history. This type of reading is categorized as antagonized reading based on their hostile feeling of this style.

Participants of this category showed an unfamiliarity with Ann Hui’s directing style. Participant Ming watched two of her films while one of the viewings was ten years ago; Participant Yue knew only one film of Ann Hui; Participant Meng knew nothing about Ann Hui except for her fame; and Participant Song watched only three of Ann Hui’s films.

Participant Ming wanted to see a poetic portrayal of Xiao Hong but felt the straightforward style of her life fragments could not meet her requirements. She could not relate this fragmentation narrative as representing Xiao Hong’s complete life. On the contrary, she thought this style was like “a diary of events” and consequently incapable of “delineating Xiao Hong’s spirit.” Participant Ming showed hostility towards both experimental film language and the fragmented narrative that Ann Hui employed into this film. Participant Ming rejected these two skills because of the gap between her expectation of a feature film and Ann Hui’s abnormal attempt in *The Golden Era* (2014).

Participant Yue loathed the length of the film and believed that this fragmental style “could not highlight the most important story of Xiao Hong.” Participant Song shared the

interpretation of Yue and defined this style as “lack catching up with the trends.” Participant Meng observed this style as “dilatatory,” “not fluent,” and “to pretend to reserve many things.”

In conclusion, the participants with an antagonized reading shared the similar feeling of what the complete Xiao Hong should be. They believed a good film should represent the “spirit” (Participant Ming), the “trends” (Participant Meng), and the “achievements” (Participant Yue) because these were important aspects of human life. However, from Ann Hui’s viewpoint, all these “spirit,” “trends” and “achievements” would be external judgments based on the filmmakers’ evaluations. In contrast, she believed the details illustrated by the fragmented narrative represented the way she understood real life was, through which she “opened several doors for audience to comprehend Xiao Hong” (Shi, 2014/10/06). Therefore, the contradictory understandings of the genuine and complete life between Ann Hui and the participants of this category resulted in their antagonized reading.

Perceiving Ann Hui’s gender identity: beyond the encoding/decoding model.

The third part of how the participants understood Ann Hui was concerning her public image as a famous female director. Film directors occupy the power of speech in public space to some extent (Tasker, 2011). Thus, they are regarded as public figures. Ann Hui’s public image is constructed through her films and other public documents, such as interviews, media events, and talks, as is the case for other film directors (Tasker, 2011; Smaill, 2013). Ann Hui’s gender identity as a female director is also showcased throughout her public image.

Most importantly, her films have embodied her gender identity. Although Ann Hui never related herself to feminist film practices, film scholars have repeatedly indicated that Ann Hui has shown a distinctive women-centric tendency while choosing the subject of her films (Perks, 2009). Some of her most famous works, such as *Song of the Exile* (1990), *Summer Snow*

(1995), *The Postmodern life of My Aunt* (2006), *The Way We Are* (2008), *All about Love* (2010), *A Simple Life* (2012), and *The Golden Era* (2014), displayed an unavoidable women-centric perspective. Especially, Ann Hui's distinctive filming skill in portraying women's ordinary lives actually indicated a tendency of feminist standpoint epistemology (Hartsock, 1983, 1998). Therefore, Ann Hui's women-centric film practices are based not on the sex difference between males and females, but on the historical and contextual individual experiences of women.

In this study, I concentrated on how Ann Hui's understanding of gendered experiences was perceived by Chinese women audience members. Ann Hui illustrated a women-centric perspective of this film according to her interviews before the film release. She identified Xiao Hong as a female writer, which was why Ann Hui created the film (Wang, 2014/10/15). She admitted that this film was especially "personal" (Shan, 2014/09/25) and represented her whole life value judgment (Zhu, 2014/02/25). In this sense, Xiao Hong in this film is partly a public extension of Ann Hui's personal identification. Ann Hui and Xiao Hong to a certain degree shared similar experiences of being a female creator who is worried that gossip about her would be more recalled than her works (Wei, 2014/09/29) and of being a woman who alienates others by immigrating from North China towards the South and Hong Kong because of the war (Jia, 2014/10/06).

Hall's encoding/decoding paradigm is not applicable for Ann Hui's gender identity because there was no evidence that Ann Hui conceived a certain intention of encoding her gender identity in certain way into *The Golden Era* (2014) and preferred the audience to read in that way. Therefore, beyond the encoding/decoding model adopted from cultural studies, this section used a feminist standpoint perspective to analyze how the participants perceived Ann Hui's gender identity.

First of all, I checked on whether the participants recalled Ann Hui's gendered identity in the viewing process of *The Golden Era* (2014). Concerning her private life, participants had some notion of her personally gendered life. They mentioned she was "not married" (Participant Wu, Song, Xin), "an old woman" (Participant Tian, Song), and "living alone with her mother" (Participant Yezi, Wu). Some came up with her outlook as "not beautiful" (Participant Tian), "short hair" (Participant Jia) "gender-neutral" (Participant Xin) or "lesbian" (Participant Xiao). Except for this last point, all of these of impressions could be found in pictures and interviews of media coverage (e.g. Kuai, 2006/04/07; Wang, 2014/10/15).

Moreover, in terms of the association between Ann Hui's gender identity and *The Golden Era* (2014), nine of the participants felt that Ann Hui continuously expressed "the humanistic concern," while ten of the participants distinguished "the woman perspective" in Ann Hui's films. Only two of the participants did not relate Ann Hui's personal identity to the film.

However, before I dig into how the difference between "the humanistic concern" and "the woman perspective" was related to how the participants comprehended Ann Hui's gender identity, I wanted to initiate a discussion about how the participants used the concept of gender, or say "Xing Bie" in Chinese. The cultural difference in the concept of sex/gender played a vital role in interpreting the participants' narrative.

"Xing Bie": gender or sex?

Western-based gender theory constructs the concept of gender as socially constructed roles and functions for men and women, in contrast to the biologically defined sex (Connell, 2009). In this sense, Ann Hui is not only biological defined as a female, but also performing her gender role as a woman in a male/men-dominated film industry. Thus, the current study sought to discuss Ann Hui's gender identity, not based on her biological sex, but focused on her gender performance.

However, during my interviews with the participants, an interesting phenomenon emerged. Encountered with Ann Hui's gender identity, the participants showed a tendency of mixing the concepts of sex and gender. In Chinese, the participants used the word "Xing Bie" to refer to sex or/and gender. Among the participants, there were two situations. Some of the participants were not able to make the distinction between sex and gender. They used "Xing Bie" in a biological way or in a socially constructed way without awareness. Others, although they did not have a clear acknowledgement of Western-based concepts of sex and gender, they actually clarified them as "a woman" (biological defined) and "a woman's experience" (socially constructed). A representative statement was like this:

I feel that the most of what a director put into her/his works must be life experiences. As a woman, a middle-aged woman growing up into a senior woman, she [Ann Hui] could better understand and depict the status quo of this type of woman with nuances that others cannot follow. ... Her ability is partly due to that she does put a lot of attention to this. On the other hand, she has the capability of grasping this and better demonstrating this than describing male characters. So I think, it has nothing to do with "*Xing Bie*"; it is related to the experiences and expectations of various life stages. The experiences of being a woman profoundly influenced her works, I agree. (Participant Lian, highlighted by the researcher)

In this way, Participant Lian insisted on departing a woman's life experience from the concept of "Xing Bie." In her view, "the experience of being a woman" was far from the "Xing Bie" difference between men and women. Translated into the Western gender concepts, what she said was exactly that gender (a woman's experience) mattered while sex (a biological woman) did not matter.

Therefore, it is notable that how the participants used the concept of "Xing Bie" in the Chinese context. Although the Chinese gender scholarship has been considerably developed since *the 1995 World Conference on Women* held in Beijing (Barlow, 2007), the public

discourses of sexuality and gender remain conservative and even invisible in Mainland China (Wong, Tam, & Wang, 2013). The difference between gender and sex in Western knowledge discourses has not been pervasive in public discourse of Mainland China. Especially when Chinese language uses “Xing Bie” to represent both sex and gender, the ambiguity of the “Nu,” “Nu Xing,” and “Nu Ren” (all representing female/woman/women) and “Nan,” “Nan Xing,” “Nan Ren” (all representing male/man/men) increases the misunderstanding between the researcher and the participants during the interviews.

In other words, due to the ambiguity of the language and the underdevelopment of gender literacy in China, the present study distinguished how the participants referred to “Xing Bie,” “Nu,” “Nu Xing,” and “Nu Ren” regarding Ann Hui and Xiao Hong. Sometimes these concepts in the narrations of the participants referred to the socially constructed gender while they also might imply that these words were representing biological sex differences and the related stereotypes. Meanwhile, the differentiation between sex and gender in the word “Xing Bie” was also useful to seek the reason why the participants showed the distinction between “women centric perspective” and “humanistic concern” regarding Ann Hui’s gendered filmmaking practice.

When “Xing Bie” means “sex.”

Some participants referred to Xing Bie as a fixed position that women inherited from the biological determination, and associated with certain stereotypes. I translated their usage of “Xing Bie” into “sex.” Among these participants, there were two circumstances: sex mattered, or sex did not matter.

The participants who believed that sex mattered acknowledged the importance of Ann Hui’s sex in her filming practices. Participant Jia and Yao both thought Ann Hui as a female

director was “not that feminized”. Participant Yao considered Ann Hui showed excellent “delicate” skills while regarding “delicate” as a feminine characteristic. Meanwhile, Yao thought Ann Hui was “not that soft” while Participant Jia thought Ann Hui could “do a calm thinking and analysis” and “not mourning all the time”. In the sense of Participant Jia and Yao, the calm thinking was a characteristic of males while softness and mourning were representative of females. Also considering in the biological way, Participant Dan interpreted the delicateness of Ann Hui’s directing skills tightly connected with her femininity. Hence, Participants Shui, Jia and Yao showed the tendency to think in the biological way of considering “Xing Bie” as a determining factor in Ann Hui’s filming practice. This interpretation connected Xing Bie with certain fixed stereotypes, which I interpreted as referring to not socially gender but biological sex.

As mentioned above, Participant Lian also treated Xing Bie in a biological way. However, she was different from those participants who supported sex mattered. She separated women’s experiences from the concept of Xing Bie, which I translated into sex did not matter while gender mattered. Several participants shared Lian’s opinion about the difference between women and women’s experiences. Perhaps due to lack of knowledge of the concepts of sex and gender, they chose to interpret the difference as humanistic concern in contrast to biological-women-centric perspective.

This type of reading found that Ann Hui shared some life experience with Xiao Hong because Ann Hui and Xiao Hong are human beings as any other ordinary persons. These participants believe that their reading of Ann Hui’s professional film practice should not be attributed only to Xing Bie nor should only prioritize Xing Bie.

Participant Xiao worked for a small film company as a promotional manager and Ann Hui was one of her favorite directors. Because of her vocation, she was also familiar with the media coverage of Ann Hui and made meanings of Ann Hui from various perspectives.

I would rather not say that the style of this film was due to her woman identity. I feel that it was the life experience of all these years that changes her. She was previously a very sharp director during the Hong Kong New Wave Films, like Xu Ke [another Hong Kong director]. They were recalcitrant, being angry about the world and thinking they were the new youth who should change the banal old world. Their attitude reminds me of Xiao Hong and her peers. They were thrown into the film market. Gradually the life adjusted you, and you became more and more sophisticated. You stepped into the life and found there were lots of touching details. I feel that Ann Hui was growing in this way. If she shot this film during her early time, she could not demonstrate this kind of warmth.

(Participant Xiao)

Participant Xiao believed that Ann Hui focused on women issues because she learned from Taiwan directors to capture the lives of the ordinary. As Participant Xiao emphasized, focusing on ordinary people, not on females was Ann Hui's style. Ann Hui's style might connect with her gender, but more appropriate to connect with her personality and her focus on ordinary people's life experiences. Participant Lian shared Participant Xiao's opinion while Participant Dong agreed, Ann Hui's "Xing Bie was insignificant," but the experience of being a woman or being a human was significant for Ann Hui.

As discussed in the sex/gender distinction, those participants (Xiao, Lian, Dong) holding a humanistic perspective actually differentiated a biological Xing Bie from the individualistic experience being a woman and a human being. They unconsciously took a feminist standpoint epistemology, just as Ann Hui did while she insisted on portraying fragmented lives of ordinary people.

When “Xing Bie” means “gender.”

This type of interpretation explained that Ann Hui was filming Xiao Hong based on an ad hoc woman perspective and shared gendered life experiences with Xiao Hong. Participants falling into this category interpreted Ann Hui’s gender identity and her women-centric films through a viewpoint of shared women experiences. In other words, gender mattered.

Participants of this category both acknowledged the woman-centric perspective and humanistic concern at the same time but highlighted the woman-centric perspective to some degree. Participant Tian pinpointed Ann Hui’s women-centric perspective from the film’s “tenderness” portrayal of Xiao Hong. Tian believed that without an experience of being a woman confronting many obstacles during the lifetime, a director could not shoot the film in this tender way. As Participant Wu observed, Ann Hui and Xiao Hong shared the same questions in their lives: how a woman’s personal life would interact with her creation when she was a writer or an artist.

From a male’s perspective, Xiao Hong was a woman falling love with a man while having the baby of her last boyfriend. She fell in this kind of love for several times during her life. She died at the age of 31. She was very talented. She was also charming. Unavoidably, a male’s perspective would seek novelty or gossip of this woman. However, when Ann Hui shot the film of Xiao Hong, she would not adopt this kind of perspective. She would think, when this talented woman with so sensitive feelings lived a vagrant life, what will be embodied in her body and life? So I believe *The Golden Era* could only be directed by a female director, also with sensitive feelings, who shared the similar experience with Xiao Hong to some extent. (Participant Wu)

Participant Wu's statement summarized why she thought Ann Hui’s female perspective would influence this film’s creation. She regarded herself as “abnormal” compared with the mainstream value: at the age of over 30, remaining single; working as a freelance lawyer, which is not a stable profession in China. Participant Wu had watched all the films of Ann Hui, claimed Ann

Hui was her favorite, and was therefore familiar with both Ann Hui's personal life and her films. Participant Wu discerned Ann Hui's conundrum of being a minority woman inside the male-dominant film industry. As Participant Wu observed, Ann Hui's gendered experience constructed the basis for Ann Hui to understand the historical figure Xiao Hong and shared the experience of struggling in an oppressed environment.

Participant Cui identified not only Ann Hui's identity as an independent woman, but also Ann Hui's gender role as a daughter and her relation with her parents as the influencing factors in this film's creation.

It [The film's creation] might be due to Xiao Hong's connection with her parents. Have you ever watched her *Qing Cheng Zhi Lian*? The romance in that film is not that romantic; on the contrary, Ann Hui was more interested in demonstrate the context of the war. Without the war, her father needs not to migrate from north to south, ending up in Hong Kong. Her Chinese name (Xu An Hua), you know, is 'An', representing An Shan [her hometown], and 'Hua', representing China. Maybe she shot this film from this perspective -- human beings were forcibly involved in fates. No one can decide their destinies. They must migrate again and again, from North China to South. Xiao Hong shared the same route with her [Ann Hui]. Ann Hui's father was also on this way. From the very northeast, after 918, to Qingdao and Shanghai and then go straightforward to the south until arriving in Hong Kong. Then Xiao Hong died in Hong Kong while Ann Hui's father lived a new life there. Maybe from this perspective? I am not very sure.

(Participant Cui)

In this paragraph, Participant Cui identified Xiao Hong, Ann Hui's father, and Ann Hui's life mobilization and the context of wars as a distinct perspective Ann Hui held. Similar to Participant Wu, Participant Cui liked Ann Hui "very much". Participant Cui was a professor of contemporary Chinese literature. Although Xiao Hong was not her research interest, she was familiar with Xiao Hong's historical context. Based on this knowledge, she was able to distinguish Ann Hui's multiple identities from a historical and contextual perspective.

Overlook “Xing Bie.”

Two participants did not associate Ann Hui’s gender identity with the creation of *The Golden Era* (2014). Therefore, they built no bridge between Ann Hui’s gendered identity and the film. Participant Yue said that she could never remember a director’s name or other characteristics. Participant Hui did not know Ann Hui was a female when she first witnessed Ann Hui’s film.

I was not clear [about Ann Hui’s gender]. At first I heard this name, I thought it was a man’s name. Then I watched *Nan Ren Si Shi* and *Nu Ren Si Shi* [two of Ann Hui’s films]. I still did not know the Xing Bie of the director. I don’t care. But I felt the films were shooting in a meticulous way. So I guess, oh, it is a female director. But I did not verify that. I knew this by coincidence. It [Xing Bie] does not matter. (Participant Hui)

In this narration, even if she related femininity and delicateness in a stereotypical way, Participant Hui intentionally disconnected the gender of the director and the film. This narration was not because she wanted, as the humanistic reading showed, to focus more on ordinary human’s lives, but because she did not “care”. This intentional overlook also emerged from the interview with Participant Mian, who insisted that gender was not influential while Ann Hui’s personal proclivity mattered. This type of reading showed a tendency to ignore the specialty of histories and social contexts, and attribute the absolute materialistic category (Participant Hui) or the extreme individualism (Participant Mian) to Ann Hui’s gendered filming practices.

Summary.

Ann Hui working on the edge of the mainstream employed two distinctive aesthetic skills in *The Golden Era* (2014). The experimental attempt she insisted upon both in this film and throughout her career showcased her effort to not be limited to the stiffness of genre films. The fragmentation skill to reveal the poetry of ordinary people’s life experiences and the women-

humanistic perspective both showed her pursuit of concentrating on subjects excluded from the mainstream film industry.

In this sense, Ann Hui displayed the agency of an author. This agency is not fixed into “the binary terms of resistance or subordination” (p. 111), as Saba Mahmood (2005) pointed out, “but actually constitutive of different forms of personhood, knowledge, and experience” (p. 120). Ann Hui’s experiences as being a female director in the male-dominated film industry performed the social norms of being a woman or being a director. Inside her performance and experience was the mixture of consolidation and subversion, the ambiguity of intimacy and distance, the conundrum of individualism and social justice. In this way, Ann Hui’s agency was continuously constituted and shifted through her ongoing process of being a female director.

To answer the RQ 1, the present study offered an investigation of how Chinese women audience members perceived the performances of Ann Hui’s agency. The eighteen participants of this study showed three different types of reception when applying Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding paradigm: the preferred reading, the negotiated reading, and the resistant reading.

The preferred readings exhibited a satisfied reception of Ann Hui’s agency. This type of reading accepted Ann Hui’s style in looking at a historical figure. The adoption of an experimental approach was seen as necessary to complete the impossible assignment of not reaching a conclusion or judgment in a biographical film. Therefore, concerning this type of reading, Ann Hui had reached her goal to reveal an abnormal angle of observing a historical figure.

The negotiated reading recognized Ann Hui’s attempt and agency, but this type of reading showcased skeptical feelings. This kind of reading thought her attempt might be

insufficient to manifest the historical truth, or to achieve a balance between the edge and the mainstream film industry. The type of reading also pointed out the controversy between Ann Hui's edge position and the mainstream film industry. The controversy was incapable of being resolved. Hence, Ann Hui should stick to one of the two positions, but should not occupy both at the same time.

The resistant reading could not relate Ann Hui's attempt to her agency in the gendered social structure. Therefore, they displayed an antagonized reading of Ann Hui's performance. Seeing Ann Hui as not submissive to the genre films, they attributed this abnormality to other reference codes such as Ann Hui's incapability of shooting a film with a broad structure or choosing the suitable cast. This type of reading ironically attributed Ann Hui's women perspective to a kind of compromise to meeting the requirements of the market (Participant Yue).

In terms of Ann Hui's gender identity and her women-centric filmmaking tendency, the perception of the participants showed complicated textures due to the ambiguity of "Xing Bie" in Chinese and the lack of gender knowledge preparation. However, while some participants implied that sex mattered in certain ways, other participants had pinpointed the importance of women's individual experiences in understanding Ann Hui's agency through *The Golden Era* (2014). Those participants who actually insisted that gender mattered understood Ann Hui's women-centric perspective through the shared experience of oppressed women in different times. This type of reading also provided a humanistic view to reduce the effect of being labeled "female" in sex.

All participants were highly educated Chinese women from urban China, living in a vast city and occupying a relatively high social-economic status. From their various perception of

Ann Hui's agency, the present study proffered empirical evidence for the statement that Chinese women are not a homogeneous group. As Butler (1990) indicated, performances and experiences mattered. The 18 women participants in the current study revealed various positions with different knowledge preparations and life experiences.

This section (Finding I) aims to address RQ1 about how the participants interpreted Ann Hui from *The Golden Era* (2014) and the results indicated that gender played a critical role in the interpretation of the participants. The next section (Finding II) continues this discussion, investigating how these women participants perceived the gender portrayal of Xiao Hong in this film.

Finding II: Decoding Xiao Hong

This section addressed RQ2&3 about how the participants identified with the gender portrayal of *The Golden Era* (2014) and if this identification influenced their understanding of gender relation norms. Seeking evidence related to the research questions, I did two steps of analysis in this section: (a) used the encoding/decoding model to distinguish the various positions of the participants in the reception of the gender portrayal of the main character Xiao Hong; (b) beyond the encoding/decoding model, developed a historically analytical model to identify how the historical context might play a role in constructing the participants' perceptions of the film in terms of gender identity and gender relations.

Finding I indicated that Ann Hui and her film crew intended to create a polysemic historical heroine Xiao Hong in *The Golden Era* (2014). The intended polysemy was developed by Ann Hui's experimental skills and fragmented narration technique as well as the scriptwriter Li Qiang's configuration of intervened space and time (Wei, 2014/09/29). Ann Hui explained

this polysemic Xiao Hong as various aspects from a motley collection of individualistic standpoints (Wei, 2014/09/29). Therefore, Ann Hui anticipated that the “Xiao Hong” that each audience member comprehended from this film, would be the “Xiao Hong” who should be in the pre-existing imagination of the audience member (Shan, 2014/09/25). In other words, Ann Hui purposed to depict the inconclusive Xiao Hong to inspire the audience’s interests in this historical figure, but not to provide a categorical conclusion of who Xiao Hong was (Shan, 2014/09/25). Li Qiang also admitted that he had no intention of generalizing a fixed conclusion in *The Golden Era* (2014), which he thought would be “narrow,” and of extreme “offensiveness” (Shan, 2014/09/25, p. 58).

In the meantime, Li Qiang emphasized that although they intently constructed a polysemic character, their attitude was hidden in-between the narrative (Shi, 2014/10/06). Li Qiang expounded his intention as “the multiple reflections of the uncertainty to approach to the certainty of the character” (Shi, 2014/10/06, p. 89). Ann Hui described some of the details she emphasized in *The Golden Era* (2014) as “mostly reflecting who Xiao Hong was” in her opinion (Shi, 2014/10/06, p. 87). That means both Li Qiang and Ann Hui recognized that they had encoded some of their own attitudes into Xiao Hong in this film in a hidden way. However, they did not publicly expose their views in media coverage as well as in *The Golden Era* (2014).

Therefore, the encoding of Xiao Hong by Ann Hui and Li Qiang could be referred to as constructing an inconclusive historical figure with various meanings. Gramsci (2011/1929-35) argued that cultural hegemony was reinforced by the reiteration of the dominant value of the ruling class. Not treating the dominant ideology as the only true one in this film, the encoding of the authors was epistemologically distant from the take-for-granted hegemonic value.

Decoding a polysemic Xiao Hong.

The portrayal of Xiao Hong in *The Golden Era* (2014) was an alternative, unconventional construction due to its inconclusiveness. Based on the participants' willing to accept, negotiate, and resist this alternative explanation of Xiao Hong, the perceptions could be categorized into three categories according to Hall's encoding/decoding model.

Preferred reading - satisfaction.

Since Ann Hui and Li Qiang preferred that audience understood a historical figure from the audience's own standpoints, the preferred reading of Xiao Hong among the perceptions of the participants was the reading type with agreement on polysemy, while understanding the existence of the hidden meanings from the authors, and explaining this polysemy with the notion of their own standpoints.

Participants with a satisfied reading liked the portrayal in *The Golden Era* (2014) because the film constructed Xiao Hong's distinctiveness (Participant Xin), consolidated her previous impression of Xiao Hong (Participant Shui), described Xiao Hong as full of tender and intimate feelings (Participant Lian, Tian, Yezi), aroused the sympathy of Xiao Hong in an understandable way (Participant Dong, Yao), and inspired the audience to think and read more about Xiao Hong (Participant Xiao, Hui, Wu). In other words, the participants with this type of reading perceived the similarity between *The Golden Era* (2014) and their expectations of Xiao Hong. Ten participants were among this category.

Negotiated reading.

The negotiated reading of Xiao Hong lay in between the preferred reading and the resistant reading: they may understand the polysemy, but interpret the encoding sometimes

without the notion of hidden meanings, or sometimes without the notion of they were understanding Xiao Hong from their standpoints.

Participants with a negotiated reading showed mixed feelings towards *The Golden Era* (2014)'s portrayal of Xiao Hong. Participant Dan could not identify with the portrayal of Xiao Hong in this film, but could understand it. Participant Cui, Mian, and Jia regarded the depiction of Xiao Hong as “not bad” but missing some vital parts. Four participants fell into this category.

Resistant reading - antagonism.

The resistant reading of Xiao Hong was a resistance to Xiao Hong's polysemy, no recognition of Ann Hui and Li Qiang's hidden attitude and of explaining Xiao Hong with disparate codes from the authors.

Participants with an antagonized reading displayed angry feelings towards *The Golden Era* (2014)'s portrayal of Xiao Hong. Participant Ming criticized this film's portrayal of Xiao Hong, arguing that the film should not be produced and distributed just to portray Xiao Hong like the film did. Participant Meng did not appreciate Xiao Hong in this film as well as in history. Participant Song thought the encoders of Xiao Hong in this film did not understand the “real” Xiao Hong at all. Participant Yue thought, although Xiao Hong displayed a serious attitude towards writing in the film, the film's portrayal resembled her scandal more than her literary achievement, which irritated her. Four participants held the antagonized reading against the portrayal of Xiao Hong in *The Golden Era* (2014).

Interestingly, because the preferred reading encoded by the authors was seeking polysemic meanings of Xiao Hong based on the viewers' experiences, the audience members' perceptions of the gender portrayal and gender relations of Xiao Hong were also inconclusive. That means, whether the participant's perception belonged to a preferred, negotiated, or resistant

reading, each participant's perception of Xiao Hong was represented as one tightly connected with the participant's own individualistic experiences. Various themes in terms of Xiao Hong's gender portrayal and gender relations emerged among the three types of reading, which echoed the encoded and emphasized polysemy.

Emphasizing the polysemy of Xiao Hong's portrayal means foregrounding the individual histories, viewing experiences and social contexts of the women audience members. In other words, the authors insisting on the inconclusive Xiao Hong might have an impact on stimulating the women viewer's agency of actively using their own lived experiences to produce the meaning of Xiao Hong. In this way, gender awareness was invoked and thus gender might have played a critical way in the reception process of the women audience members. To illustrate the agency of the women audience members, I developed a historical analytical model according to Hall's encoding/decoding paradigm (1980, p. 130).

An historical analytical model.

The Golden Era (2014) portraying an inconclusive historical figure, suggested that both the encoding of the authors and the decoding of the Chinese women audience members were reconstructing the history in their own ways regarding Xiao Hong and her era. I use Figure 2 to describe the process of the reconstruction of the history based on the distinctive historical positions of the encoders and decoders.

The historical analytical model of Xiao Hong (Figure 2) shows how encoders and decoders of different historical contexts rewrote histories of Xiao Hong. The scriptwriter Li Qiang was born at 1968, eight years after which China went out of the shades of Cultural Revolution and stepped into the reform era. The director Ann Hui was born in 1947, migrated with her parents to Macao at 1949, and settled down in Hong Kong from five years old.

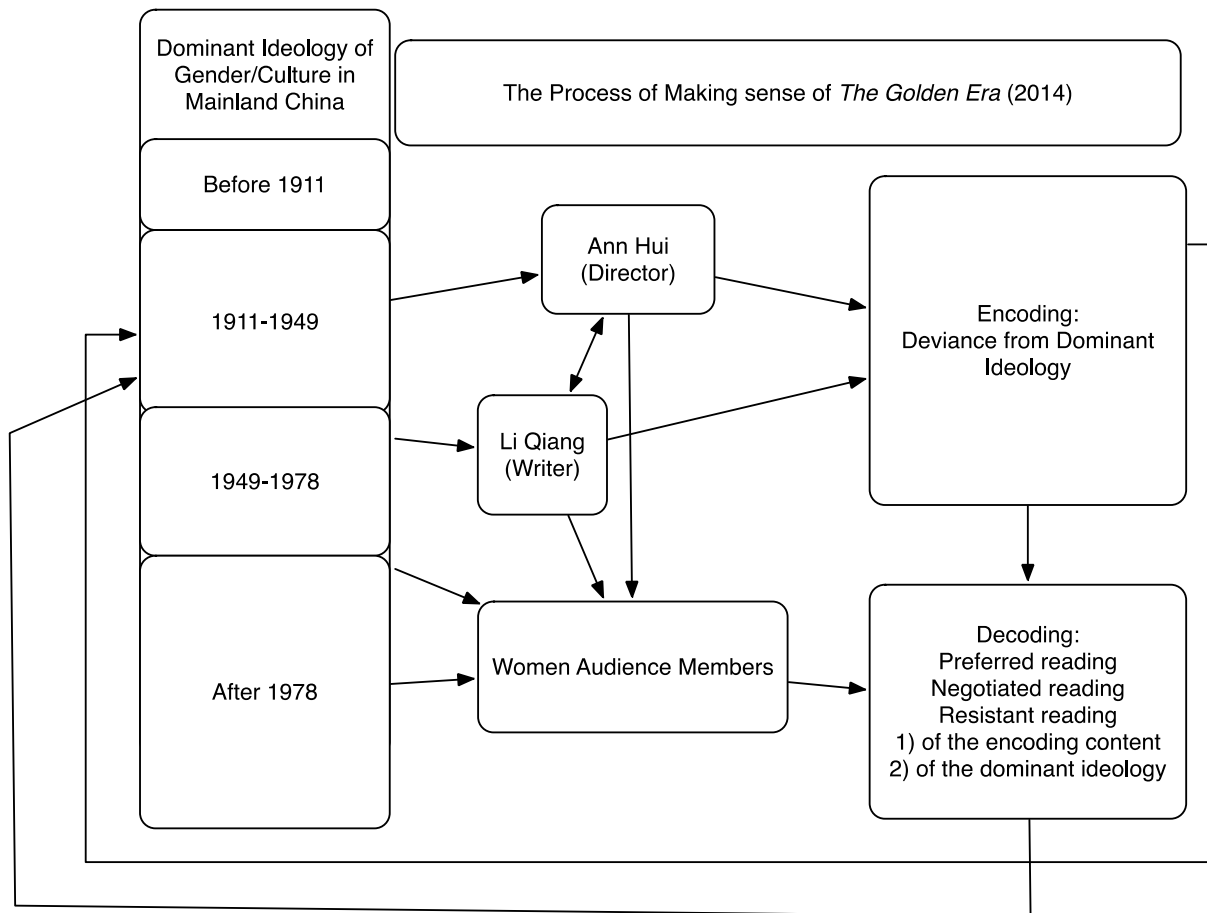


Figure 2. The reception model of Xiao Hong in the historical context. Drawn by the researcher. According to Hall's encoding/decoding paradigm (1980 [2002], p. 165).

The participants of the present study were born from 1973 to 1991, most of whose education was received during the reform and post-Mao era. The different historical moments in which the authors and the participants were born indicated the possibility of their various socializations with distinct historical dominant ideologies. That means the encoders and decoders may maintain heterogeneous standpoints of understanding the historical figure Xiao Hong. In this way, the diversity of the decoders' appreciation of Xiao Hong derived both from the encoders' intention and from the decoders' own historical contexts.

The present research primarily investigated how the Chinese women participants understood their predecessor Xiao Hong in pursuit of gender freedom. The Chinese history experienced by Xiao Hong during the 1920s-30s and that of the participants of contemporary China was continuous as well as disrupted, as determined by the dramatic transformation of contemporary Chinese history (Higher Education Press, 2013). The participants of the present study were born from 1973 to 1991. During their education they experienced the transition of the dominant ideology in China from Maoism to post-Maoism. In terms of women's status, I want to argue that this transition of the dominant ideology was translated as the overturn of the state feminism, instead constructing the women's subjectivities as responsible consumers in the neoliberalism fashion. Gender difference, advocating females containing more femininity and males containing more masculinity, was more rigidified as an adjustment than the state feminism's gender equality (Wang, 2004). Alongside was the import of the Western essentialism of biological sex concept (Wang, 2004, p. 30).

Under such circumstances, the participants' perceptions of Xiao Hong were influenced by at least two elements: (a) *The Golden Era* (2014)'s alternative construction of historical figures, and (b) the dominant ideology of history and gender status in the contemporary China. The tension between these two elements was also crucial to the reception of the audience members. The next two sections would investigate how the various discourses of the dominant ideology in the contemporary China had an impact on the women audience members' perception.

Based on the feminist standpoint theory, women audience experiences were influenced by the historical and ideological culture in which those women were immersed. Cultural studies also emphasizes the ideological characteristic of cultural representations and meaning-productions (Hall, 1997). Louis Althusser (2014/1970) advanced Gramsci's concept of the

ideological hegemony of the dominant class (2011/1929-35) and pointed out cultural reproduction was utilized by the state's persistence in social hierarchy. Cultural studies focuses on the analysis of the dominant and the submissive classes, as well as on the concept of discourse from Michel Foucault (Mikula, 2008). Various discourses from different social divisions, such as class, gender, race, ethnicity, and education, intersected with each other, determine the cultural reproduction in everyday life, and reflected the relations of power. Notably, the perceptions of the Chinese audience members were affected by the dominant ideology of contemporary China (Huang, 2012). As Huang (2012) elucidated, the dominant ideology currently contained various aspects such as the development of modernity, the capital and market, and nationalism. Chinese scholars have pointed out the current cultural discourses of contemporary China contained the dominant culture, the elite culture, and the popular culture (Fan, 2005; Wang Yichuan, 2010). The state apparatus of the ruling party, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) lead the dominant culture, which showcased more political characteristics than others (Wang Yichuan, 2010). The elite culture maintained the responsibility of enlightening the intelligence of Chinese citizens (Fan, 2005). The popular culture was the culture driven by market forces and attracted the mass audience (Fan, 2005; Wang Yichuan, 2010). Through the investigation of the present study, I argue that the participants' perceptions of Xiao Hong showcased the intersection of these three discourses.

Notably, due to the goal of the present study of investigating gender roles, I pay special attention to how the construction of gender was affected by the three discourses. Chinese feminist historian Wang Zheng (1999) illustrated gender roles in the modernization of China and pointed out the freedom of women was integral to the modernity of China, especially during the time of May Fourth when Xiao Hong grew up. Wang Zheng (2005) also argued that the state

feminism from 1949 to 1976 under Maoism was both an indication of the Party's male-dominated top-down policy and a representative of women's empowerment from gender equality. However, after 1978, as David Harvey (2005) analyzed, China had transformed into the trend of neoliberalism. In Chinese public discourse that dominated by the social elites of contemporary China, gender difference was more emphasized than gender equality in the purpose of consolidating the prestigious power of the newly-emerged middle-class or quasi-middle-class (Wang, 2008). However, what Wang Zheng had underestimated was the impact of the popular discourse in contemporary China when she mentioned gender in the popular discourse was just a fashion. Although the newly-emerged middle-class or quasi-middle-class perhaps held the tendency of preserving the social elite' status, they were also affected simultaneously by the dominant discourse and the popular culture discourse. Since the participants of the current study all came from the largest cities of urban China and lived a quasi-middle-class life (except for two students), the current study provides a good chance to look into the ideological meaning-producing process of the ordinary women of newly-emerged middle-class or quasi-middle-class in contemporary China.

The perception of “Zuoyi Wenxue Nv Zuo Jia.”

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) started to rule China in 1949 with the Party leader Mao Zedong dead in 1976. Due to the drastic transformations of the economy, politics, and culture in China after the death of Mao, historians have divided the contemporary history of China as the Mao era (1949-1976) and post-Mao era (1976 until present) based on Mao's death in 1976. The reign of the ruling party is consistent and powerful, and thus one of the most crucial public discourses in contemporary China is still the ruling-party-discourse. This discourse works for the

domination of the ruling party, penetrating every aspect of China; for example, education, literacy, and art.

The conventional construction of Xiao Hong in the ruling-party-discourse was a “Zuoyi Wenxue Nv Zuo Jia” (A female author serving the Left Wing literature), an oppressed woman and a literary warrior fighting against the old feudal system and yearning for the new socialist era. The majority of characters in *The Golden Era* (2014) were partitioned into the Left Wing literacy circle in the ruling-party-discourse; for instance, Xiao Hong, Xiao Jun, Duanmu Hongliang, Ding Ling, and the crucial literary leader Lu Xun. One representative of this ruling-party-discourse were the textbooks in the Chinese primary and middle schools (Wang & Phillion, 2010), which included several works from Lu Xun, Ding Ling, and optionally, Xiao Hong (Li, 2011/01/04). That means the participants of the current study experienced the ruling-party-discourse from their childhood. This discourse has been applied to the class analysis and the political rightness to explaining literary works, and women’s liberation had been explained as part of the class liberation in pursuit of the new socialist era (Dai, Wang, & Barlow, 2002).

The attitude towards the ruling-party-discourse in *The Golden Era* (2014) could be probed through Ann Hui and Li Qiang’s portrayal of the leader Lu Xun. The scriptwriter Li Qiang explained that he decided to preclude the “ideological” Lu Xun and restored him to “a human being” (Shi, 2014/10/16, p.88). The director Ann Hui grew up in Hong Kong; consequently, the different educational background outside the ruling-party-discourse offered her a distinct lens to observe Lu Xun. For her, Lu Xun criticizing the color of Xiao Hong’s skirt was more intriguing than the Left Wing literary leader Lu Xun (Wang, 2014/10/15).

In this sense, Ann Hui and the producing group used the experimental film language and the fragmented narrative to depict Xiao Hong as an ordinary woman with the dream of writing in

that era more than a Left Wing writer inheriting the political blueprint. This approach showed an enlightened attitude of the social elite discourse that focused more on humanity than the class revolution. However, the film did not completely exclude the ruling-party-discourse. When describing other persons who were related to Xiao Hong, this film symbolized them in the Left Wing circle that represented the Chinese history written in the ruling-party-discourse. The complexity originated from the film's approach of using these historical figures' documents to construct the narrative and because of that, the narrative would embed the ideological influence on these historical figures in the ruling-party-discourse.

In terms of the contentions between the ruling-party-discourse and the social-elite discourse, two major themes emerged: rejecting the label of “a Left Wing writer” and comparing Xiao Hong with Ding Ling. Below are detailed descriptions of these two themes.

Rejecting the label of “Zuo Yi.”

Most of the perceptions resembled the film's reference to Xiao Hong as a writer outside the Left Wing literary circle in a revolutionary era. Some perceptions regarded the era of Xiao Hong as “revolutionary” (Ming, Dan, Shui, Lian, Dong, Hui, Song, Xin); some saw “a turbulence” during “the war years” (Ming, Dan, Dong, Cui, Yezi, Xiao, Hui, Mian, Wu, Song, Yao, Xin); and some observed a “left” political tendency was mainstream at that time (Dan, Cui, Yezi, Xiao, Hui, Meng, Wu, Song, Xin). These perceptions reflected the force of the ruling-party-discourse.

The participants who described the era in such a manner contained various attitudes towards the film's general portrayal of Xiao Hong, but they mostly shared the similar perception of the era of 1920s and 1930s as “the war years” and noticed the “revolutionary” and “left”

trends. This impression was the official account of Chinese history and had been reiterated through various artifacts.

On the other hand, some participants related that era to “min guo” (The Republic of China, ruled by The Republic Party), when China’s bourgeoisie economy was represented in the novels of Zhang Ailing (another famous female writer in that era, mostly regarded as right-wing; to see more information, check Zhu, 2011). When participant Yao compared the Min Guo era to the 1960s and 1970s of China, she was astonished by the hard lives that the film portrayed. Her perception was deviant from the ruling-party-discourse to a certain extent, especially when Yao considered the era dominated by The Republic Party was better than the era ruled by The Communist Party in the 1960s and 1970s. According to China’s history textbooks, the CCP represented the advanced productivity force; therefore, the society of its ruling should be much better than it of the ruling of the Republic Party (Higher Education Publisher, 2013).

The majority perceptions of the participants referred to Xiao Hong as an “unusual” writer with extreme “loneliness” (Ming, Tian, Dong, Lian, Xin, Wu, Yezi, Xiao, Cui, Hui, Meng, Jia, Yue). The perception of “unusual” and “loneliness” referred to situate Xiao Hong outside the mainstream Left Wing circle in pursuit of the revolution of China. Therefore, this perception showed the participants’ alienation from the ruling-party-discourse because they rejected the label of the Left Wing writer on Xiao Hong as the CCP claimed.

Participant Hui thought Xiao Hong was different from other people of that era since Xiao Hong was interested in writing the ordinary things of life while other people appraised the revolutionary. Participant Xiao described her feelings while she first read Xiao Hong’s “*The legend of Hulan River*” [Xiao Hong’s book]:

Her contemporaries were writing that kind of topics. Suddenly, *The Legend of Hulan River* came. She is so distinctive in the theme of that novel and her personal style.

(Participant Xiao)

Participant Xiao interpreted Xiao Hong as insisting on the freedom of writing while Xiao Hong's peers advocated the Left Wing literary. Xiao praised her work as "full of vitality" and even "avant-garde." Participant Wu demonstrated Xiao Hong's choice as following her own heart. These participants observed Xiao Hong's insistence on her feelings was different from others' political pursuit, and thus rejected the label of Xiao Hong as a Left Wing writer.

I don't think she was in the Left Wing. I believed she was forced to be involved. Left Wing writers persisted in their revolutionary goal but do you think Xiao Hong owned this goal? I don't think so. I don't think she wanted to use her writing to inspire the ordinary people, to awake them. She just described how she lived, a dreary life that she lived. She did not claim that 'I will write this to inspire you to change your life and embrace a new world.' I don't think she had this kind of idea. (Participant Dong)

Only one participant interpreted Xiao Hong as a Left Wing writer, not due to the political pursuit, but due to her female identity.

Are women not natural fighters? Females are natural Left Wing. Thus, they naturally pay attention to the grass-root issues, the poor and weak, the marginal groups, and the abnormal stuff not allowed in the social mainstream. (Participant Song)

As Participant Song believed, Xiao Hong should be an active Left Wing fighter because she was a female, a "sensitive," "brave," and "smart" female. In this sense, she was unsatisfied with the film's portrayal and claimed that the producers misunderstood that era. Song's perception illustrated an individual characteristic of the ruling-party-discourse, but her perception was also mixed.

My impression is that the judgment of Chinese literary history is not totally out of her writing talent but out of the political functions. Because Xiao Hong was related to that Left-Wing social movement, I am not very curious in her writing. (Participant Song)

In this paragraph, Participant Song expressed a rejection of the ruling-party-discourse of the Left Wing limiting a writer's achievement to a political function, but related to what she said previously, she showed a mixed recognition of the Left Wing social movement. In the subsequent interview, she illustrated a historical opinion of the ruling-party-discourse of the Left Wing literary. In her view, the era Xiao Hong lived in was different from the current China: while the current dominant discourse uses the political function to define an author's literary achievement, the Left Wing trend at that time was idealistic and romantic. In this way, she both accepted and rejected the ruling-party-discourse to some extent. However, her golden nostalgia time of the Left Wing politics implied the fragile acceptability of the current ruling-party-discourse.

When this film attempted to distance itself from the ruling-party-discourse while portraying Xiao Hong, the film intentionally concealed its own standpoint (Wei, 2014/09/29), thus causing some perceptions of lack of demonstration and judgment about Xiao Hong's literary achievement (Participant Yue, Jia, Mian). Participant Yue showed less notion of the era as a revolutionary era and Xiao Hong's suspicious Left Wing identity. Yue felt the film offered little portrayal of Xiao Hong's "literary achievement" and "social influence." Participant Jia shared Yue's attitude on lack of portrayal of Xiao Hong's social influence and pointed out that it was unclear in the film why the literary leader Lu Xun showed enormous interests in helping Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun.

You cannot understand, why Xiao Hong was so important for the contemporary Chinese literary history. Why on earth? Why did the leader Lu Xun treasure Xiao Hong and Xiao

Jun? So many writers came up during the war time. Why was Lu Xun fond of them?
(Participant Jia)

One possible reason for Jia's question was that when the *The Golden Era* (2014)'s narrative intentionally kept distance from the ruling-party-discourse, its deconstruction did not precisely and clearly lead to another discourse to construct the connection between Xiao Hong and the era. As Participant Mian hoped, this film should tell the audience a story about how a female writer falling love with the writing.

From these perceptions of the participants, it could be seen that *The Golden Era* (2014)'s narrative efficiently destroyed the connection between Xiao Hong and the ruling-party discourse. Meanwhile, its hidden strategy and inconclusive observation angle also might lead to more possibilities in viewers' active interpretations.

Other than Participant Song's explanation of Xiao Hong's possibility of being a Left Wing writer as an illustrative of female instinct, some participants proposed another reason for Xiao Hong to be included into the Left-Wing literary circle. Participant Cui understood Xiao Hong as one of the "Dongbei Zuo Jia Qun" (The Writers Circle of Northeast China); because those northeast writers were mostly Left Wing, Xiao Hong was also delegated into the Left Wing by the CCP's narration of Chinese contemporary literary. More importantly, she pointed out Xiao Jun[Xiao Hong's boyfriend]'s role:

Xiao Jun was a very Left Wing writer. He ran to Yan'an [The Revolutionary Center of CCP]. I thought this was possible the reason [for Xiao Hong to be a Left Wing writer]. If she was following a right-wing writer, she might become a Right-Wing writer. Really it would be. She was very ignorant in this aspect. (Participant Cui)

Participant Dong also regarded the reason lied in Xiao Hong's friends, not herself. Participants like Cui and Dong pinpointed Xiao Hong's submissiveness to Xiao Jun in their romance relationship. The political tendency between Left Wing and Right Wing hence was connected

with the gender order between men and women. The intersection of the political dominance and gender performance was also evidenced in the below comparison of Xiao Hong and Ding Ling.

The comparison between Xiao Hong and Ding Ling.

It was notable that participants' rejection of seeing Xiao Hong as a Left Wing writer was operated through the comparison between Xiao Hong and Ding Ling. Ann Hui spoke of the incipient idea of *The Golden Era* (2014) as telling a story of two female writers Xiao Hong and Ding Ling, which was resigned due to a certain political reason (Wei, 2014/09/29). Ding Ling was the female exemplary of the Left Wing writers in the ruling-party-discourse (Liu, 2009). Her most famous work "*The Sun Shines over the Sangan River*" was awarded the Soviet Union's Stalin second prize for Literature in 1951. The excerpt of this work was also collected into the textbooks of Chinese middle schools.

The participants perceived the comparison between Ding Ling and Xiao Hong as two female writers' distinctive choices when confronted with political trends. Compared Xiao Hong with Ding Ling, Participants Ming and Mian suggested that Xiao Hong lacked Ding Ling's pursuit of and devotion to revolution with an overpowering belief in socialism. Other participants also agreed with this difference between Xiao Hong and Ding Ling.

The film seemed like, I think, Xiao Hong was more devoted to writing and her works, whereas Ding Ling owned her ambition and aggressiveness. Even Ding Ling wanted to impress the literary circle as an author, the reason for which should more adapt to the broad era background. (Participant Xin)

Participant Xin never read any works of Xiao Hong while Participant Hui read one of her collections of essays. Still, they reached a congruent opinion on Xiao Hong and Ding Ling's disparate political pursuits.

[Xiao Hong] could also understand the bitterness of the ordinary. But she was not that revolutionary. She could write the dreary and the sad, but she could not write in a revolutionary fashion. However, Ding Ling felt like a revolutionary author: She wrote these works to inspire the ordinary to join the revolution. (Participant Hui)

Moreover, the participants related Xiao Hong and Ding Ling's aesthetics choices to the two authors' gender performance. More masculinity was attributed to Ding Ling whereas more femininity was attributed to Xiao Hong. Participant Wu commented on Ding Ling's choice as "effaced her femininity and lived an activist life." Participant Hui also thought Ding Ling's femininity was less manifest than Xiao Hong's in that Ding Ling's novels always showed the positive sunshine and the determination to achieve the victory of the revolution, and Ding Ling wore a military coat all the time with a haircut in Liu Hulan's (a revolutionary martyr in CCP's history) fashion. To some extent, Hui explained Wu's claim of Ding Ling's reducing femininity with the description of Ding Ling's outfit style.

Participant Dan referred to Ding Ling as "a chivalrous lady," perfect at both writing and fighting. Ding Ling was the mainstream lady image in Yan'an [the revolutionary base of the CCP] of that era, although a little boyish. However, Xiao Hong was a delicate and sensitive girl who was incompatible with the era. Almost in the same angle with Dan, Participant Ming and Yezi explained Xiao Hong's femininity as her delicate personality, estrangement from the era, and susceptibility to emotions.

Ding Ling stayed with the Left Wing, behaved like the men and wrote for the revolution. But Xiao Hong did not. Xiao Hong was always non-mainstream. She was interested in, although writing the bitter life of the ordinary, the delicate feelings at the beginning. She was more immersed in feelings and love. Ding Ling, I felt like, more masculine.
(Participant Yezi)

Participant Shui and Yao described Xiao Hong's femininity as "soft" or "tender" while Ding Ling was more "tough" or "aggressive," which was perceived as masculine characteristic.

Because Ding Ling was always talking about, that, "we need the revolution, and we need", something like that, it looked like Ding Ling was closer to the men and more like a man. She did not care about how other people looked at her, or something. Anyway, the whole film gave me that kind of feeling: Ding Ling was very, very tough, and then felt like not a woman. But Xiao Hong was very soft. (Participant Shui)

The reductionism tendency embedded in such binary attributions among some of the participants indicated a trend towards criticism of the ruling-party-discourse as erasing femininity. This criticism echoed the Chinese feminist Marxist scholar Dai Jinhua's analysis of "genderless" male and females in the ruling-party-discourse (2000). Meanwhile, the feminist historian Wang Zheng (2004) argued that the "genderless" view had been used as an implication of Maoism's erasing-humanity. Therefore, turning "genderless" into a new gender difference became a legitimate action for post-Maoism scholars to retrieve Maoism's faults. Wang Zheng (2004) referred to this gender difference as "males have masculinity while females have femininity." She pinpointed that the consolidation of the new gender difference was a considerable retrogression of the achievement of gender equality in contemporary China. Defining all the Chinese women under the ruling of The China Communist Party as genderless ignored the historical and contextual experiences of individual Chinese women and any effort of the Chinese feminist movements, thus being another form of Marxist reductionism.

Participants showed various perceptions of the embedded value judgments towards this comparison between Ding Ling and Xiao Hong. Some participants thought the film heightened Ding Ling while lowering Xiao Hong (Participant Tian, Shui, Yue). Some participants thought this comparison did not show the judgment on who was right or not (Participant Lian, Xin).

Some participants thought this comparison showed Ding Ling's negative characteristic whereas depicting empathy on Xiao Hong (Participant Yao, Wu).

Participant Tian and Shui argued that this comparison depreciated Xiao Hong's virtue. Participant Tian declined this comparison in that the film depicted Ding Ling with sunshine smiles and active spirits dancing on the mainstream melody while depicting Xiao Hong with nervous and trivialness. She claimed that this comparison was "unfair" to Xiao Hong.

I felt that she [Ann Hui] depicted Ding Ling as a particularly tough person, which made Xiao Hong extremely useless. I don't know who Ding Ling really was. But Ding Ling in that film, was a very, looked like a very independent and skillful. She made Xiao Hong look like very feeble. But Xiao Hong for me was closer to a real woman. That was just the difference of personality, I felt. (Participant Shui)

Similar to Tian, Shui felt that the comparison of Ding Ling and Xiao Hong embraced a value judgment more favorable to Ding Ling than Xiao Hong, although Ann Hui and Li Qiang continuously emphasized that they had no judgments on their characters.

Participant Yue commented on Ding Ling's choice as an adaption to the social rule of that era. She emphasized that the rule was the "truth," which should be recognized, whether or not understanding the truth suggested Ding Ling's sophistication and Xiao Hong's innocence. Participant Meng interpreted Ding Ling as a writer with more political ambition and pursuit due to the "extreme powerful" political and social environments. Both Yue and Meng observed the force of the social conventions and suggested Ding Ling's submission to the social conventions was reasonable whereas Xiao Hong's choice was illogical.

A woman's private life in the popular culture discourse.

This section aimed to answer RQ 3 through probing into how the gender relation norms influenced the participants' perception of Xiao Hong. According to David Harvey (2005)'s

neoliberalism analysis, post-Mao China has experienced a profound economic, political, and cultural transformation into a neoliberalism society. This neoliberalism emphasized individual responsibility while seeing the entire society as an extremely free market. Capitalist logic therefore penetrated every aspect of ordinary lives. The ruling-party discourse also adopted the neoliberalism logic to promote a few new rich and the inimitable power of market and economy. Affected by the ruling-party discourse and the market logic, the popular discourse in China prioritizes the market and the individualism to an inaccessible level.

Different from the ruling-party discourse, the popular discourse of Xiao Hong focused more on her private life: she was always relying on a man; when she conceived a baby with her first fiancé, she fell in love with Xiao Jun; with Xiao Jun's baby, she married Duanmu Hongliang; and most unacceptable, she abandoned two kids (Shan, 2014/09/25). Several participants also noticed the gossip (Dan, Wu, Hui, Jia, Yao, Yue), but only one participant claimed she went to the movie for the gossip (Meng). Ann Hui and Li Qiang regarded Xiao Hong's gossip as part of her life story (Shi, 2014/10/06). Li Qiang also considered that scandal that could attract a mass audience while the serious attitude to the history in this film would attract the social elite (Wei, 2014/09/29).

The popular discourse of Xiao Hong centralized her private life experience that was represented as gossip. From a feminist standpoint epistemology, this discourse was gendered because Xiao Hong experienced her life with her female body under the pressure of gender inequality in China. Perceptions of gossip and Xiao Hong's private life reflected the participants' recognition of gender inequality and Xiao Hong's agency. The current study found that the participants' perceptions were immersed in individualism and the market value of free choice, which effaced the collectivism of Maoism and the possibility of allied agency. In other words,

the participants showed a passive attitude regarding the tension between a woman's personal agency and the gender order norms. This attitude also influenced their empathy with or anger about Xiao Hong's choices on gender relations.

Gender inequality.

In terms of gender inequality, the participants showed two disparate attitudes, with both being passive. Some participants pinpointed that the gender inequality at the level of the social structure was embodied in Xiao Hong's personal choice. Participant Yao experienced the gender inequality both in her personal life and her perception of Chinese history. She compared her own marriage with that of Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun's romantic relationship, and concluded that if a wife respected her husband more, then it would lead to a more stable marriage. She suggested that the reason lied in the "Nan Zun Nv Bei" (respectable men and submissive women) through the course of China's thousand years, the degree of which was various in different time but the phenomenon always existed.

Participant Wu pointed out that the reason for Xiao Hong's life clinging to the men was that the men wrote the social rules, and the society did not provide a self-dependent space for poor female writers. Xiao Hong's contemporary female writers either depended on their husbands or erased their femininity to live a life. Wu noticed that there was a statement that Xiao Hong was stupid because she always stayed with the men who could not take care of her and abandon her at key points. Wu argued that, "Yes, choosing a good man was the so-called supreme intelligence of a woman. Even my father scolded me that: 'Your top issue was not finding a job, understand?'"

Similar to Wu, Participant Cui also thought that women needed to depend on men to attain the economic independence at that time. Thus, the society hardly accepted the abnormal

Xiao Hong. Participant Song thought the women's liberation during that time might increase Xiao Hong's hardship because:

She even could not tell other people she was painful...The literary circle pressed more on women because traditionally women should take the household labor, but after liberation it seemed like women's position was equal. However, women could not be equal. So this means, the equality on the surface deprived some women rights. Originally you could be a housewife, and your husband needed to support you. But now you gave up the support of the husband. And you get the new requirements from somewhere. You need to take care of the house and go out to meet the circle. That kind of era was harder to women than to men, I think. (Participant Song)

Aside from these perceptions of gender inequality, some participants rejected gender as a useful analysis category. These rejections showed a tendency towards absolute individualism. This tendency might derive from the loathing of Maoism's collectivist and authoritarian (Wang, 2004). Moreover, this tendency might associate with the individualization of the Chinese society as Yan (2009) concluded. Participant Dong thought there was not inequality between Xiao Jun and Xiao Hong in that they were not in the relationship of demanding and submissive but a relationship just between these two individuals. For Participant Dong, there was no such a thing that Xiao Hong was a representative of a group of Chinese women. Xiao Hong was only Xiao Hong herself. Participant Lian also resisted the gender as a practical category to observe an individual. Therefore, a woman like Xiao Hong confronting the powerful social force was an impossible assignment for these participants. The impossibility was particularly obvious and take-for-granted in Participant Dong's expression:

At that time, some people survive while some people did not. It was the issue of luck. Someone needed to die while always someone survived. ***It was the statistics*** Xiao Hong, she often thought she could not survive. So she would grab every chance of living. (Participant Dong, highlighted by the researcher)

Participant Jia pointed out even depending on a man was insecure during that period:

At that time, her pressure came from her family and the society, especially from the economic situation. She was hungry and desperate, not knowing where her next meal was. I felt, she really, was, and no other persons could help her. The only Xiao Jun who she depended on ended like that. (Participant Jia)

Indeed, in this type of narrative, women's right (collective) in this way shrank into the right of "a woman" (individual). Advocating Individualism effaced the power of women as a social group. Therefore, Xiao Hong's struggle was reduced to a person's survival during the wartime without any possibility to confront the social structure.

The possibility of Xiao Hong's agency.

However, Xiao Hong was complicated because she was not always oppressed as a slave without a breath. Holding the position of rejecting Left-Wing literary circle, Xiao Hong showed her agency and mobility as an author to some extent, a point on which most participants agreed. Participants perceived Xiao Hong as "talented" and devoted only to writing.

Nevertheless, when Xiao Hong's career choice was intersected with her personal life choices, for instance, in terms of her romance and family, Xiao Hong was interpreted as equivocal and sometimes incomprehensible. Participants recognized Xiao Hong's anomaly status as "loneliness" due to her non-mainstream choices. For example, most of the participants showed the resistance to accepting Xiao Hong abandoning her two babies while some of them considered it "understandable." Participant Mian's opinion was representative: "Because of her abandoning her children, I should say, I do not understand what Xiao Hong was seeking for. She was totally an abnormal person." Participant Tian also agreed that Xiao Hong could not be understood according to conventional social values, "too outlined for a normal woman."

Some participants thought Xiao Hong's choice was reasonable but without agency. Xiao Hong was regarded as placing herself into a marginal position in the society due to her choices as a daughter, a wife, and a mother. Participants implied that Xiao Hong's lack of agency drew from two aspects: financially and mentally dependence on men. It was said that Xiao Hong always depended on men, especially financially. The majority of the participants insisted on the importance of the women's financial independence. Some participants also pinpointed the difficulty to obtain financial independence for a woman during that time. Participant Mian thought that it was hard for Xiao Hong to live on her own because she had a lack of living skills. Participant Hui believed that it was more difficult for a woman than for a man to find a job at that time.

Men could do it. You see, Xiao Jun, he was doing something for living. He liked writing, but for writing, he needed to do other things, such as teaching, part-time jobs, and other such things. However, for a woman at that time, it might be impossible to do some physical jobs. Physical jobs were hard to find. So did the mental jobs since no one would believe in you. Right? You claimed you could teach. People would say, why you? You were a woman, knowing nothing. Right? You could only do well in staying at home and help your husband and children. Right? Although she read a lot, it was still hard for other people to believe she could be a teacher. So many men were there. Why choosing you? She had no choice but to depend on other men. (Participant Hui)

In addition, some participants thought that the financial independence was so vital that Xiao Hong should give up, maybe temporarily, her writing career. The priority of financial independence over artistic value in contemporary China reflected the firm belief in Marxism in terms of the principle of "the economic base decides a superstructure," which was repeatedly emerging in both the ruling-party discourse and the popular discourse during the post-Mao era (e.g. Li, 2009; Wang, 2009; Zhang, 2014). This principle was explained as that no superstructure can be developed before setting up the economic base. Concerning Xiao Hong's case, it meant

that Xiao Hong should not focus on her talented writing before she could financially support herself. As Participant Xin elucidated,

I believe every woman should own the ability to raise herself independently. No difference between men and women. Everyone needs it. ... People should not use the writing as an excuse. Feeding yourself is the essential skill for everyone. I'm not saying extremely rich or something. But to make a living was a basic skill for everyone.
(Participant Xin)

Participant Jia explained a similar opinion that "Writing was a hobby, and I could shrink my time on it." Jia argued that financial independence was particularly important in the romance relationship. Participant Xiao also believed that Xiao Hong's hardship for the whole life was based on her economic dependence, which also caused struggles between Xiao Jun and Xiao Hong.

Xiao Jun was very male chauvinist. At the beginning of their relationship, he thought they were the literary couple. Later, Xiao Hong's talent was burst and gradually went beyond his achievement. I felt that, as a man selling his writing, his pride was bruised.
(Participant Xiao)

In this way, Xiao Hong's transition from financial dependence on Xiao Jun to independence decided the steadiness of their relationship. Participant Yao used her personal experience to explain the reason. She described her marriage: first she could earn more than her husband and so the marriage was shaky, but now her husband was promoted and obtained more money and confidence and in this way the marriage was harmonious.

Moreover, it was perceived that Xiao Hong was also mentally depending on men. In the meantime, the mental dependence was ambiguous. Accompanying Xiao Hong's loneliness, her contradictory complexity was detected by most participants. Xiao Hong was both "traditional" (Participant Yao) and "contemporary" (Participant Dong), "both independent and dependent"

(Participant Dong), “both disloyal and dependent” (Participant Dan), and making choices “in a back-and-forth way” (Participant Jia). Other participants (Participant Xin, Song, Cui) also pointed out Xiao Hong’s complexity from their own perspectives. For example, Participant Xin perceived her as “the lack of the real determination and resolution. She was a delicate girl with particular, considerable talent at that time. She was a little bit radical but also very sensitive and innocent.” Participant Song believed that Xiao Hong was both “a fighter” and “stood in the traditional viewpoint.” Participant Cui believed that Xiao Hong’s fighting was unconscious.

The perceptions of Xiao Hong’s femininity also echoed the aforementioned complexity and contradictions in her financially status and psychological dependence on men. Some participants thought of Xiao Hong’s femininity as submissive, traditional, and depending on others (Participant Xin, Yao, Wu, Shui). Participant Shui also shared this opinion: “A man at that time could support himself on his own. But Xiao Hong, she continuously depended on other people for the whole life. She relied on others. Various men.” Participant Xin thought Xiao Hong was “using her femininity” and thus implied her gender performativity.

Due to Xiao Hong’s complexity, some participants thought her femininity contained the force of “rebellious” (Participant Yue, Song, Wu, Shui). Participant Shui considered Xiao Hong’s agency (fighting) from a more abstract humanistic perspective. Participant Yue thought Xiao Hong’s rebellious was necessary because she was restrained by her romance with Xiao Jun. Participant Wu combined Xiao Hong’s career and her romance to understand Xiao Hong’s agency not only as an author but also as a woman who was oppressed during that era.

Actually, you need to consider the era she lived in. That era made women feel unsafe. It was very hard for the women of that era to find a job. The ordinary girls would choose a steady family. For example, other women in the literacy circle chose to stay with their husbands of that circle. A couple would support each other’s career. Most of the women

would choose a compromised, steady life. However, she [Xiao Hong] chose to follow her heart while almost everyone wrote for politics at that time. (Participant Wu)

In terms of agency, Participant Song indeed held an absolutely different opinion from others. She perceived Xiao Hong with strong consciousness to fight against the social norm of that era.

First, she was sensitive, so she could detect something ridiculous during that period. She discovered that those things were not right. So she started to fight. Secondly she was smart. Though contacting the outside world and her courageous fighting, she knew the world more and better. She was not just a symbol or say, deceived by the politics. I believe she was a very talented person. (Participant Song)

In a conclusion, regarding Xiao Hong's agency as a woman, most participants showed a passive attitude towards Xiao Hong's confrontation with socially-structured gender inequality. Still, some participants probed into the possibility of Xiao Hong's agency.

Summary.

The perceptions of the gender portrayal of Xiao Hong suggested politics and gender reinforced each other in an intersectional way. Xiao Hong was interpreted as “abnormal” but perhaps “natural,” a woman who was oppressed by the powerful conventional norms in two ways: a political choice of not complying with the proletariat CCP combined with a gender choice of being more feminine than masculine.

One interesting thing in participants' perceptions was the abandoning of the category “class.” Wang Zheng (2004) once explained this abandonment as a conspiracy of the CCP and the newly emerging middle class in contemporary China. Meanwhile, the participants narrated Xiao Hong as more “purifying” (Participant Yao, Yue), more “ordinary” (Participant Lian, Dong), more “a normal person” (Participant Shui, Tian), more “a true woman” (Participant Yezi), who just wanted a “mundane life” (Participant Lian). These words implied the participants' assumption of a naturally reasonable and actual world outside the class category

and the politics. Ideologically, they wanted to avoid Maoist class analysis. Wang Zheng (2004) explained this elusion as the attempt of the middle class and the quasi-middle class in contemporary China, which was aiming at consolidating their new financial privilege during the post-Maoism era.

Especially when participants perceived Ding Ling as a representative of the ideology of Maoism and without manifest femininity, appraising Xiao Hong became a symbol of overturning the Maoism's overwhelming class analysis. In this way, Xiao Hong also became a symbol of reversing the gender policy during Maoism, which transformed Ding Ling into a female with strong masculinity. Therefore, the gender policy during Maoism which upheld a considerable gender equality was perceived as "unnatural" and thus the absolute gender difference as "natural" was advocated. In this sense, Wang Zheng (2004) described the post-Maoism as a regression of gender equality in China.

More complicatedly, not all the participants held the same opinion of Xiao Hong as naturally feminine or abandoning Ding Ling as a necessity. Outside the political consideration and the class analysis, the intersection of social elite discourse and popular discourse explained how the participants displayed a more complex perception of Xiao Hong's femininity.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Conclusion

The present research aimed to contribute to feminist scholarship and media audience research. This study applied Hall's encoding/decoding model to an under-researched social group—the Chinese women audience. In the meantime, unlike the major feminist film scholarship in China focusing on texts, this study provided empirical evidence about women's lived experiences.

The present study investigated how Chinese women audience members perceived the film *The Golden Era* (2014). Eighteen participants came from four major cities in China. The current study used a reception analysis to explore how the participants decoded Ann Hui and Xiao Hong. Various types of reading emerged from the participants' viewing experiences as based on Hall (1980)'s encoding/decoding paradigm. The present study extended Hall's paradigm and created a historical model to understand how the participants perceived a historical figure through a contemporary commercial film. The historical model showed that both the film's encoding of history and the historically transformed dominant ideology had an impact on the reception process of the participants.

Overall, *The Golden Era* (2014) occupied a special position at the margin of the mainstream Chinese film industry. The complicated gender representation of the historical figure Xiao Hong directed by the female director Ann Hui constructed a meaningful site for the contradictions among different public discourses in contemporary China. Ann Hui, the vital encoder of *The Golden Era* (2014), applied experimental film language, as well as continued her aesthetic shooting style in this film. Hence, based on the scriptwriter Li Qiang's narration of breaking time and space, Ann Hui created an alternative historical figure Xiao Hong, departing from expected and predictable representations of the dominant ideology of the contemporary China. The participants showed distinct and complicated attitudes towards Ann Hui's creation.

Participants had disparate types of response towards Ann Hui's experimental style, her fragmented detail focus, and portrayals of the historical figure Xiao Hong (See Figure 3).

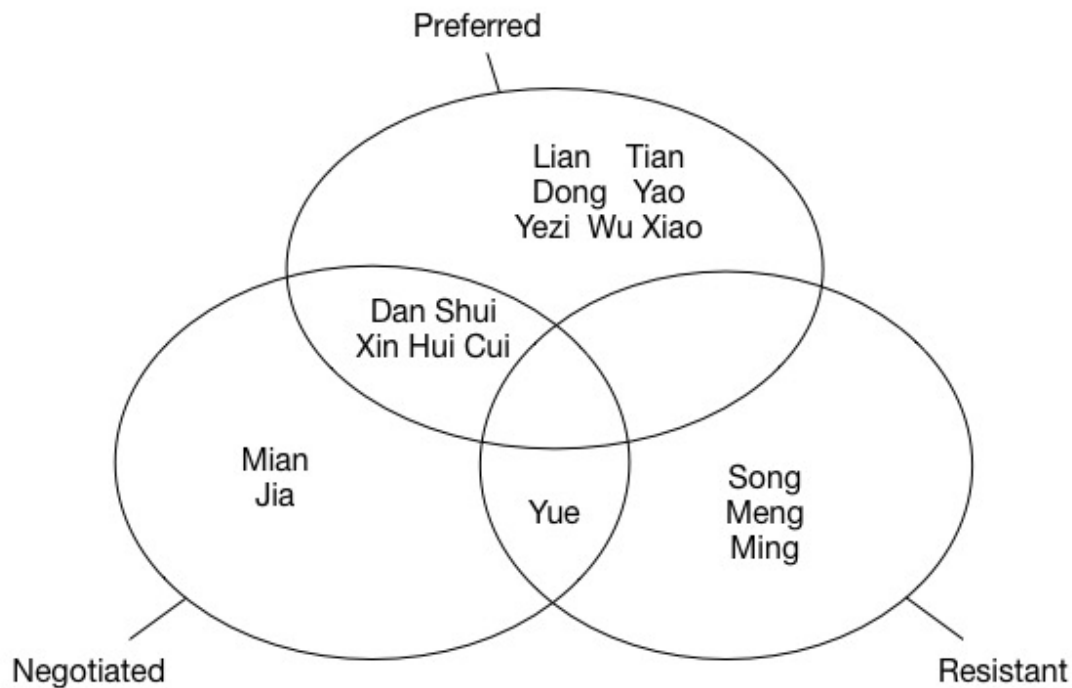


Figure 3. The distribution of the participants' reading types. Drawn from the analyzing results.

As showed in Figure 3, the current research found that some participants displayed comparatively consistent readings of *The Golden Era* (2014) while others showed a tendency toward hybridization. Participant Dan, Shui, Xin, Cui, and Hui expressed a mixed feeling of preferred and negotiated reading while Participant Yue occupied both negotiated and resistant reading. No participants in this research fell into the combination of both preferred and resistant reading, which indicated the integrity of an artwork and causing influence.

The hybridization of the reading types of some participants implied the complexity of the film and the nuance of reading. While encountering a complicated film with vague meanings as

The Golden Era (2014), the encoding/decoding paradigm seems insufficient to provide the deep interpretation of the participants' viewing experiences. It is hard to determine the preferred encoding. Thus, it became necessary to provide an advanced model to explain the diversity of the decoding. The current research provides a historical model (See Figure 2) to explain how participants (decoders) and Ann Hui/Li Qiang (encoders) were limited by their unique historical contexts and thus their reading of the historical figure Xiao Hong based on their own backgrounds.

Individual experiences, as the feminist standpoint theory emphasizes, were crucial in constructing women's subjectivity and agency. The current research provided a detailed reception analysis of the 18 women participants' viewing experiences in contemporary urban China. Cultural studies suggests that these viewing experiences produce and reproduce meaning of social institutions. In the present study, the participants' perceptions of Ann Hui as a female director, and Xiao Hong as a female writer, reproduced the gender roles and gender relations defined by the dominant ideology of contemporary China.

The main research question of the current study is to identify the gender in relation to Chinese women audience members' viewing experiences. The results indicated that gender did play a role in the perceptions of my 18 participants while they were decoding Ann Hui (RQ 1) and Xiao Hong (RQ 2&3). Furthermore, the gender intersected with other social categories such as class, education, and history. The concepts of gender identity and gender relations were contextually experienced by the women audiences in routine lives. Through viewing a specific women-centric film like *The Golden Era* (2014), the participants showcased diverse gender practices in reiterating gender norms or arousing the awareness of gender oppression.

One major finding addressed the concept of gender among the participants. Scholars of Chinese women studies have tried to translate “gender” into “Shehui Xingbie,” (meaning socially-constructed gender) in Chinese in order to distinguish the concept of gender (Shehui Xingbie) with the concept of sex (Xing Bie) in Chinese. However, ordinary Chinese women audience members are still unfamiliar with the concept of gender. All of the participants in the current research used “Xing Bie” to refer to both sex and gender in their narrations.

Another major finding from the viewing experiences of the participants highlighted the intersection of gender and class in contemporary China history. Maoism and post-Maoism, two continuous dominant ideologies in China, influenced the participants’ perception of gender. Maoism established the super-priority of class in everyday life, thus causing the insignificance of gender and other social institutions. Although the state feminism advocated the absolute equality between males and females during the Mao era, this absoluteness derived from the acknowledgement of the supreme same worker-peasant class in which both males and females unconditionally supported each other. Post-Maoism starting from 1976 recognized the destructive consequences of Cultural Revolution, which was directed by Chairman Mao, and criticized Maoism’s focus on class, which historically caused the ignorance of economic development and the impoverished lives of ordinary people. The participants of the current research were born or grew up during the post-Mao and reform era, which indicates the influence of the dominant ideology of post-Maoism.

However, the present research suggested that the dominant ideology of post-Maoism did not cause a fixed monopoly on the meaning production and reproduction of gender roles/relations among the participants in terms of gender and class. In contrast, the process of meaning production and reproduction was a flexible and hybrid one, which possibly originated

from disparate historical contexts of the participants. Unlike the disguise by the prominent class struggle during the Mao era, the gender issue was re-emerging throughout the post-Maoism discourse in contemporary China. Among the participants of the present study, the narration approaches to talking about gender issues were varying. Some participants believed that “Xing Bie” was biologically determined, which would determine an individual’s personality and destination. Some participants hoped to erase the collective categories such as class and gender because they argued that an individual not ought to be defined by any singular social group. Some participants believed that biologically “Xing Bie” was meaningless while women’s experience was meaningful. Some participants further argued that the socially oppressed situation of women would lead to women’s fighting and revolution. The disparate opinions of gender roles and gender relations in the participants’ viewing experience of *The Golden Era* (2014) showed the complexity and nuance in the participants’ meaning-producing process. To illustrate this complexity, the current research developed a historical model of the reception process of the participants.

Through the historical model, the current research argued that the meaning of the historical figure Xiao Hong had been produced and reproduced at distinctive historical and contextual moments of different individuals. The encoders of *The Golden Era* (2014) majorly referred to the director Ann Hui and the scriptwriter Li Qiang, occupied different historical and contextual spots from the participants in the current research. This film employed the approach of using comments from Xiao Hong’s family and friends to construct an inconclusive persona. These historical documents emerged during the pro-Mao or Mao era. It was noticeable that Xiao Hong’s family and friends were included in a Left-Wing literacy circle devoted to Marxism and later Maoism. In this fashion, *The Golden Era* (2014) mixed the influences from ideologies such

as Marxism and Maoism (the historical documents of Xiao Hong's family and friends), and post-Maoism (the creation of Ann Hui and Li Qiang). Based on the historical model, I wanted to define the historical documents from Xiao Hong, Xiao Hong's family and friends as the first round of meaning-production of Xiao Hong; refer to the encoding of Ann Hui and Li Qiang as the second round; and finally, the viewing experiences of the participants as the third round. Through this multiple-layered meaning-production process, the reception of the participants presented a complicated and intertwined landscape of how to perceive the gender roles and gender relations represented by Xiao Hong. As feminist standpoint theory suggested, women's individual experience of the oppression of femininity could lead to the feminist consciousness. The results of the current research also indicated that the participants, 18 Chinese women audience members in urban China, conceived hybrid attitudes towards the dominant ideology. This hybridity revealed both the force of the dominant ideology and the possibility of the fighting back of Chinese women.

Furthermore, comparing the participants' perceptions of Xiao Hong and that of Ann Hui, I wanted to argue that time more affected the former while space more affected the latter. More than one participant noticed the identity of Ann Hui as a female Hong Kong director and pointed out the influence of her regional identity. However, some other participants emphasized that like class and gender, space or regional difference should not be referred to as an indicator of affecting Ann Hui's film.

One tendency detected from both the perception of Ann Hui and that of Xiao Hong was the attempt of erasing the influence of broad social categories, for instance, class, gender, and region. This attempt could be analyzed as criticizing Maoism's extreme focus on class on the one hand. On the other hand, this attempt also revealed the individualization of Chinese society in

contemporary China (Yan, 2009). The flourishing individualism in China echoed the neoliberalism tendency raised by David Harvey (2005), which emphasized individual responsibility more than the function of the public institutions. As feminist scholars disclosed, the categorical emphasis on individualism might cause the weakening of the agency of the women as a consolidated social group.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study showed the following limitations. First, although in-depth interviews provided a great chance for me to explore the participants' memories and feelings of *The Golden Era*, this method was insufficient to sketch a broad map of Chinese women audiences' reactions towards this film. Therefore, the current study leaves considerable room for future research.

Furthermore, the current study adopted a convenient sample strategy to recruit participants due to the restrictions of time and funding. Although this strategy is applicable for collecting sufficient information to meet the requirements of saturation, the results indicated that those participants might fall into the same class category—the middle and quasi-middle class in China. Even if the knowledge requirements of *The Golden Era* was repeatedly mentioned during the interviews, working-class women audience members still have a chance of accessing the necessary knowledge and the film.

In addition, the age of the sample size is 18-42, but women audience members over 42 should not be excluded from future samples. According to the historical reception model of this study, the women audience members from senior age group might bring different insights into the present investigation.

Moreover, the current study chose *The Golden Era* as a research object, which gave me an opportunity to observe the whole process of the ongoing distribution and reception of this

film. However, it also meant a lack of academic articles about this film during my current investigation.

Therefore, based on the acknowledgement of the limitation of my study, my suggestions for future research would be:

1. Studies based on survey or experiment approaches, aiming to provide a broad map of Ann Hui's audience, and exploring which social factors most affect the viewing experiences of audiences. The results of the current research provide indications for the future quantitative research to construct variables, such as gender, birth date, age, education, knowledge, and class.

2. Studies to explicate how Ann Hui encoded *The Golden Era* in a male-dominated film industry. The research could be a textual analysis about the film itself because systematically textual analysis could offer other researchers more insights than the media coverage or reviews of this film. It could also be a case study around Ann Hui, to explore what kind of factors have influenced her decisions of this film.

3. An important route should be exploring more about the women audience. The current study pinpointed the shortage of research on the Chinese women audience and made an effort to fill the gap. However, the Chinese women audience is a broad research topic. While the present study takes a feminist standpoint approach concentrating on women's individual experiences, I still feel it is not enough in terms of women's standpoints in the specific historical context. The Chinese women audience, as the current study indicated, could never be a homogenous social group. Although this study has explored the diversity of this group, such as the intersection of gender, class and age, there are still academic blanks inside this domain. For example, the women's immigrant histories from small cities to major cities and even abroad, the Western

influence in their education and film-viewing experiences, and their personal relationships with other men.

References

- Althusser, L. (2014). *On the reproduction of capitalism: ideology and ideological state apparatuses*. New York; London: Verso.
- An, Y. (2014/10/08). 女导演许鞍华: 拍《黄金时代》真是拍伤了. [Female Filmmaker Ann Hui: *The Golden Era* exhausted me]. Retrieved from http://hebei.ifeng.com/edu/wenhua/detail_2014_10/08/2986557_0.shtml
- Ang, I. (1985). *Watching Dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination*. London; New York: Methuen.
- Ang, I. (1996). *Living room wars: Rethinking media audiences for a postmodern world*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Austin, T. (2002). *Hollywood, hype, and audiences: Selling and watching popular film in the 1990s*. New York; Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bai, Y. (2012, March 15). 《桃姐》单日票房超许鞍华作品内地总票房. [A *Simple Life*'s box office: First day's gross over the entire past of Ann Hui]. 网易. Retrieved from <http://money.163.com/12/0315/20/7SLP4J5B00253B0H.html>
- Bandara, W. (2006). *Using Nvivo as a research management tool: A case narrative*. Paper presented at the Quality and Impact of Qualitative Research: Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Qualitative Research in IT & IT in Qualitative Research.
- Barlow, T. E. (2007). Asian women in re-regionalization. *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, 15(2), 285-318.
- Berry, C. (2012). Chinese film scholarship in English. In Y. Zhang (Ed.), *A companion to Chinese cinema* (pp. 484-498). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Bielby, D. D. (2009). Gender inequality in culture industries: Women and men writers in film and television. *Sociologie du Travail*, 51(2), 237-252.
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.soctra.2009.03.006>
- Bielby, D. D., & Bielby, W. T. (1996). Women and men in film: Gender inequality among writers in a culture Industry. *Gender and Society*, 10(3), 248-270. doi:10.2307/189696
- Bobo, J. (1988). The Color Purple: Black women as cultural readers. In E. D. Pribram (Ed.), *Female spectators: looking at film and television* (pp. 90-109). London; New York: Verso.
- Brown, M. E. (1994). *Soap opera and women's talk: The pleasure of resistance*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Butler, A. (2002). *Women's cinema: The contested screen*. London: Wallflower.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Byerly, C. M., & Ross, K. (2006). *Women & media: A critical introduction*. Malden, MA ; Oxford: Blackwell.
- Chen, C. Y. (2014, October 22). 为什么大数据在预测《黄金时代》时不灵了?. [*Why does the big data not work in anticipating the box office of The Golden Era?*]. Retrieved from <http://www.huxiu.com/article/44847/1.html>.
- Chen, X. H. (2012). Chinese film scholarship in Chinese. In Y. Zhang (Ed.), *A companion to Chinese cinema* (pp. 460-483). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cheung, E. M. K., Marchetti, G., & See Kam, T. (2011). Interview with Ann Hui: On the edge of the mainstream. In E. M. K. Cheung, G. Marchetti, & T. See Kam (Eds.), *Hong Kong screenscapes: From the New Wave to the digital frontier* (pp. 67-74). Hong Kong: Hong

- Kong University Press.
- Connell, R. (2009). *Gender: In world perspective*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Vol. 3rd). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (Vol. 4th). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Dai, J. (1994). 不可见的女性: 当代中国电影中的女性与女性的电影. [Invisible women: The women in contemporary Chinese cinema and women's cinema]. *当代电影*, 6, 37-45.
- Dai, J. (2000). 雾中风景/中国电影文化/1978~ 1998: 中国电影文化. [*Scenes in the fog/Chinese film culture/1978-1998*]. Beijing, China: 北京大学出版社.
- Dai, J., Wang, J., & Barlow, T. E. (2002). *Cinema and desire: Feminist Marxism and cultural politics in the work of Dai Jinhua*. New York; London: Verso.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. New York: Sage.
- DOUBAN.com. (2015). *The Golden Era* (2014). Retrieved from <http://movie.douban.com/subject/10545939/>
- Entgroup. (2012). *A Simple Life: Box office in mainland China*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbooo.cn/m/590503>
- Erens, P. B. (2000). The film work of Ann Hui. In P. Fu & D. Desser (Eds.), *The Cinema of Hong Kong: history, arts, identity* (pp. 176 -195). Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

- Fan, C. (2010). 许鞍华专访. [*Interview with Ann Hui*]. Retrieved from <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/f/2010-10-15/04353113030.shtml>
- Fan, Y. (2005). 文化走向市场亟需厘清的几个问题. [Emergent issues on the culture towards the market]. *理论前沿*, 2005(1), 20-22.
- Foster, G. A. (1995). *Women film directors: An international bio-critical dictionary*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Gledhill, C. (1988). Pleasurable negotiations. In E. D. Pribram (Ed.), *Female spectators: Looking at film and television* (pp. 64-89). London; New York: Verso.
- Gramsci, A. (2011). *Prison notebooks*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gripsrud, J., & Lavik, E. (2008). Film audiences. In J. Donald & M. Renov (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of film studies* (pp. 454 - 470). Los Angeles; London: SAGE.
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Love, & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, Media, Language* (pp. 128–138). London: Hutchinson.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*. Thousand Oaks, Calif; London: Sage.
- Han, S., Kong, W., Mei, Y., Qin, H., Xu, T. (Producers), & Zhang, J. & Hui, A. (Director). (2014). *The Golden Era* [Motion picture]. China: Stella Mega Films, China Film Group, Edko Films, Cheerland Entertainment Organization, & China Film Co.
- Hartsock, N. C. M. (1983). *Money, sex, and power: Toward a feminist historical materialism*. New York: Longman.
- Hartsock, N. C. M. (1998). *The feminist standpoint revisited and other essays*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.

- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- HKMDB. (2015). 許鞍華 *Ann Hui On-Wah*. Retrieved from
http://hkmdb.com/db/people/view.mhtml?id=4443&display_set=big5
- Ho, C.-f. S. (1998). *Ann Hui as a female filmmaker: In search of Hong Kong culture*. The University of Hong Kong (Pokfulam, Hong Kong).
- Ho, E. Y. (2001). Women on the edges of Hong Kong modernity: The films of Ann Hui. In C.-M. E. Yau (Ed.), *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World* (pp. 177-206). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Huang, Z. (2012). The competition of two discourses: The making of a New Ideology in China. *Cultural Politics*, 8(2), 233-252.
- IMDB. (2015). *Ann Hui: Awards*. Retrieved from
http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0401176/awards?ref_=nm_awd
- Jarvie, I. C. (1977). *Window on Hong Kong: A sociological study of the Hong Kong film industry and its audience*. Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong.
- Jia, D. (2014/10/06). 从异乡到异乡: 重访萧红漂泊地. [Displacement: Revisiting the places Xiao Hong once lived in]. *三联生活周刊*, 806, 64-77.
- Johnston, C. (1973). *Notes on women's cinema* (Vol. 2). London: Society for Education in Film and Television.
- Kleinhans, C. (2009). Becoming Hollywood? Hong Kong cinema in the new century. In T. See Kam, P. X. Feng, & G. Marchetti (Eds.), *Chinese connections: critical perspectives on film, identity and diaspora* (pp. 109-121). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kohnen, M. (2014). 'The power of geek': Fandom as gendered commodity at Comic-Con.

- Creative Industries Journal*, 7(1), 75-78.
- Kuai, L. (2006/04/07). 许鞍华：我不懂导演以外的事情. [Ann Hui: I know nothing other than director]. *南方人物周刊*. Retrieved from <http://news.163.com/06/0407/13/2E417P5E00011E80.html>.
- Kuhn, A. (1984). Women's genres. *Screen*, 25(1), 18-29. doi:10.1093/screen/25.1.18
- Kuipers, G. (2012). South Park boys and Sex and the City women: Television trade, narrowcasting and the export of gender categories. *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*, 2(3), 179-196.
- Lauzen, M. M. (2011). The celluloid ceiling: Behind-the-scenes employment on the top 250 films of 2010. *Agnes Films*.
- Lauzen, M. M., & Deiss Jr, D. M. (2009). Breaking the fourth wall and sex role stereotypes: An examination of the 2006-2007 prime-time season. *Sex Roles*, 60(5-6), 379-386. doi:10.1007/s11199-008-9553-9
- Leyda, J. (1972). *Dianying: An account of films and the film audience in China*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Li, C.-T. (1982). Survival is the most important: An interview with Ann Hui. *Film Bi-monthly*, 96, 19-23.
- Li, L. (2011/01/04). 语文教材的历史更迭. [The transformation of Chinese textbooks]. Retrieved from <http://history.people.com.cn/GB/198819/206622/13650833.html>
- Li, S. (2014/05/03). 传奇也是普通人:《黄金时代》的文青宗师关系谱. [They are both legendary and ordinary: The network of writers in The Golden Era]. Retrieved from

- <http://news.mtime.com/2014/04/30/1527097.html>.
- Li, Y. (2009). 思想解放, 理论创新, 经济改革——纪念中国改革开放三十年. [Openness, theory creation, economic reform]. *经济研究导刊* (14), 1-5.
- Mahmood, S. (2005). Feminist theory, agency, and the liberatory subject. *On shifting ground: Muslim women in the global era*, 111-141.
- Mao, C. X., & Li, Y. Y. (2014/09/23). 跨过沉沦的一切 抵达黄金时代. [Arrive in *The Golden Era after a long journey*]. Retrieved from http://beijing.timeoutcn.com/ShowArticle_14434.htm
- Marchetti, G. (2009). Gender Politics and Neoliberalism in China: Ann Hui's *The Postmodern Life of My Aunt*. *Visual Anthropology*, 22(2), 123-140. doi:10.1080/08949460802623747
- Mayne, J. (1990). *The woman at the keyhole: Feminism and women's cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mayne, J. (1993). *Cinema and spectatorship*. New York; London: Routledge.
- McDowell, L. (1999). *Gender, identity and place: Understanding feminist geographies*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Meagher, M. (2005). Feminist cultural studies. In G. Ritzer & P. Sage (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of social theory [electronic resource]* (pp. 269-271). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Meng, Y., & Dai, J. (1990). 浮出历史地表 [*Floating up from the surface of History*]. Zhengzhou, China: Henan People's Press.
- Mikula, M. (2008). *Key concepts in cultural studies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Morley, D. (1980). *The Nationwide audience: Structure and decoding*. London: British Film Institute.
- Moul, C. C. (2007). Measuring word of mouth's impact on theatrical movie admissions. *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy*, 16(4), 859-892. doi:10.1111/j.1530-9134.2007.00160.x
- MPIA. (2013). *Hong Kong film market in 2012*. Retrieved from Hong Kong: Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry Association Ltd.: <http://www.mpia.org.hk>
- MTIME. (2012). 《桃姐》票房告捷: 文艺的胜利还是商业的胜利?.[*Box office of A Simple Life: The victory of art or business?*]. Retrieved from <http://news.mtime.com/feature/ASimpleLife.html>
- MTIME. (2015). *Ann Hui*. Retrieved from <http://people.mtime.com/892977/>
- Mueller, K. F. (2012). Decoding media images of political leaders: The perspective of young adults on the relation of gender and power. *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*, 2(3), 261-277. doi:10.1386/iscc.2.3.261_1
- Pang, L. (2005). Introduction: The diversity of masculinities in Hong Kong cinema. In D. Wong & L. Pang (Eds.), *Masculinities and Hong Kong cinema* (pp. 1-342). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Perks, S. (2009). Visible secrets: Hong Kong's women filmmakers. *Film International*, 7(4), 48-56.
- Radway, J. A. (1984). *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Ren, S. (2014/10/09). 从《黄金时代》谈许鞍华的电影: 昨夜明灯昨夜梦. [*From The Golden*

- Era to Ann Hui's films: The lights, the dreams, and the passing nights*]. Retrieved from <http://culture.people.com.cn/n/2014/1009/c87423-25793878.html>.
- Rofel, L. (2007). *Desiring China: Experiments in neoliberalism, sexuality, and public culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Rollet, B. (2002). *Women directors and genre films in France*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Rosen, S. (2012). Film and society in China: The logic of the market. In Y. Zhang (Ed.), *A companion to Chinese cinema* (pp. 197-217). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Schrøder, K. C., Drotner, K., Kline, S., & Murray, C. (2003). *Researching audiences*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative inquiry*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Sender, K. (1999). Selling sexual subjectivities: Audiences respond to gay window advertising. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 16(2), 172-196.
doi:10.1080/15295039909367085
- Shan, C. (2014/09/25). Interview with Ann Hui, Li Qiang, and Tang Wei. *看电影*, 614, 56-61.
- Shi, M. (2014/10/06). 《黄金时代》: 萧红的另一种可能性. [*The Golden Era: Another possibility of Xiao Hong*]. *三联生活周刊*, 806, 81-89.
- Shuimuding. (2014/10/04). 萧红的卑微与伟大. [*Xiao Hong: Trivial and sublime*]. Retrieved from <http://movie.douban.com/review/7118701/>
- Smaill, B. (2013). Sofia Coppola. *Feminist Media Studies*, 13(1), 148-162.
doi:10.1080/14680777.2011.595425

- Stacey, J. (1994). *Star gazing: Hollywood cinema and female spectatorship*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Stanworth, C. (2000). Women and work in the information age. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 7(1), 20-32. doi:10.1111/1468-0432.00090
- Szeto, M. M. (2011). Ann Hui at the margin of mainstream Hong Kong cinema. In E. M. K. Cheung, G. Marchetti, & T. See Kam (Eds.), *Hong Kong screenscapes: From the New Wave to the digital frontier* (pp. 51-66). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Tasker, Y. (2011). *Fifty contemporary film directors*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Taylor, K. E. (2012). *Dekalog 4: On East Asian filmmakers*. New York: Wallflower Press.
- Tech.163.com. (2012/08/17). 豆瓣称月度覆盖用户数超1亿 已接近盈利. [*Douban.com claimed 10 billion unique visitors per month, close to make profits*]. Retrieved from <http://tech.163.com/12/0817/08/893L4F6N000915BF.html>.
- Thornham, S. (1999). *Feminist film theory: A reader*. New York: New York University Press.
- Thornham, S. (2000). *Feminist theory and cultural studies: Stories of unsettled relations*. London: Arnold.
- Thornham, S. (2012). *What if I had been the hero? Investigating women's cinema*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tudor, A. (1999). *Decoding culture: Theory and method in cultural studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA; London: SAGE.
- van Zoonen, L. (1994). *Feminist media studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA; London: Sage.
- Wang, H. (2014/10/15). 许鞍华: 在我的时代做我自己. [Ann Hui: Being myself in my era]. *博客天下*, 175, 66-73.

- Wang, L. (2012). Chinese women's cinema. In Y. Zhang (Ed.), *A companion to Chinese cinema* (First ed., pp. 318-345): Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Wang, S. (2009). 转型经济学的框架变迁与中国范式的全球价值——纪念中国改革开放 30 周年. [Framework transformation of economics and the global value of China paradigm]. *财经研究*(5), 17-29.
- Wang, T. (2009). Understanding local reception of globalized cultural products in the context of the international cultural economy: A case study on the reception of Hero and Daggers in China. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 12(4), 299-318.
doi:10.1177/1367877909104240
- Wang, Y. (2010). 主流文化与中式主流大片. [Mainstream culture and Chinese mainstream films]. *电影艺术*(01), 5-9.
- Wang, Y., & Phillion, J. (2010). Whose knowledge is valued: a critical study of knowledge in elementary school textbooks in China. *Intercultural Education*, 21(6), 567-580.
doi:10.1080/14675986.2010.533037
- Wang, Z. (1999). *Women in the Chinese enlightenment: Oral and textual histories*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.
- Wang, Z. (2004). 越界: 跨文化女权实践. [Cross borders: Transcultural feminist praxis]. Tianjin, China: 天津人民出版社.
- Wang, Z (2001). Call me Qingnian but not Funü: A Maoist youth in retrospect. *Feminist Studies*, 27(1), 9-34.

- Wang, Z. (2005). "State Feminism"? Gender and socialist state formation in Maoist China. *Feminist Studies*, 31(3), 519.
- Wei, Y. (2014/09/29). 风暴里的黄金时代. [*The Golden Era in Storm*]. *南方人物周刊*, 34, 32-47.
- Wong, D. (2005). Women's reception of mainstream Hong Kong cinema. In L. Pang & D. Wong (Eds.), *Masculinities and Hong Kong cinema* (pp. 1-342). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Wong, W. C. A., Tam, S. M., & Wang, D. (2014). Introduction. In S. M. Tam (Ed.), *Gender and family in East Asia* (Vol. 5.; 5, pp. 1-16). Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge.
- Yan, Y. (2009). *The individualization of Chinese society* (Vol. 77.). Oxford; New York: Berg.
- Yang, L. (2014/10/15). 《黄金时代》失掉黄金. [*The Golden Era lost gold*]. *博客天下*, 175, 83-85.
- Yau, C.-M. E. (Ed.) (2001). *At full speed: Hong Kong cinema in a borderless world*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Yau, K.-F. (2007). Looking back at Ann Hui's cinema of the political. *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 19(2), 117-150. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41490983>
- Yin, H., & Feng, F. (2015). 2014年中国电影产业备忘. [Notes on Chinese film industry in 2014]. *电影艺术*, 361(02), 13-26.
- Yue, A. (2010). *Ann Hui's Song of the exile [electronic resource]*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

- Zhang, K. (2014). 马克思主义国家观与中国当代经济增长. [*Marxist nationalism and the development of Chinese economy*]. (Doctoral Dissertation), 辽宁大学, Shenyang, China.
- Zhang, W. (2009-04-30). 大众观看电影情况问卷调查报告. [A survey on audiences' film-going]. *中国电影报*, p. 21.
- Zhang, Y. (2012). *A companion to Chinese cinema*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Zhang, Y. (2012). General introduction. In Y. Zhang (Ed.), *A companion to Chinese cinema* (pp. 1-22). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Zhou, C. (2014/10/03). 萧红: 那个饥饿的贱货 [*Xiao Hong: That hungry bitch*]. Retrieved from <http://movie.douban.com/review/7117908/>
- Zhou, X., Song, W., Liu, T., Wang, P., Jiang, X., & Wu, Y. (2008). 改革开放30周年中国影视与大学生的互动调查问卷分析报告. [Reform-30th-Anniversary: A survey on the interactions between Chinese film/television and college students]. *当代电影* (07), 120-125.
- Zhu, W. (2011). "张爱玲神话"及其反思. [The myth of Zhang Ailing' and the reflection]. *文艺研究*, 2011(1), 51-58.

Appendix A: IRB approval



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY Institutional Review Board MEMORANDUM

TO: Carol Liebler
DATE: December 4, 2014
SUBJECT: **Determination of Exemption from Regulations**
IRB #: 14-337
TITLE: *Dancing with Gender: A Reception Analysis of Chinese Women's Viewing Experiences of Ann Hui's The Golden Era*

The above referenced application, submitted for consideration as exempt from federal regulations as defined in 45 C.F.R. 46, has been evaluated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the following:

1. determination that it falls within the one or more of the five exempt categories allowed by the organization;
2. determination that the research meets the organization's ethical standards.

It has been determined by the IRB this protocol qualifies for exemption and has been assigned to category 2. This authorization will remain active for a period of five years from **December 3, 2014** until **December 2, 2019**.

CHANGES TO PROTOCOL: Proposed changes to this protocol during the period for which IRB authorization has already been given, cannot be initiated without additional IRB review. If there is a change in your research, you should notify the IRB immediately to determine whether your research protocol continues to qualify for exemption or if submission of an expedited or full board IRB protocol is required. Information about the University's human participants protection program can be found at: <http://orip.syr.edu/human-research/human-research-irb.html> Protocol changes are requested on an amendment application available on the IRB web site; please reference your IRB number and attach any documents that are being amended.

STUDY COMPLETION: Study completion is when all research activities are complete or when a study is closed to enrollment and only data analysis remains on data that have been de-identified. A Study Closure Form should be completed and submitted to the IRB for review ([Study Closure Form](#)).

Thank you for your cooperation in our shared efforts to assure that the rights and welfare of people participating in research are protected.

Tracy Cromp, M.S.W.
Director

DEPT: Communications, Newhouse II – Rm. 353

STUDENT: Li Chen

Office of Research Integrity and Protections
121 Bowne Hall Syracuse, New York 13244-1200
(Phone) 315.443.3013 □ (Fax) 315.443.9889
orip@syr.edu □ www.orip.syr.edu

Appendix B: Sample Questions

Sample Questions [In English]

1. When did you first watch *The Golden Era* (2014)? Could you tell me where you watched it? And with who? Why do you choose to watch that movie?
2. What was the first impression after watching the film? What is the most memorable scene of this film to you?
3. How about the female characters in that film? How about the male characters? How about their relations described in the film? Do you agree with the film's portrayal or not? Why?
4. How do you feel related to those female portrayals as a Chinese woman? What kind of emotions did you have when you watch the film?
5. Would you have conversations with others about the film after viewing? What do you talk about? Do your male(or female) friends have different response to the film?
6. What's your opinion of women's status of 1930s? Have you read Xiao Hong or other female writers' works of that era? How does this film reflect it?
7. What's your opinion of seeing Xiao Hong as a "Nu Wen Qing" ("female literary youth")? Would you identify yourself as "Nu Wen Qing"? Why?
8. What is your opinion about Ann Hui? Who is the most memorable female character in her films for you? And why? Through which part do you think you could relate to that female character?
9. Do you know other Chinese female filmmakers? What's your opinion of them? What kind of women should be portrayed in Chinese films in your opinion? Why?
10. Do think the current portrayal of men and women in Chinese films appropriately reflect what you feel and observe in reality?

Note. If the answer is gender-related, add follow-up question as “why?” If not, use other wording style to rephrase the question.

Sample Questions [In Chinese]

1. 你什么时候看的《黄金时代》的? 可不可以告诉我们一些当时的细节, 比如在哪儿看的, 和谁看的, 以及为什么会选择看这部电影呢?
2. 你对电影的第一印象是怎样的? 最难以忘怀的场景呢?
3. 你怎么看待这部片子的女性角色? 男性角色呢? 影片是怎么阐释两性关系的?
4. 你觉得这部片子对男性 / 女性 / 两性关系的阐释你有认同感吗? 看这片子的时候你有什么情绪?
5. 看完后有没有和朋友聊聊这个片子? 你们都是怎么说的? 你的男性朋友或女性朋友对这个片子会有不同的反应么?
6. 你对上个世纪三十年代对女性有什么印象? 有没有读过萧红和其他同时代女性作家的作品? 你觉得电影对这拨女性作家的诠释如何?
7. 有一种观点把萧红看成女文青的代表, 你怎么看? 你觉得自己是女文青吗? 为什么?
8. 你对许鞍华有什么印象? 对你来说, 她哪部影片里的女性角色你最喜欢? 为什么呢? 什么部分你觉得有代入感?
9. 对中国其他的女性导演你有了解吗? 你觉得她们的作品怎样? 你觉得中国电影应该拍什么样的女性和女性的故事? 为什么?
10. 你觉得现在中国电影里的女性形象, 和你观察和感受到的现实一致吗?

注: 如果被访者的回答与性别相关, 就接着追问为什么; 如果不相关, 用其他方式重问。

Appendix C: Ann Hui's Filmography

1. *The Secret* (*Feng Jie*), 1979
2. *The Spooky Bunch* (*Zhuang dao gui*), 1980
3. *The Story of Woo Viet* (*Hu Yue de gu shi*), 1981
4. *The Boat People* (*Tou ben nu hai*), 1982
5. *Love in a Fallen City* (*Qing cheng zhi lian*), 1984
6. *The Romance of Book and Sword* (*Shu jian en chou lu*), 1987
7. *Princess Fragrance* (*Xiang xiang gong zhu*), 1987
8. *Starry is the Night* (*Jin ye xing guang can lan*), 1988
9. *Swordsman* (*Xiao ao jiang hu*), 1990
10. *Song of the Exile* (*Ke tu qiu hen*), 1990
11. *Zodiac Killers* (*Ji dao zhui zong*), 1991
12. *My American Grandson* (*Shanghai Jiaqi*), 1991
13. *Boy and His Hero* (*Xiao nian yu ying xiong*), 1993
14. *Summer Snow* (*Nu ren si shi*), 1995
15. *Ah Kam* (*A Jin de gu shi*), 1996
16. *As Time Goes By* (*Qu ri ku duo*), 1997
17. *Eighteen Springs* (*Ban sheng yuan*), 1997
18. *Ordinary Heroes* (*Qian yan wan yu*), 1999
19. *Visible Secret* (*You ling ren jian*), 2001
20. *July Rhapsody* (*Nan ren sis hi*), 2002
21. *Goddess of Mercy* (*Yu guan yin*), 2003
22. *The Postmodern Life of My Aunt* (*Yi ma de hou xian dai sheng huo*), 2006
23. *The Way We Are* (*Tian shui wei de ri yu ye*), 2008

24. *Night and Fog* (*Tian shui wei de ye yu wu*), 2009

25. *All About Love* (*De xian chao fan*), 2010

26. *A Simple Life* (*Tao jie*), 2011

27. *Beautiful 2012* (*Mei hao 2012*), 2012

28. *My Way* (*Wo de lu*), 2012

29. *The Golden Era* (*Huang jin shi dai*), 2014

Note. Information form: (English name)(Pin Yin), (Screening Year). Based on the data of HKMDB (Hong Kong Movie Database). Retrieved from http://hkmdb.com/db/movies/view.mhtml?id=7299&display_set=big5).

Curriculum Vitae

Li Chen

215 University PL, Syracuse, NY, 13210, USA

(607)-768-8217; chipmunk1995.lc@gmail.com; lchen28@syr.edu

EDUCATION BACKGROUND

Ph. D., Major in **Mass Communication**, S. I. Newhouse of Public Communication, Syracuse University, USA, 2015-present

Certificate of Advanced Studies in **Women's and Gender Studies**

M.A., Major in **Media Studies**, S. I. Newhouse of Public Communication, Syracuse University, USA, 2013-2015

Master thesis: **Dancing with gender: A reception analysis of Chinese women's viewing experiences of Ann Hui's *The Golden Era*** (Supervisor: Professor Carol M. Liebler)

Ph.D., Broadcasting and Television Arts, School of Art and Communication, Beijing Normal University, China, 2007-2011

M.A., Journalism, School of Journalism and Communication, Nanjing University, China, 1999-2002

B.A., Journalism, School of Journalism and Communication, Renmin University of China, China, 1995-1999

PUBLICATIONS

Liebler, C. M., **Chen, L.**, & Peng, A. (2016). Corporeal commodification: Chinese women's bodies as advertisements. In K. Golombisky (Ed.). *Feminists, feminisms, and advertising*. (Forthcoming).

- Liebler, C. M., Jiang, W. & **Chen, L.** (2015). Beauty, binaries and the big screen in China: Character gender in feature films. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 25 (6), 1-16.
- Chen, L.** (2010). Post-feminism expressions on contemporary women's films in China. *China Social Sciences Today*, 7(20), Vol.107.
- Chen, L.** (2010). Pursuing the female subject position in social discourses. *China Social Sciences Today*, 7(20), Vol.107.
- Chen, L.** (2009). How to profile an average person during the outstanding time. In R. Y. Wang (Ed.). *The overview of film and television of China in 2008* (pp. 308-313). Beijing, China: Culture and Art Publishing House.
- Chen, L.** (2008). Film and television Arts. In Y. L. Yang & R. G. Zhang (Eds.). *Top ten cultivations of teachers: Part 3 - The Cultivation of Arts* (pp. 126-150). Tianjin, China: Tianjin Educational Press.
- Chen, L.** (2002). Understanding the idea of media design: How to be functional in festival reports. *Journal of News and Communication*, 4, 21-23.

CONFERENCE PAPERS

- Chen, L.** (2015). *Decoding Xiao Hong in The Golden Era (2014): A reception analysis of Chinese women audience members' film-viewing Experiences*. Paper submitted to the conference of International Communication Association, Fukuoka, Japan, 2016.
- Chen, L.** (2015). *Space, otherness, and public intimacy: An observation of the current LGBT activism in mainland China*. Paper submitted to the conference of International Communication Association, Fukuoka, Japan, 2016.

- Chen, L.** (2015). *Neoliberalism, absence, and violence: On The Postmodern Life of My Aunt* (2006). Paper will be presented at the National Conference of Popular Communication Association, Seattle, U.S.A, 2016.
- Liebler, C. M. & **Chen, L.** (2015). *Butts and other body parts: Celebrity culture, ethnic identification and self-objectification*. Paper presented at the Conference of Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Francisco, U.S.A.
- Liebler, C. M. & **Chen, L.** (2015). *Celebrity culture, media use, and body surveillance*. Paper presented at the Fifteenth International Conference on Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations, Hong Kong.
- Zhou, X. Y. and **Chen, L.** (2015). *A longitudinal content analysis: The construction of U.S. presidential photographs in China's Xinhua News Agency since 1972*. Paper presented at the conference of International Communication Association, Puerto Rico, U.S.A.
- Chen, L.** (2015). *Perfecting fatherhood: Gender discourse on reality TV in China*. Paper presented at the midwinter conference of AEJMC, University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma.
- Chen, L.,** Akat, H. D., Can, X., and Song, S.W. (2014). *Rethinking Hijab: Multiple themes in Muslim women's perceptions of Hijab fashion*. Paper presented at the conference of The International Conference on Communication, Media, Technology and Design, Istanbul, Turkey. Retrieved from <http://www.cmdconf.net/2014/pdf/34.pdf>.
- Jung, S., Kim, J. K. and **Chen, L.** (2014). *Who use more emoticons? Who anthropomorphizes more?: Cultural and gender differences in emoticons use on IM*. Paper presented at the conference of Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Montreal, Canada.

Chen, L. (2008). *Star Culture and Television*. Paper submitted to the conference of *The Doctoral Forum of China Television Research*, Sichuan University, Chengdu, China.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCES

Research Assistant, PROFESSOR Carol M. Liebler, Spring, 2015, Syracuse University,

Worked on the project of *celebrity culture, self objectification and self dissatisfaction*

Research Assistant, PROFESSOR Carol M. Liebler, Fall, 2014, Syracuse University, Worked

on the project of *celebrity culture, self objectification and self dissatisfaction*

Research Assistant, PROFESSOR Carol M. Liebler, Summer, 2014, Syracuse University,

Worked on the project of *content analysis of Chinese films' gender portrayal*

Research Assistant, PROFESSOR Beth Ellen Egan, Summer, 2014, Syracuse University,

Worked on the project of *the effect of native advertisements*

Research Assistant, PROFESSOR Carol M. Liebler, Spring, 2014, Syracuse University,

Worked on the project of *a celebrity's body image*

Research Assistant, Professor Joon Soo Lim, Spring, 2014, Syracuse University, Worked on

the project of *social TV*

Visiting Fellow in **University of Sussex**, Supervisor: Professor Sue Thornham, 2009.9-2010.3,

Brighton, UK, Worked on *Feminist Film Theory*

TEACHING EXPERIENCES

Guest Lecturer, *Introduction to Chinese Media*, in the course of Introduction to Communication

Theory, Spring, 2014, Syracuse University, USA

Lecturer, *Introduction to Film and Television*, Winter, 2011, Hai Bing Film and Television
Professional Training School, China

Teaching Assistant and Lecturer, *Journalism Interview Methods*, Professor Du, Junfei, 2000.9
- 2001.1, Nanjing University, China

ACADEMIC AWARDS

2015 - 2016 **Syracuse University Graduate Fellowship (\$24,230)**, s. i. nEWHOUSE of Public
Communications, Syracuse University

2013 - 2014 **Liu Foundation Multicultural Scholarship (\$10,000)**, s. i. nEWHOUSE of Public
Communications, sYRACUSE uNIVERSITY

2009.9 - 2010.3 **The Scholarship for Visiting Scholar (approximately \$6,000)**, Graduate
School, Beijing Normal University

WORKING EXPERIENCE

Freelance (Filmmaker, Writer, & Translator), China, 2011 - 2013

- Served as an independent filmmaker for Fushan Features (a documentary film company)
- Wrote essays and translated articles for magazines and newspapers

Editor & Program Designer, China Movie Reports, CCTV-6, China, 2006 - 2007

- Focused on film/television events and trends, celebrities of media industry
- Organized the program assignments and offered guidance for reporters
- Led strategic development, content creation, and art style design of reports

Media Manager & Co-Owner, Renrenanxun Ads Company, China, 2004 - 2006

- Focused on online game industry
- Offered services as public relationship construction and media coverage maintenance

Reporter & Editor, China Weekly, CCTV-NEWS, China, 2003 - 2004

- Conducted a weekly report of an influential figure in Chinese social culture
- Conducted interviews, wrote scripting, directed shootings, and edited the program

Reporter & Editor, Culture Weekly, Jiangsu Province TV, China, 2002 - 2003

- Focused on culture trends, events and celebrities
- Conducted interviews, wrote scripting, directed shootings, and edited the program
-

PROFESSIONAL AWARDS

Two television programs are awarded by the Department of Culture Administrative in Jiangsu Province:

Chen, L. (2002), *Campus Drama in Nanjing University*, awarded as “Cultural Reports Prize”

Chen, L. (2002), *Campus Ballad: Flowing in Time*, awarded as “Cultural Reports Prize”

LANGUAGES

Proficient in Chinese and English

SKILLS

Research — SPSS; Qualtrics Survey; STATA

Profession — Final Cut Pro; Documentary filmmaking

AFFINITY

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication member

International Communication Association member & reviewer

Popular Communication Association member