Victims, Perpetrators and Professionals: The Representation of Women and Violence in Chinese Crime Films

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Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of women and violence in award-winning Chinese-language crime films. It introduces a new trajectory in the investigation of the cinematic representation of female figures in relation to gender issues by interweaving Western feminist and postfeminist critiques with traditional Chinese sociocultural discourses that maintain salience in contemporary society. Through an in-depth narrative and critical multimodal analysis, it identifies and examines three major representations of women in relation to violence – the female victim, the female perpetrator of violence and the female professional. In doing so, the study demonstrates the various ways in which Chinese crime films depict female victims, passive and active female perpetrators of violence and female professionals, all of which reinforce a sense of male dominance and patriarchal power. It bridges the gap in the field of the representation of females in Chinese culture and in Chinese film studies by being one of the first studies to systematically examine Chinese crime films as a genre. This thesis argues that while the depiction of female victimisation at the hands of men consolidates the notion of women's vulnerability and inferiority in Chinese society, the representation of female perpetrators of violence and as professional working women presents what may be seen as a postfeminist masquerade – a cultural strategy that presents an impression of female empowerment all the while reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies. While graphic female victimisation is commonly presented, female perpetrators of violence and females in professional roles in crime films are shown to remain under the control of male authorities, implying that Chinese crime films are produced in a context of heavy patriarchal power and misogyny.

Statement of Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “Victims, Perpetrators and Professionals: The Representation of Women and Violence in Chinese Crime Films” has not previously been submitted for a degree, nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree, to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by myself. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

Tingting HU

Publications during candidature

A part of Chapter 5 has been included in a journal article which has been accepted by the *Asian Studies Review* in 2018.

Publications included in this thesis

A part of Chapter 5 has been included in a journal article which has been accepted by the *Asian Studies Review* in 2018.

Contributions by others to the thesis

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Within the globalised Chinese society, the status of women has been enhanced and women have become much more visible in many areas of public life including in education and employment. Chinese cinema has reflected shifts in women's participation with many attactive representations of female protagonists being created to impress the audience especially in popular commercial films. However, the social, cultural and ideological discourses behind the seemingly splendid female characters remain hidden and are ripe for exploration. This thesis shines a light on the social, cultural and ideological discourses that condition female characters in Chinese films, with a focus on the crime film genre, and an emphasis on addressing the following questions: How are women represented in Chinese crime films? What cultural insights can be gained by applying a feminist and postfeminist theoretical framework to the analysis of the representations of females in Chinese crime films? In what ways do the representations of females in relation to violence in Chinese crime films reflect traditional Chinese values and contemporary Chinese socio-cultural norms?

Academic research on the representation of women in Chinese cinema has focused on prominent stars, directors, and films of the martial arts genre, while studies on the representation of females in other genres of contemporary Chinese commercial films is still largely absent. This study aims to bridge this gap by positioning the genre of crime films, which has long been a mainstream commercial genre, as the lens through which to interrogate the representation of women and violence. The aim is to understand the cinematic reflection of women's status and gender norms in Chinese socio-cultural discourse. This thesis contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the cinematic representation of women in violent situations. It offers insights into the representation of females in Chinese cinema through the application of feminist and postfeminist theories to the crime film genre. It considers the representation of women in such Chinese cinema in relation to both Western-orientated feminism and traditional Chinese cultural norms, which continue to be salient in the current socio-cultural discourse. The study provides insights into the representation of women in Chinese culture at a time when China and Chinese culture more generally are deeply engaged with Western/global norms.

Chinese Cinema in Transition

This study focuses on highly-acclaimed crime films produced after 2000 that received awards in at least one of the three most prestigious Greater Chinese film awards, including the Mainland-based *Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Awards* (GRHFA), the Hong Kong-

based *Hong Kong Film Awards* (HKFA), and the Taiwan-based *Golden Horse Awards* (GHA). These festivals are significant to viewers and filmmakers across the region and reflect mainstream Chinese values and perspectives across the Greater China region. All of the films selected for these awards have been produced in a Chinese language – predominantly Mandarin or Cantonese. While the GRHFA represents a government-sanctioned voice in Mainland China, the HKFA has had a particular focus on local Hong Kong films and the GHA has a broader horizon covering the films produced across the Greater China region. These three film awards interweave a Chinese film circle that awards and nominates prestigious mainstream works. The films have been judged by experts who seek to award the most creative films and acclaim these works as extraordinary pieces with good quality. At the same time, these works have had wide exposure amongst audiences at both national and international levels. Therefore, the analysis of award-winning films can contribute to uncovering wide-spread and well-received norms, including gender norms. In order to adequately analyse the representation of female characters, the criteria for including particular films in this study was that at least one female character had to have a leading role and an impact on the storyline. Based on this criteria, twenty-three films were chosen for in depth analysis.[1]

Mainland and Hong Kong films, respectively produced in Mandarin and Cantonese, are the focus of this study, although some Mainland actors/actresses may use Mandarin when they join a Hong Kong film crew because of their inability to speak fluent Cantonese and vice versa. These films generally have dubbed voices in the local language to make the stories understandable to the local audiences no matter whether they are screened on the Mainland or in Hong Kong. For more than a hundred years, from 1842 to 1997, Hong Kong was under British rule. It established a distinct identity positioned between the East and the West. After the 1997 handover from British rule, Hong Kong officially became a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Even though Hong Kong has retained a separate identity, the Mainland and Hong Kong have become increasingly intertwined. Furthermore, although Hong Kong experienced a century of colonial rule, it shares common cultural roots with the Mainland, including cultural values relating to gender issues. As the Hong Kong and Mainland economies have become increasingly intertwined, Hong Kong crime films have increasingly relied on the massive Mainland movie market where they are a popular

[1] For more details on the selection process and criteria, see Chapter 3.

commodity. The 2003 Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA)[2] has facilitated co-productions between the two regions, which has gradually blurred the boundaries between the Mainland and Hong Kong film industries, meaning that Hong Kong films have gradually focused on catering to Mainland tastes and culture (Liu, 2012). Only two of the twenty-three films analysed in this study have not screened on the Mainland. The two provide an alternative lens through which to evaluate the female representations in Hong Kong films without the influence of Mainland censors (*Port of Call* discussed in Chapter 4 and *Accident* in Chapter 5). Mainland and Hong Kong films have often been studied separately in academic scholarship given their different cultural contexts. However, given the integration between the two regions and industries, particularly in the production of crime films, it makes sense to examine them inclusively.

While the Taiwanese film industry has also been increasingly engaged with both the Mainland and Hong Kong markets, Taiwanese crime films were excluded from this study because of the limited number of crime films from Taiwan that were awarded in the three major Chinese language film awards. The only post-2000 award-winning Taiwanese crime film was *Monga* (*Meng Jia*, dir. Doze Niu, 2009), and this film does not focus on a female character. Nonetheless, award-winning crime films from the Taiwan-based film festival, the GHA, were included because the festival is open to Chinese-language films from Hong Kong and the Mainland and beyond and has awarded a considerable number of Mainland and Hong Kong-made crime films. The festival also has had considerable impact on the broader Chinese film circle.

This increasingly blurred boundary between the Mainland and Hong Kong film industries has become significant because CEPA marked a new trajectory for Hong Kong films in its interactions with the Mainland. According to CEPA, as long as there are no fewer than one-third of leading actors or actresses from the Mainland, regardless of the proportion of Mainlanders in the whole cast, Hong Kong produced films are allowed to be screened in the Mainland film market after passing the censors, similar to any other Mainland-made movie. Hong Kong investors have also been allowed to have a bigger share (over 75%) in operating and investing in movie theatres in the Mainland (Xuelin Zhou, 2016). Therefore, CEPA has

[2] See the website of The Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region https://www.tid.gov.hk/english/cepa/legaltext/cepa_legaltext.html for more details, access date 3 October 2018.

acted as the linkage between the Mainland and Hong Kong film industries and has enhanced the development of the Chinese film industry as a whole.

Despite the interactions between the two entities, Hong Kong cinema continues to project a quasi-national identity in terms of its geopolitical cultural distinction from the Mainland. Hong Kong cinema has been involved in a triangular relationship between the coloniser, the motherland and itself (Yingchi Chu, 2003). China's historical and cultural resources, and stylistic and generic conventions have played a particularly significant part in the aesthetic, thematic and cultural dimensions of Hong Kong films. As Chu (2003, p. 137) has noted:

> Film performance and star images construct and present images of both Hong Kong and China. Given that national identity depends on exclusion to make sense of itself, the cultural distinction of Hong Kong perceived as both Hong Kong and China produced for film a quasi-national identity. Film is quasi-national, because its texts were based on both the exclusion and the inclusion of China's cultural identity.

From this perspective, the quasi-national identity of Hong Kong cinema supports its projection of China's cultural identity. Therefore, in terms of gender issues, the insights into gender representations in Hong Kong films can contribute to an understanding of the broader Chinese gender norms that have been exported into the Mainland.

The 1997 Handover and 2003 CEPA mark turning points towards a significant transformation of Hong Kong cinema away from local values and towards meeting the needs of the Mainland market. Before 1997, Hong Kong cinema revitalised its local identity through emphasizing its differences with the Mainland (Stephen Teo, 2004). It took a "privileged position" within broader Chinese culture because of its ability to reflect "the history of contemporary Hong Kong with all its anxieties and contradictions" (Ackbar Abbas, 1997, p.17). The 1997 Handover stirred up anxieties about the impending invasion by the Mainland, while local films showed a nostalgic trend with themes of destiny and fate with allegorical treatments of the impending handover (Cheuk-to Li, 1990). After the 1997 Handover, however, CEPA marked a shift from the previous condition that Hong Kong films needed to compete with Hollywood blockbusters to be one of the few selected to screen on the Mainland, which has had a strict international import quota. Under CEPA, Mainland-Hong Kong co-productions have now been classified as domestic films and are allowed to screen in the Mainland as long as they pass the censors and are exempt from the Mainland's

foreign film quota restriction (Yiman Wang, 2013). CEPA has allowed the Hong Kong film industry to generate considerable profits and has motivated Hong Kong filmmakers' moves northward, establishing a new cooperative mode of operation for Hong Kong cinema. In this context, Hong Kong cinema faces a challenge around its ability to retain its local identity when it undertakes co-productions with the Mainland, which have become the dominant form of production in Hong Kong since the downturn in the film industry following the global financial crisis (Ernest Chan, 2011; Chi-fai Wong, 2010).

Accompanied by criticism and controversy about the decline of the typical Hong Kong film style, post-2003 Hong Kong films have presented an obvious transformation in themes, content and production to meet the requirements of the Mainland censors. As Sun (2018) has noted, contemporary Hong Kong cinema has been experiencing a dynamic process of political and cultural osmosis under the PRC government's top-down policy-making and intervention (Esther Yau, 2005). Thus, CEPA has not only led to economic integration between the Mainland and Hong Kong film industries but has motivated a new transformation of cultural values in Hong Kong films. As Zhou (2016) has indicated, the transition has attempted to redefine Hong Kong cinema as 'big Chinese cinema' (*da zhonghua dianying*) (Baoxian Zhong, 2014) or 'Chinese-Hong Kong cinema' (*zhongguo xianggang dianying*) (Hsin-i. Liu, 2010). From this perspective, Mainland-Hong Kong co-productions have been perceived as a homologation of Hong Kong and the Mainland in terms of gender norms, while local Hong Kong films have provided an alternative spectrum through which to evaluate gendered representation without the influence of Mainland censors.

From a global perspective, the post-2000 era reflects a period of prosperity in the Chinese film industry, with high production values, impressive artistry, and a substantial box office within China and overseas. China's joining of the WTO in 2001 spearheaded a new epoch in the development of Chinese films by opening the Chinese film market to the world and allowing more frequent cooperation with international studios. Chinese cinema has gradually become a regular participant in various international film festivals. Globalisation has had a considerable impact on Chinese production values, including cultural ideas about the roles and representations of men and women. While Chinese values have been influenced by global ideas, particularly from the West, there remains a strong undercurrent of traditional values, particularly Confucian values that have long underpinned the dominant state ideology and standard of high culture in China. While Confucian tenets were repudiated in the early

days of Communist China after the PRC's establishment in 1949, in the 21st century, they made a comeback to be upheld by the PRC as a flag of Chinese culture, a national icon and have largely engaged with consumer culture. The PRC has utilised the favourable content of Confucianism, such as social harmony, respect for authorities, obedience to superiors, devotion to the state and protection of the family to stabilise the society and regulate the people (Ya-chen Chen, 2011; Xianlin Song, 2003). Therefore, key Confucian tenets, including harmony, benevolence, righteousness, obedience and loyalty, also underpin filmic productions, including gendered representation in the crime genre as produced in and across both the Mainland and Hong Kong.

The Waves of Western Feminism

This study draws on Western feminist and postfeminist theories which were developed under the influence of the second-wave of feminism from the 1970s. This section briefly discusses the three waves of Western feminism and postfeminism and introduces the historical and social context of feminist and postfeminist theories in order to understand the connection to and separation from the Chinese feminist context. The first wave of feminism occurred during the 19th and early 20th centuries throughout the Western world. It focused on legal issues, primarily on gaining the right to vote. As a leading figure, British writer, Mary Wollstonecraft, published one of the first feminist treatises, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she advocated the social and moral equality of the sexes. The first wave of feminism was primarily led by white women from the middle class, and it was not until the second wave of feminism that women of colour began developing a voice (Rampton, 2015). Feminism became a politically motivated ideology, which rose from the conversation about the reform and correction of democracy based on egalitarian conditions (Karen Offen, 1988). The first wave of feminism influenced China's May Fourth Movement[3] in 1919

[3] The May Fourth Movement (五四运动; *Wǔsì Yùndòng*) was an anti-imperialist, cultural, and political movement growing out of student participants in Beijing on 4 May 1919, protesting against the Chinese government's weak response to the Treaty of Versailles, especially allowing Japan to receive territories in Shandong that had been surrendered by Germany after the Siege of Tsingtao. These demonstrations sparked national protests and marked an upsurge of Chinese nationalism, a shift towards political mobilisation and away from cultural activities, and a move towards a populist base rather than intellectual elites. Many political and social leaders of the next decades emerged at this time.

The term 'May Fourth Movement' in a broader sense often refers to the period of 1915–1921, more often called the New Culture Movement, which sprang from the disillusionment with traditional Chinese culture following the failure of the Chinese Republic – founded in 1912 – to address China's problems. Intellectuals, such as Chen Duxiu, Cai Yuanpei, Li Dazhao, Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, and Hu Shi had classical educations but began to lead a revolt against Confucianism. They called for the creation of a new Chinese culture based on global and Western standards, especially democracy and science.

during which many elite thinkers advocated the banishment of the backward traditional culture and the promotion of women's rights. This period was widely recognised as the first wave of Chinese feminism (see Chapter 2 for more details).

The second wave of feminism began in the US in the early 1960s and lasted around two decades. It quickly spread across the Western world, with the aim of increasing equality for women by gaining more than just voting rights. While the first wave of feminism focused mainly on suffrage and overturning legal obstacles to gender equality, the second wave of feminism broadened the debate to include a wider range of issues, including sexuality, domesticity, employment, reproductive rights, de facto inequalities, and legal inequalities (Elinor Burkett, 2017). With the influence of the second wave of feminism and women's studies in the 1960s and 1970s, early feminist film theories focused on two directions: "images of women in films", which was characterised by a sociological approach and focused on uncovering stereotypes of women, mostly in Hollywood films in the US context (e.g., Marjorie Rosen, 1975; Molly Haskell, 1987); and "woman as image", which was more predominant in the United Kingdom and primarily focused on the ways in which women were objectified onscreen (Joanne Hollows, 2000). It was heavily structuralist[4], semiotic[5] and psychoanalytically[6] focused, with key theorists including Claire Johnston (1973, 1974, 1975), Pam Cook (1974) and Laura Mulvey (1975). In China, the 1960s and 1970s was a period during which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led the country through the Cultural Revolution[7] (1966-1976) during which Maoism was upheld as the dominant ideology. During this period in which the PRC was significantly isolated from the rest of the world, it was

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As in this historical period, the Qing dynasty had just ended in 1912, which marked the end of thousands of years of feudal monarchy; then, the Nationalist Party and warlords took power with the rise of nationalism as an ideology.

[4] Structuralism is a methodology that implies that elements of human culture must be understood by way of their relationship to a broader, overarching system or structure. See more in Sturrock, J. (2008). *Structuralism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

[5] Semiotics is the study of signs. It includes the study of signs and sign processes, indication, designation, likeness, analogy, allegory, metonymy, metaphor, symbolism, signification, and communication. See more in Chandler, D. (2002). *Semiotics: The basics*. London, UK: Psychology Press. Sebeok, T. A. (2001). *Signs: An introduction to semiotic*. Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press.

[6] Psychoanalysis is a set of theories and therapeutic techniques related to the study of the unconscious mind, which together form a method of treatment for mental health disorders. See more in Milton, J., Polmear, C., & Fabricius, J. (2011). *A Short Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

[7] The Cultural Revolution was a socio-political movement in China from 1966 until 1976. Launched by Mao Zedong, its stated goal was to preserve CCP-style Communism by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society, and to re-impose Mao Zedong Thought (known outside China simply as Maoism) as the dominant ideology within the Party. The Revolution marked Mao's return to a position of power after the failures of his Great Leap Forward. The movement politically paralysed China and negatively affected the country's economy and society to a significant degree.

widely believed that gender equality was achieved in socialist China and foreign thoughts were to a great extent officially banned from China as they were seen as a threat to socialism. Thus, the second wave of feminism was not introduced widely into China at that time. While China began to open up to Western influences from the late 1970s and to a greater extent from the 1990s, feminist film theories have been slow to catch on. Both directions of early feminist theories are useful to this thesis because the key ideas are underpinned by the notion that film languages reproduce patriarchal ideology and its spectators as subjects of patriarchal ideology.

The third wave of feminism began in the early 1990s in the US, and it was grounded in the civil-rights advances of the second wave of feminism and informed by post-colonial and post-modern8 thinking with an emphasis on individualism and diversity (Jennifer Baumgardner & Amy Richards, 2000). With the rapid development of cyberspace in the late 1990s and early 2000s, feminists were able to reach a global audience allowing for a broadened discussion on the need to abolish gender-role stereotypes and expanded the discussion of feminism to include women with diverse racial and cultural identities (Laura Brunell, 2008; Rosemarie Tong, 2009). In this phase, many constructs were de-stabilised, including the notions of universal womanhood, body, gender, sexuality and heteronormativity. With an emphasis on girl power, the key ideas of the third wave of feminism cover women's empowerment, eschewing victimization and defining feminine beauty for themselves as subjects, not as objects of a sexist patriarchy (Martha Rampton, 2015). The third wave of feminists used the term 'the third wave' because they believed it was an expression of having grown up with the second wave but were addressing different issues to their predecessors (Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004). In China, the period of the 1990s is known as the post-reform era as it experienced rapid development as a result of privatisation and individualisation. However, even in this context when China was opening up to the West, Mainland-based scholars continued to reject Western feminist thought as they

[8] Postcolonialism is about the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands. Colonialism refers either to a system of government or to an ideology or world view underlying that system, while postcolonialism represents an ideological response to colonialist thought, rather than simply describing a system that comes after colonialism. Postcolonialism is fuelled by postmodernism, with which it shares certain concepts and methods, and may be thought of as a reaction to or departure from colonialism in the same way postmodernism is a reaction to modernism. Modernism is a philosophical movement that happened along with cultural trends and changes, arose from wide-scale and far-reaching transformations in Western society during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Postmodernism is a broad movement that developed in the mid- to late 20th century across philosophy, the arts, architecture, and criticism and that marked a departure from modernism. See more in Butler, C. (2002). *Postmodernism: A very short introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, Young, R, J, C. (2003). *Postcolonialism: A very short introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

believed that Chinese women were different from Western women and that Western thoughts were not applicable in the Chinese context (Xiaojiang Li, 1998). Hence, to date, third-wave feminist theories have rarely been applied in Chinese film scholarship on the Mainland and beyond.

The term 'postfeminism' became popular in media studies in North America and Europe during the 2000s in discussions of whether or not feminism was needed anymore. It emerged in response to the mainstream stance that the problems addressed by feminists had been solved, thus making feminism redundant (Jane Gerhard, 2005). Susan Faludi is a precursor to studies focusing on this cultural shift. Her book *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (1991) sparked the debate by asking if feminism was dead or alive. According to Faludi (1991), various media formats, including journalism, news, TV shows, films, and the experts who created them, possessed a profound anti-feminist sentiment which downplayed the achievements of potentially powerful women. These women were believed to be *too* powerful, so the patriarchal order utilised the hegemonic force of the media to draw attention to the drawbacks of women's success, such as the difficulties in combining work and family life. This posited feminist aims as problematic and contributed to claims of its redundancy.

Postfeminist theoretical framework has been pervasively applied in the Western film context but rarely in the Chinese context. Theoretically, it coincides with a shift from psychoanalysis popular in the second wave of feminism to consumer culture[9]. In the context of media culture, postfeminism recognises young women as empowered consumers, yet its most prominent feature disavows feminism as necessary politics. The engagement of feminist values within popular media and consumer culture has led to a condition in which feminism can be "taken into account", suggesting that gender equality has been achieved and feminism is no longer needed (Angela McRobbie, 2004, p. 255). Within the market-orientated and globalised contemporary society, postfeminist discussions in the Western context share some common features with socio-cultural discourses in China, where young women have attracted a great deal of attention along with increasing visibility in various public arenas, becoming educated professionals, and gaining the freedom to make their own choices professionally

[9] Consumer culture focuses on the spending of the customers money on material goods to attain a lifestyle in a capitalist economy. It is a theory in marketing strategic planning that considers the relationship consumers have with certain products or services. See more in Lury, C. (2011). *Consumer culture*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press; Goodman, D. J. & Cohen, M. (2004). *Consumer culture: A reference handbook*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

and domestically. With the key works of women's power and free choices, contemporary China has shown to engage with global postfeminist ideas including discourses around women's visible femininity and sexiness and their individualistic behaviours, which makes postfeminist theories applicable to the Chinese context. With the aim of understanding gender norms in China, postfeminist theories can be applied to decode the interaction between women and consumer culture in social discourse in order to gain a deeper understanding of the dominant patriarchal ideology. This study considers what cultural insights can be gained by applying feminist and postfeminist theoretical frameworks to the analysis of female representation in post-2000 award-winning Chinese crime films. Furthermore, violence against women or used by women is not a gender issue alone but also intersects with discourses on class and race. While class and race are not the foci of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge that women's images are produced through a confluence of prevalent narratives of race and gender, which Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) refers to as 'representational intersectionality'. For instance, the male and female protagonists in one of the selected films, *One Nite in Mongkok* (2004), are represented as villagers from the Mainland and working in Hong Kong as a hitman and a prostitute. Both of them are the victims of violence and bullied by the local gangsters, which gives us a glimpse at the tension between class, gender and violence.

With the aim of understanding women's status and gender norms in Chinese culture through a focus on the representation of females in Chinese crime films, the film theories of Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz help to explain the connection between gender, film and ideology[10]. Baudry (1970) has argued that cinema acts as a mirror reflecting a fantasy of reality that is ideology itself. Based on Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis of mirroring and Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's concept of ideology, Baudry (1970) developed his discussion in two ways: on the one hand, he argued that the audience aligns with the camera to feel a sense of control over the images; and on the other hand, cinematic narratives and editing styles contribute to the construction of films that are received by the audience unconsciously. Baudry (1970) argued that "it is an apparatus destined to obtain a precise ideological effect, necessary to the dominant ideology: creating a fantasmatisation of the subject, it collaborates with a marked efficacy in the maintenance of idealism" (p. 46). Baudry (1970) contended that ideology functions negatively since it shapes people by its

[10] Although Baudry and Metz's classic film theories are relatively dated, this study applies them as a fundamental foundation for understanding the interaction between gender, film and ideology. While Baudry's theories help to explain the relationship between film and reality, Metz's theories contribute to understanding how spectators read films.

instruction but appears as the people's own choice, while cinema is regarded as an essential tool to help ideology function. Applied to this study, Chinese crime films will be seen to reflect an ongoing and long-standing dominant ideology of the patriarchy in which the male subject is heroic and the female subject submissive. Baudry's (1970) critique lays the foundation for feminist theorists to study how women's oppression is constructed in cinema and also justifies the understanding of women's status by studying their representation in films.

From the perspective of spectatorship, cinema has been viewed as the site of an imaginary relationship for the spectator, though the structure informing that relationship is hidden (Metz, 1982). For Metz (1982), a film is more like a discourse articulated from a specific and tendentious perspective than a simple story. Both Baudry (1970) and Metz (1982) have theorised the impact of narrative structures on spectators and their engagement, which established the basis for feminist film theories that help to uncover how films work as a system of signifiers as they interact with viewers' imaginations and reinforce social structures. Similarly, this study views films as a medium that represents the dominant ideology of the patriarchy as it disseminates ideal messages and gendered representations to viewers in order to reinforce its leading position. In this way, the analysis of the representation of females in Chinese films will pave the way towards a deeper understanding of the kinds of female images that are expected and approved under the dominant Chinese ideology.

Conceptualising Film Violence

With a particular focus on crime films, this study approaches violence as the key activity through which to analyse female figures in Chinese cinema. Violence is a notoriously complex concept. J. David Slocum (2001) termed violence an action or behaviour that causes harm or injuries that can be physical, psychological or even sociological. In addition, the threat of harm or injury can often be as disturbing as the act itself. Structural violence can emerge from conditions that inscribe "a given set of social or cultural relations without necessarily clarifying the reasons for or consequences of specific actions", such as racism, sexism, homophobia, classism or xenophobia (Slocum, 2001, p. 2). In this sense, violence may be seen as a complicated cultural process and can be understood through the examination of socio-cultural discourses. Max Weber (1947) formulated the distinction between violence and coercive force, which relies heavily on notions of legitimacy that are deeply rooted in society. The state has the power to maintain a monopolistic legitimacy

through coercive force, while individuals are only allowed to use violence in certain extreme circumstances, such as in self-defence and war. This distinction between legitimacy and illegitimacy suggests the power of discourse to decide whether certain actions are violent. One typical example here is domestic violence, which mainly refers to violent actions that happen "outside the public realm for which notions of legitimacy are most easily applied" (Slocum, 2001, p. 3). Such violent behaviours are mostly outside the purview of what is considered legitimate or not.

With a focus on uncovering representations of women's status in Chinese contexts, this study examines female characters' engagement with violence in the film world, including an analysis of female victims who are physically or mentally suppressed by male violence, as well as female perpetrators who use violence to harm others, whether for self-protection, revenge, wealth or other reasons. It examines representations of the legitimacy of violence against and by women in Chinese crime films, with a consideration of differences between men and women.

Violence has long been used in films as an aesthetic formula to attract the audience's attention. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Barbara Creed (1998) has argued that the film industry can be viewed as a mechanistic apparatus that places the audience in a god-like position and offers them a sense of control. Film provides spectators not only with a viewing pleasure, but also a fantasy of at least perceptual control over the world (David Hansen-Miller, 2011). With the assumption of cinema as a communicative medium between the audience and social ideology, this study contributes to an understanding of social and cultural attitudes towards women and engages with the types of female images that are encouraged to be accepted by the audience in Chinese culture. The cinematic representation of violence opens a portal to a space where women are closely involved in crime and violent activities that hardly have a chance to be witnessed in reality.

Michel Foucault's (1977) concept of the "spectacle of the scaffold" is a useful tool for explaining the relationship between films and the audience. It is used to describe the torture and execution that is carried out by authorities in public to show their authoritative power in order to reinforce their dominance. This notion can also describe the relationship between the authoritative power that lies behind the production of the film and the viewers who are gathered to watch it. The authorities rely on violence to rule, while the scaffold becomes a stage on which to perform its capacity and show their power to the viewers by executing or

publicly punishing criminals. Foucault's (1977) explanation fosters a sense that the cinematic representation of violence is displayed by a kind of social power that utilises narrative strategies to softly cultivate its perception of reality with the audience. In this study, the social power is the patriarchal order that expresses the ideology of male dominance and female inferiority through the showcase of violence.

Film violence has long been topical in debates around gender and representation. It is regarded as an entry point for the discussion of shifts, trends and tropes of gender representation as well as gender transgressions. Research on the representation of females and violence has played a vital role in both film and feminist theories, which have focused on such notions as sadism, masochism, power, and the body (Lisa Coulthard, 2007). Violence in films has been used as a catalyst for narration and stylistic and aesthetic spectacle to dramatise plots and conflicts between characters. Representations of violence against women and by women have been analysed in relation to whether they act as markers of anti-feminist recidivism and masculinisation or of feminist power and progress. They can also indicate regressive or dominant ideological constructions of violence and gender under the guise of liberative or subversive fantasies (Coulthard, 2007).

In scholarly research, film violence has been traditionally studied for its effects on viewers, while cinematic representation of violence has also garnered a great deal of critical attention, including in the Asian context (e.g., Chua Beng Huat & Charles Leary, 2011; Laikwan Pang, 2005), with Teo (2011) and Ma Ning (2011) having focused on representations of violence in Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese films, respectively. In the Western context, four key anthologies (Stephen Prince, 1999; Christopher Sharrett, 1999; Slocum, 2001; and Martha McCaughey and Neal King, 2001) have investigated violence as a filmic element, namely, among which McCaughey and King (2001) have a particular emphasis on women and violence, though focus only on the image of the woman warrior. None of these has been concerned with representations of females in relation to violence in crime films specifically.

While there have been many useful studies of gender and violence in an Asian context, this study draws most strongly on Hilary Neroni's (2005) framework for its usefulness in examining the interactions between women and violence and applicability across cultural contexts. This framework was articulated in her monograph, *The Violent Women: Femininity, Narrative and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema*, in which she closely examined interactions between women and violence in film narratives. In this book, she analysed

violent female characters in contemporary American films drawing on psychoanalytical film theories, arguing that violent female characters disrupt the norms of cinematic narratives and challenge cultural ideals. Considering Hollywood as a powerful ideological machine, Neroni (2005) systematically examined the representation of violent women by uncovering a typical narrative structure, drawing on Gunning (1996), who regarded violence as a distinct filmic form of narrative rather than just an element of narrative. Tom Gunning's (1996) notion is different from the discussion of theorists from the 1960s to 1980s, such as David Bordwell (1985) who saw violence as simply a part of the narrative structure of a film, which was primarily aimed at attracting the audience's interest in dramatic conflicts and plot twists, and Metz (1967) who saw narrative as a key element of a film's structure. In light of Gunning's discussion, Neroni (2005) contended that violence in films cannot exist on its own; it coexists with and rests on a narrative framework, because the narrative provides the background and conditions through which violence acquires its meanings.[11]

Neroni's (2005) notion that screen violence is tightly interrelated with ideology makes her framework highly applicable to this study, which aims to investigate the ways in which the interrelations between women and violence reflect mainstream patriarchal ideologies on gender and power din the Chinese context. For Neroni (2005), violence appears to erupt when the narrative structure breaks down. In other words, the ideological norms in the film world breaks down. On the one hand, violence functions as an approach to stop this failure, helping ideology, or acting as the supplement to it. On the other hand, violence challenges the ideology, representing a threat to the ideological stability. This study will draw on Neroni (2005), which is the unique contribution of intersectional scholarship in femininity and violence, to show that representations of masculine violence in Chinese crime films mainly act as aids to stabilise the patriarchal order, while representations of female violence often comes across as rebellion that threatens the stability of this ideology.

Defining Crime Films

In this study, the genre of crime films has been chosen as the lens through which to explore the representation of females in relation to violence. Crime films have seldom been analysed as a genre in the field of Chinese film studies. This contrasts with numerous studies on the genres of kung fu or martial arts (e.g., Rong Cai, 2005; Chen, 2012; Louise Edwards, 2011). Nicole Rafter (2000) has argued that the crime genre is a dynamic interplay of art and life,

[11] For a narrative analysis, see more in Chapter 3.

which reflects ideas about fundamental social, economic and political issues, and tends to influence the ways people think about these issues. In some ways, crime films offer the audience contradictory kinds of satisfaction, including the fulfilment of people's real fears, the fantasy of overcoming these realities, the pleasure of being involved in forbidden and illegal realms, and the security of escaping from these realms in the end. Although this study does not focus on the audience's reception, it assumes that crime films play an important artistic role in presenting issues of social concern. Representations of crime, including violence against women and exerted by women, are interconnected with relationships between filmmakers, audiences and society as well as changing political and cultural values (Delthia E. Miller & John, L McMullan, 2011). Like other genres, crime films can construct and reflect popular perceptions of social issues, including the status of males and females (Souha R. Ezzedeen, 2013), and also offer commentary on the politics of everyday life (Gary Cavender & Nancy Jurik, 2012). Hence, an analysis of the representations of women in crime films can contribute to an understanding of the social interpretations of women, crime and social issues in the film world and beyond.

The definition of crime films in this study draws on definitions offered by Rafter (2000) and Thomas Leitch (2002). Rafter (2000) sees crime films as "an umbrella term", primarily focusing on "crime and its consequences" and covering several smaller and coherent categories including detective movies, gangster movies, police and prison movies, courtroom dramas, and many other sub-genres without generic labels (p. 5). Leitch (2002) provides a more specific definition by indicating the three stock characters in crime films, namely, the criminal who commits the crime, the victim who suffers from the crime, and the avenger or detective who investigates the crime in order to bring the criminal to justice and maintain the social order, although the boundaries between these characters can sometimes be blurred. Drawing on these definitions, this study focuses on films of crime stories that centralise the narration of crime and its consequences, with typical stock characters of the criminal, victim and avenger/detective.

Crime films have a strong focus on violence, and as Nick Browne (2000) has illustrated, violence is a "signature gesture" of crime films (p. 14). Violence in the crime films discussed in this study refers to the illegal violence of the criminal as well as socially-sanctioned violence (Kirsten Moana Thompson, 2007). The criminal plays the role of a sacrificial scapegoat who symbolically uses violence to stimulate desires to antagonise society, while his or her final execution or imprisonment fulfils the social requirement for ritual punishment

(René Girard, 1979, 1986). The examination of film violence in this study particularly concentrates on the violent activities that have involved women, including violence committed by criminals against women and violence committed by women themselves. In doing so, the examination of women and violence in crime films offers an insightful and dramatic lens through which to examine power dynamics between the genders in Chinese culture.

This study also applies Rafter's (2000) dialectical approach to consider crime films as a two-way medium that "draw(s) from and in turn shape(s) social thought about crime and its plays" (p. 7). Rather than seeking to understand the relationship between social reality and filmic representation, it focuses on the ideological messages that are embodied or interpreted in cinematic representations. As film theorist, E. Ann Kaplan (1983), has explained, ideology may be seen as the myths that a society lives by rather than beliefs people consciously hold. Such myths appear to be the natural and unproblematic "reality" that the society is seen to be based on (p.12-13). In this context, the myths describe people's fundamental beliefs about the construction of the world - what is right or wrong, and what is valuable or not (Rafter, 2000). Ideology is obviously relative to power. By looking upon the blind faith in the patriarchal order as a kind of myth in the Chinese ideological system, part of the aim of this study is to investigate how crime films negotiate this ideological power by representing the female characters' violent activities in order to understand the interaction between filmic representation and power.

Producing and reading crime stories can be seen as a form of cultural work in which society comes to terms with this deviance or social transgression (Karen Halttunen, 1998). Violence and crime in films challenge the social or institutional order and metaphorically demonstrate the fragility of the social contract. As Leitch (2002) has stated, crime films primarily reinforce a series of social barometers. For instance, violence that is used by heroes with good intentions positively confirms the distinctiveness of the moral and legal order. It allows the viewers to maintain the sense that the society is stable and safe because the law-abiding citizens are clear about what is right and wrong. Such Chinese values as harmony, righteousness and loyalty are established based on the patriarchal order. Crime films work to dramatise violent conflicts and reinforce the beliefs of patriarchy as the basis for the highest moral and legal orders, which in turn helps viewers to keep faith in them.

Based on this definition of crime films, this study identifies three main female portraits according to women's engagement with violence, namely female victims who are physically or emotionally harmed by male counterparts; female perpetrators who use violence for self-defence or to actively harm others; female bystanders who participate in the violent activities (e.g. crime investigating, criminal actions) but who are neither being harmed nor using violence against others. To examine these representations, the study involves an analysis of twenty-three award-winning films from Mainland China, Hong Kong and coproductions. Corresponding films include female victim-centred *The Accidental Spy* (2001)*, One Night in Mongkok* (2004), *Confession of Pain* (2006), *Protégé* (2007), *Flash Point* (2007), *The Beast Stalker* (2008), *Connected* (2008), *Sparrow* (2008), *Overheard* (2009), *The Bullet Vanishes* (2012), *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (2014), *Port of Call* (2015); female perpetrator-centred *Nightfall* (2012), *The Stool Pigeon* (2010), *Divergence* (2005), *Accident* (2009) and *Overheard* 3 (2014), and female professional-centred *2000 AD* (2000), *Breaking News* (2004), *A World Without Thieves* (2004), *Eye in the Sky* (2007), *Life Without Principle* (2011) and *Silent Witness* (2013).

Thesis Outline

This chapter has introduced the objective of this thesis which is to examine the representation of females in Chinese-language crime films, and has explained why both Mainland and Hong Kong-produced films should be discussed in tandem given the close cultural interrelationship between the two regions. By briefly mapping out the three Western feminist waves and postfeminism, introducing the concept of film violence and introducing the crime genre, this chapter has explained the theoretical groundwork for this thesis, which attempts to place the analysis of Chinese crime films within the global debates on feminist film and gender studies.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, focuses on gender discourse in Chinese contexts, particularly PRC China, and deepens the discussion of the theoretical framework of the study. The first part contextualises the historical discourse on gender in China with a focus on the impact of Confucian thought on gender norms. It introduces the concept of the Confucian *nei-wai* (inner-outer) realms, which is used as a framework in the analytical sections. It then provides a detailed overview of the three waves of the feminist movement in both the PRC Mainland and Hong Kong SAR to provide further grounding for understanding feminism in the current PRC cultural context. This is followed by a review of studies on the representation of females in Chinese-language films and other media formats, which will be used as a basis for comparison with the representations of women uncovered in this study. Building on the

theories briefly introduced in Chapter 1, the third part of Chapter 2 explains the second-wave of Western feminist and postfeminist discourse in more depth.

Chapter 3 is the methodological section, which explains in depth the criteria for the selection of crime films that form the basis of this study. The films selected were all awarded in one or more of the three most prestigious Chinese film festivals between 2001 and 2016. It then specifies the research approach of critical and multimodal discourse analysis, as well as framing and film text analysis, with a focus on narrative, visual and audio elements, which are used to analyse the selected films.

Chapters 4 to 6 are the analytical chapters that respectively analyse representations of female victims, perpetrators and professionals in the selected Chinese crime films. Chapter 4 engages classic feminist film theories and the concept of masquerade to explore issues of female objectification and victimisation. Chapter 5 draws on classic feminist film theories to examine the subjectivity of passive female perpetrators of violence and postfeminist theories (the concept of the postfeminist masquerade) to analyse active female perpetrators of violence. With a focus on applying the notion of the postfeminist masquerade, Chapter 6 investigates the representation of female professionals who are engaged in violence and which seemingly attempt to show women's empowerment, but really work as a patriarchal strategy to reinforce male dominance.

The conclusion (Chapter 7) provides a reflection on the key arguments of this thesis, and compares the findings with broader discourses on Chinese feminism. By addressing the similarities and differences between Chinese feminism and Western feminism, it also further discusses women's oppression and gender norms in relation to the current Chinese political discourse. Potential directions for future research in Chinese feminist and cinema studies are also offered.

Chapter 2. A Literature Review: Representations of Women in Chinese Culture and Overview of Feminist Film Theories

This chapter begins with an overview of the historical discourse on gender in China with a focus on the Confucian impact on gender norms by introducing the concept of the Confucian *nei-wai* (inner-outer) realms. It then provides an overview of the three waves of the feminist movement in both the PRC Mainland and Hong Kong SAR to provide a grounding for understanding feminism in the contemporary PRC cultural context. The chapter then reviews a range of studies on the representation of females in Chinese films and other media formats, which can be usefully compared to the findings in this study. Building on the theories briefly introduced in Chapter 1, it ends with an in-depth explanation of the second-wave of Western feminist and postfeminist discourse and explains the application of the theories to this study in the Chinese context.

Chinese Culture and Discourses on Women

Gender discourse in China and the Confucian nei-wai realms

Traditional Chinese gender discourse has primarily been influenced by Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, among which Confucianism has been dominant. Confucianism has been the state ideology in China for over two thousand years and its features are male dominance, female subordination and heterosexual hegemony. Although it was banished by the Communist government during the first 30 years of the establishment of the PRC from 1949 when Marxism was the CCP's guiding ideological principle, the canonization of Confucianism returned in the reform era, particularly from the 1990s. In the pre-modern, polygamic society (before 1840), a man in Chinese society was allowed to have concubines through which they sought to bear male heirs to carry on the patrilineal line of the family. The husband had absolute authority over the wife and concubines, while women were expected to follow the 'Three Obediences and Four Virtues' as a moral principle (Xiaoya, Gao, 2003). The 'Three Obediences' explained that a woman should obey her father before marriage, follow her husband's lead in marriage and obey her son after her husband dies. The 'Four Virtues' mainly described the requirement for women to be diligent, subservient and chaste, and most importantly, to unconditionally submit to the existing patriarchal order. Because the family system functioned as the basic unit of social order in ancient China, Confucian ideology stipulated that a man's role as the leader of the household endowed the male with dominant power. Based on the historical, economic and political allocation of power to men, male desires could be realised through social force, which reinforced male dominance (Shuqin Cui, 1996). In contrast, women in traditional China who were separated

from the public world and kept within the family and kinship, were regarded as a group without personal identities.

In both the traditional Western and Chinese contexts, the woman has been understood as a cultural being rather than a natural being (de Beauvior, [1949] 2015), meaning that the cultural identity of women has been produced rather than assumed to be innate. In the Chinese context, Chinese women have primarily been perceived through familial and kinship roles rather than their social roles (Lisa Rosenlee, 2006). Such a gender norm in Chinese discourse needs to be understood within the framework of Confucianism since it has consistently been perceived as the moral backbone and the grand synthesis of Chinese high culture. As a state ideology throughout pre-modern China, Confucianism has been considered as the root of women's oppression. Though Chinese society has undergone significant social changes in the modern era, this traditional hierarchical structure kinship system continues to underpin many areas of contemporary Chinese society.

This study applies the philosophical framework of Rosenlee (2006), in particular, the realms of *nei* and *wai* in the Confucian discourse to understand women's status in China. The *nei-wai* framework acts as a gender distinction, based on the assignment of men to the realm of *wai* (public sphere, involving personal accomplishment and extra-familial relations) and women to the realm of *nei* (domestic sphere, involving concealment, practical household management and familial, and kinship relations). The *nei* realm refers to the limited functional roles in which women have mainly been allocated, as a daughter, wife and mother and who are viewed as serving and perpetuating the patrilineal line. In this context, female personhood is barely realised unless a woman is situated in a familial structure or attached to a male leader, who is usually a husband, a father or a son. These roles have been deeply rooted in Chinese culture and has impacted on cinematic representations, especially in crime cinema, which is often centred by male protagonists and created by male filmmakers.

The disparity between the realms of *nei* and *wai* bespeaks the distinction between men and women in Chinese social discourse (Rosenlee, 2006). In this system where the man is privileged as the sole bearer of patrilineage, a woman is rarely endowed with a permanent social place of her own without entering a marriage, which indicates the nameless nature of a woman's personhood. Thus, marriage becomes the only legitimate social recognition for a woman in this system. However, this condition does not apply to the man. In other words, marriage is regarded as a definitive marker of womanhood (Rosenlee, 2006). As Rubie S.

Watson (1991) has declared, a Chinese woman cannot be and is not fully personalised. Furthermore, the *nei-wai* model signifies a functional distinction that allocates the propriety of two spheres for two genders and the normative, gender-based division of labour. Women who are assigned to the *nei* realm are expected to have domestic skills and take responsibility of household management, while men tend to engage in a more extensive *wai* realm of literary learning and the political sphere. The theorisation of *nei-wai* helps to understand the historical and cultural spatial binary of men and women within Confucianism. As Lisa Raphals (1998) has suggested, the distinction between men and women is better understood as a functional rather than a physical, social and intellectual separation. In this study, the concepts of *nei* and *wai* are used in conjunction with Western feminist theories to explain the female-male binary from both a traditional Chinese and Western feminist standpoints. This unique application of Chinese and Western theory helps situate Chinese films within a contemporary Chinese context which reflects both ongoing cultural traditions and contemporary ideals influenced by globalisation and interaction with the West.

Within the subject of Chinese feminism, one of the most frequently used terms is *nüxing*, which refers to 'woman' as a subject or an agent. It appeared as a neologism after the May Fourth movement in 1919, which was a political, social and cultural revolution, of which the women's movement was a part. Chinese intellectuals at the time adopted a Western view of history and endeavoured to awaken Chinese women to break from the traditional Confucian and highly unequal social system of relations between men and women. They called for the end of arranged marriages, the abandonment of the custom of binding feet, and agitated to allow women to receive an education like men (Zhongli Yu, 2015). In this revolt against Confucianism, protesters advocated an end to the patriarchal family in favour of individual freedom and women's liberation. China came to be viewed as a nation rather than a uniquely Confucian culture. In the Mao era (1949-1976) the term *nüxing* was replaced by the state-generated term *funü*. It produced the woman as "the national woman under a Maoist-communist state inscription" – a social and political subject that stood for the collectivity of all politically normative women (Tani Barlow, 1993, p. 345). After the CCP established the PRC and came into power in 1949 after winning the civil war against the Nationalist Party/Kuo Min Tang (KMT), the first 30 years saw the discrediting of the Confucian culture and the aim of cutting ties with the old conservative, backward culture. This was accompanied by promises of offering equal opportunity to women with Mao's famous slogan 'women hold up half of the sky'. Although in the Mao era, women's social status seemed to be elevated compared to before as women were allowed to receive an education and engage

in social productivity, the CCP-led women's liberation was much criticised for its erasure of sexual differences in the enforcement of so-called gender equality. The focus was really on gender sameness (Sue Thornham & Pengpeng Feng, 2010). Jinhua Dai (2002) called it "the liberated woman as defined by revolutionary (male) norms" (p. 119).

Cui (1996) referred to the national myth of women's emancipation as their double status: her signifying function of Communist ideology and the concealed elimination of gender difference. Women were mobilised by socialisation into the workforce that seemingly endowed them with equal rights. Yet, they were really introduced into political and ideological power structures which simply claimed to have achieved equality of the sexes. In this context, instead of emphasizing sexual differences between men and women, both genders were subsumed into sexless subjects of the nation-state. As Thornham and Feng (2010) contended, linked with the notions of revolution, state control and refusal to recognise difference, the 'liberated' woman, or *funü*, was a compromise in the Chinese discourse at that time.

The post-Mao era (after 1976) saw a return of the term *nüxing* in popular discourse, which promised a return to representations of femininity, which reinforced and essentialised sexual difference, in a way that resonated with concepts of the 'modern' woman (Thornham & Feng, 2010). After the reform policy launched in 1979 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China opened up to a consumer culture, and experienced significant integration with the world community in trade and culture. Since then, modern Chinese women have been expected to undertake the double roles in both the *nei* and *wai* realms by being employed in the workplace, and taking care of the family and being a good wife and mother.

In the twenty-first century, rather than being abandoned as an obsolete theory, Confucianism has continued to be upheld by the PRC as an essential component of Chinese culture, including in a commercial context. PRC authorities have attempted to reclaim control over the usage of Confucius and Confucianism as national icons (Beng-huat Chua, 2001). As Kam Louie (2015) has argued, the choice of Confucius as the icon of Chinese culture suggests the direction the Chinese Government wants to take, which is to seek wealth and power based on moderation, harmony and humane governance, qualities that current advocates of Confucianism presume were preached by Confucius thousands of years ago. Nowadays, "Confucius has been used to represent such diametrically opposed views that the only way to reconcile these differences is to either embrace a self-contradictory philosophy or denounce

generations of interpreters as hypocrites or misguided fools" (p. 16). The PRC has utilised favourable content of Confucianism, such as social harmony, respect for authorities, obedience to superiors, devotion to the state, and protection of the family to stabilise the society and regulate the people (Chen, 2011; Song, 2003). By re-engaging Confucian values in a way that connects with the CCP's political purpose, women's domestic roles have been advocated to encourage a retreat into the family because women's marriage to men has long been seen as a necessary measure to preserve social stability. Even more seriously, as Leta Hong Fincher (2018) has suggested, married women are seen to provide an outlet for men's violent urges, perform unpaid labour at home, breed babies, which helps to relieve the aging the population and shrinking workforce, and take care of the elderly, which reduces the financial burden on the government for its welfare program. In essence, the fundamental inequality between men and women can be traced to the reproductive functions of their differences, and the power difference between them is embodied in the biological family (Shulamith Firestone, 1970). Thus, nowadays, the reinforcement of women's domestic roles and female compliance to both men and the nation has been a systematic strategy of the central powers to deal with the decrease in working-age labour, as well as the employment crisis and financial pressures.

The family rather than the individual has been regarded as the most significant social unit in traditional China and continues to be so under the control of the CCP. In addition to the basic socio-economic functions, the family has constituted a unique social security system that has provided care for its needy and aging members (Lloyd E. Eastman, 1988). The family in China as a social institution has been characterised by a hierarchical power structure but it has also represented a cultural ideal consisting of a set of norms that motivates individuals in their social practices. These hierarchical power relations within the patriarchal family system have been sanctioned by Confucianism, including in contemporary China under the rule of the CCP (Ning, 1993). Even the current President of the PRC, Xi Jinping has been built up in the media as a strong leader, as the father of the nation who presides over the family-nation. In other words, the nation has been regarded as a big, male-dominated family that needs strong, masculine leadership in the form of Xi as "the paternalistic patriarch" (Fincher, 2018, p. 65). In order to maintain the harmony of the 'big family', small families need to be harmonious. For this reason, women have come back to the centre of this conversation by being encouraged or even required to re-orient towards the traditional role of being submissive to the patriarchal order. The social expectation of women in the PRC is to encourage submissiveness to male power and discourage female transgression that may defy

the patriarchal order. In this way, Confucianism in the twenty-first century consumerist Chinese society under the CCP has played a significant role in reinforcing gender inequality and the oppression of women.

Three waves of Chinese feminism and beyond

In the Chinese socio-cultural context, 'two key terms have been used to refer to the concept of feminism: *nüquan zhuyi* (the theory of women's power or rights, literally women's rights-ism/women's power-ism); and *nüxing zhuyi* (the theory of the female gender, literally women's gender-ism/feminine-ism) (Yu, 2015). The former term was adopted from the translation of feminism that reflected the political desires and demands of feminists (Dongchao Min, 2005; Feng Xu, 2009) and marked the Chinese women's liberation movement during the anti-imperial and anti-feudal revolution (Yu, 2015). The latter term describes the Chinese women's movement and distinguishes Chinese feminism from its Western counterpart (Dorothy Ko & Zheng Wang, 2006; Min, 2007; Kay Schaffer & Song, 2007; Xu, 2009). According to the scholarly standard in Anglophone literature, this "softer feminism" might not be regarded as feminism because it focuses more on promoting femininity and reinforcing gender distinctions (Ko & Wang, 2006, p. 463) and marks a tendency to reinforce a return to a female identity or "female essence" (*nüxing qizhi)* (Zhong, 2006, p. 637). While the term *nüxing* tends to be aligned with femininity, *nüquan* is usually associated with negative connotations (Ko & Wang, 2007) because it implies men's loss of their original privilege (Chen, 2011). Women's/feminine studies comes across as "sharp but not aggressive", more concerned with "the harmonious development of both sexes", and aimed at manifesting "new cultural strategies and attitudes towards women in the twenty-first century" by signifying a "smiley or friendly/complimentary Chinese-styled feminism" (Schaffer & Song, 2007, p. 20).

In recent studies by United States of America- (USA) and PRC-based scholars, three waves of Chinese feminism have been most frequently examined, including during the May Fourth Movement (1919), during the establishment of the PRC and Chinese Communism (1949), and during the United Nations' (UN) Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing[12]

[12] The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace was the name given to a conference convened by the United Nations on 4–15 September 1995 in Beijing, China. A major result of the conference was the Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women, signed at the NGO Forum in the Indigenous Women's Tent. This document seeks, in part, to reconcile the tension felt by Aboriginal women activists between (primarily white) feminism and Aboriginal movements dominated by men. It was a significant step forward towards Indigenous women's rights and a significant victory for Indigenous feminism practice.

(1995). The May Fourth Movement (1919) has generally been recognized as the first climax of feminism in modern Chinese history, but this wave was led by male elites and only a few female intellectuals participated (Chen, 2011). These male elites were criticised by some scholars who believed they were actually patriarchal and used women's movements to realise their own political or social purposes. Moreover, China at that time had a large illiterate female population that raised a series of questions about the degree of impact that this wave could generate on society in general.

In the second wave of Chinese feminism after the establishment of the PRC, Maoist feminism highlighted women's social responsibility and claimed that women should be equal to men. The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF, *Fulian*), which was established in 1949, was the CCP's first semi-governmental women's organization, and was one of the most powerful units to organise Chinese women and to implement the CCP's political decisions in relation to women. However, as Tania Angeloff and Marylène Lieber (2012) have stated, the ACWF has only had consultative authority with directives on gender issues coming from the central authorities. For a long time, the ACWF had been the only body representing women's causes in China (Wang, 2006). Laws and policies in the patriarch-centralised PRC that were supposed to favour women tended to be unclear until the 1980s. As the protector of patriarchy, the state utilised the ACWF to specify the methods and policy changes to maintain women's rights and interests, as the symbolic representative body that actually served to support the patriarchal order.

Feminism in the PRC has long been criticised for its inadequate liberation of women. Ding Ling, one of the most reputable female writers in the PRC, declared that women were half-liberated from the private sphere in the daytime, considering they were expected to take the responsibility for the housework in the evening at home (Ling Ding, [1942]1982). Ding has emphasized the CCP's double standard of requiring women to work in both the public and domestic spheres, but requiring men to only focus on the public sphere. Barlow (2004) has compared the condition of Chinese and European women in their modernising process and argued that European women got rid of feudal social foundations and dealt with the challenges of modernisation, while Chinese women added modern roles to the feudal roles that they had inherited. The so-called women's liberation has made Chinese women face a number of dilemmas. Women in the family have still been required to take traditional responsibility roles as before, such as doing housework, cooking and taking care of the children, while they have also been required to participate in vocational work in society.

This gendered double-standard has been disguised through the superficial appearance of equality between men and women (e.g. women are allowed to work and receive education), which has been transformed to a kind of power to consolidate the CCP's rule. By doing this, male power has become de-centred and replaced by a patriarchal form under the guise of the 'nation'. As Yue Meng and Dai (1989) suggested, "women are no longer required to be obedient to men, but women and men together equally obey the sexless political collectivity" (p. 31). The gendered double-standard has also resulted in a lack of gender consciousness by women themselves. Furthermore, the mental burden of self-sacrifice, in which the woman is expected to place the needs of others' (i.e., husband, family, working unit and the CCP) before their own, has become an expected virtue of a good woman (Cui, 2006). This tendency towards pleasing others while neglecting self-care has also become a phenomenon in Western postfeminist contexts (see Section 2.3.4).

Another problem pointed out by Christina Gilmartin (1993) and Lisa Rofel (1993) is that although the CCP seemed to liberate women from the private sphere by encouraging them to be involved in the job market, women have still tended to remain in lower positions, including as cheap labour. Furthermore, the emphasis on women's agitation has been consistently downplayed, as seen through the complete abolishment of the ACWF during the Cultural Revolution. As Rey Chow (1993, p. 112) has stated:

> The Chinese Communist government serves...[as] an agency speaking for "minorities" in order to mobilize an entire nation. . .. For intellectuals working on "women" in the China field, therefore, the first critical task is to break alliance with this kind of official sponsorship of 'minority discourse.' Instead, they need to use their work on Chinese women to deconstruct the paternalistic social consequences resulting from a hegemonic practice.

Chow's quote here explains the attitude of the Chinese Communist government toward women's work, which has been to consider women as an underprivileged group which needs help and which relies on a kind of paternalistic-style supervision to deal with their own issues in an official capacity. Overall, the ACWF has played a role that is indicative of an official stranglehold on the organisation of women's demands for equality in the very process of promoting the development of women studies, stimulating feminist debate, and establishing and feminist networks in China (Angeloff & Lieber, 2012).

During the 1950s to the 1970s, the PRC was comparatively isolated from the global community in terms of feminist thinking, which kept Chinese feminism away from the well-developed second-wave of feminism in the West. Because of political restrictions on Western feminist ideas in the early period of class struggle under Communist rule, China's activists have continued to keep themselves away from Western feminism and maintain a focus on class struggle rather than equality between the genders (Edwards, 2010a). The ACWF has also had to modify its programs and activities to avoid the possibility of being accused of supporting Western feminism and to ensure compliance to party-state directives in which the safe opinion has been to assume that gender equality has already been achieved (Wang, 2006). From the CCP's perspective, by keeping Chinese women away from foreign feminism, women necessarily assumed a different identity - that of political actors who were passively victimised by feudal oppression before 1949, gratefully liberated by the socialist system and the CCP after 1949, and uniquely 'Chinese' in rejecting 'Western' feminism (Li & Zhang, 1994).

In the post-Maoist era (post-1976) and with China's gradual opening to the West, the 1980s was considered to be a climax of feminist studies in China, and Western feminist theories were more readily admitted. For example, the first subject on feminist literary criticism started at Peking University in 1988 (Rosie Roberts, 1999). The French feminist theorist, Simone de Beauvoir's, well-known book *The Second Sex* (1949) was translated and introduced by Chinese feminist scholars. The post-Maoist era was regarded as the first time for women to professionally and academically theorise and examine feminist issues in higher education. At that time, the CCP's 'one-child policy', which aimed to control the surging population in China, had long been criticised in terms of its impact on women. On the one hand, from a feminist perspective, abortion, which was not available before, became an option that was politically sanctioned and promoted. It was legitimated and made moral because of the one-child policy. It allowed women to choose whether they would keep their babies or not. On the other hand, considering the long-lasting traditional value of preferring a son to carry on the family legacy, many women aborted or abandoned their babies, either by their own will or from family pressure, when the babies were predicted or proven to be female, which caused massive female infanticide (Emily Honig & Gail Hershatter, 1988). Although in the early twenty-first century gynaecologists in China have not legally been allowed to disclose the unborn babies' gender in order to prevent pregnant women from aborting daughters-to-be, the population gap between the two genders has already been

firmly created. The shortage of females has resulted in an excess of males who have been forced into celibacy. It has also led to a growth in violence against women and the trafficking of women (Angeloff & Lieber, 2012). In recent times, a preference for males, particularly in the context of employment, has continued in many areas in China, resulting in gender division at work, a pay gap between men and women, massive layoffs of female employees in state-owned enterprises, and a lack of females at the management level. All in all, gender equality is far from been achieved in China.

In the post-Mao era, the ACWF has supported women's family roles in order to be in line with the CCP's support for re-instating traditional values as a stabilising force after the decades of social revolution (Edwards, 2010a). Key topics of discussion around women's welfare have focused on such issues as domestic violence, the smuggling of women, childbirth and childcare, and female employment opportunities. In contemporary Chinese society, discrimination against women in terms of education, employment and salary has been statistically demonstrated by Isabelle Attané (2012), which can explain the tendentiousness with which women's domestic roles in private life has been highly emphasised.

The third wave of Chinese feminism arose with the UN's World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, which was considered to be part of China's effort to heal broken relations with the West after the Tiananmen Square Incident[13] in 1988 (Chen, 2011). Incorporating major themes of the conference, Chinese feminism was propelled by three key action programs which were considered to be influential socio-political forces. The first action program was the China National Program for Women's Development 1995-2000 (*zhongguo funü fazhan gangyao*).[14] At the national level, this program set up eleven objectives, divided into eight action sectors and focused on supporting women's development in rural regions.[15] It contributed significantly towards accentuating discrimination against women – especially

[13] The 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, commonly known in Mainland China as the June Fourth Incident (六四事件; *liùsì shìjiàn*), were student-led demonstrations in Beijing in 1989. More broadly, they refer to the popular national movement inspired by the Beijing protests during that period, sometimes called the 89 Democracy Movement (八九民运; *bājiǔ mínyùn*). The protests were forcibly suppressed after Chinese Premier Li Peng declared martial law. In what became known in the West as the Tiananmen Square Massacre, troops with automatic rifles and tanks fired at the demonstrators who were trying to block the military's advance towards Tiananmen Square.

[14] For details refer to http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/natrep/NatActPlans/china/CHINA, access date 13 September 2018.

[15] For details, see Angeloff, T., & Lieber, M. (2012). Equality, did you say? Chinese feminism after 30 years of reforms, trans. N. Jayaram. *China Perspective*, 4, p. 19.

girls – with an emphasis on combating female unemployment and domestic violence (Lin, cited in Angeloff & Lieber, 2012). The second program – the China National Program for Women's Development 2001-2010[16] was launched by the State Council and corresponded with the UN Millennium Development Goals. It focused on various issues relating to combating non-discrimination against women, including care for mothers and infants. Focusing on the six major themes of the economy, policies and administration, education, health, laws and environment, the second program highlighted the significance of integrating gender issues into the policy-making process and it moved away from the collective discourse in which the first program was situated. This program improved measures to protect women's and girls' rights and interests. More recently, the third action program – the China National Program for Women's Development 2011-2020[17] was launched with a parallel program for children attached. With three major areas of development (women's health, education and the economy), it included some new goals, such as developing women's participation at all political levels, increasing women's access to jobs, and improving maternity insurance and basic health.

Apart from the three programs, the CCP's 'care for girls' campaign, which was launched in 2003, had a particularly positive impact on female children's status in regional areas and went a long way to prevent abortions and the abandonment of baby girls. While it had a noble purpose, the campaign also emphasised a number of gender stereotypes, with girls represented as being gentler, closer and more caring to their parents than boys (Lisa Eklund, 2011). Both this campaign and the third action program discussed in the previous paragraph combined women and children together, which implicitly reaffirmed an alleged difference in the nature of women vis a vis men. As Tao Jie (1996) has illustrated, grouping women with children emphasises a shared sense of vulnerability and enhanced a stereotype of women's social roles as being mainly concerned with raising children.

The CCP's attitudes towards feminism have long been controversial. Since its establishment in 1921, the CCP has regarded feminism with suspicion as a movement aiming to highlight gender inequality in order to distract from the 'more important' task of class inequality, (Marilyn J. Boxer, 2007). The non-Marxist women's movements were considered to be a distraction of disruptive 'bourgeois feminism'. International connections with non-CCP

[16] For details refer to http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/cw/140979.htm, access date 13 September 2018.

[17] Details refer to http://m.womenofchina.cn/womenofchina/xhtml1/source/1502/998-1.htm, access date 13 September 2018.

women was often denounced, which drove female activists into silence (Edwards, 2010a). On the one hand, the CCP seemingly used women's liberation as a tool to realise its political purposes, including winning the hearts of the people through the promise of equality in order to defeat the Nationalist Party/KMT before 1949, encouraging women to participate in social productivity after 1949, and avoiding being criticised by the West in the post-Maoist era. As Honig (1985) has contended, the Chinese government's commitment to women's liberation has not been entirely genuine. Unsurprisingly, given their integration with the system, few feminists in the central Party School's Women Studies and the ACWF have blamed the state socialist system for gender inequality (Wendy Wesoky, 2002).

Seen as a Western concept, many Chinese people, both men and women, have rejected feminism as a worthwhile concept ever since the Western feminist theories were introduced to China in the 1980s[18]. To understand the reasons behind this refusal to adopt feminism, Cui (2003) considered the scholarship of Li Xiaojiao who was a pioneer in the creation of women's studies in China but who has largely rejected the feminist identity. Li (1988) defined Chinese feminism with 'Chinese characteristics' in which the nation and national development to which both men and women have contributed is considered as a starting point. In her later anthologies, she directly denied her identity as a feminist (Li, 1998). For Li, gender is an ontological construction whereby one's sociocultural and gender identity is defined by language and terminology. From the linguistic perspective, in contrast to the English word 'woman', which is attached to the word 'man', in the Chinese language, *nüren* (woman) and *nanren* (man) are created on the basis of *ren* (human being). Thus, there is no need to promote another women's revolution since woman and man seem are seen to be equal in terms of their character creation. From a theoretical perspective, Li (1998) has contended that women's liberation is a Marxist rather than a feminist notion. Under the umbrella of Marxism in which gender issues are attached to class struggle, politics and the proletarian revolution, Li (1998) has insisted that women's liberation in China has been the outcome of a socialist revolution, which has legitimised gender equality through the socialist ideology rather than feminist movements. Represented by Li (1998), a group of scholars in

[18] One of the typical examples of this refusal is Huang Shuqin, a leading Chinese female director. In her interview about her most well-known work, *Human, Woman, Demon* (*Ren gui qing*, 1987), she mentioned that she did not think about the notion of feminism and did not try to relate her film to gender issues or view it from a feminist perspective (cited in Dai & Yang, 1995). Wang Anyi, a famous female author, also showed her negative attitude toward feminism by saying that she denied she was a feminist and disliked this notion. She thought China was a tragic place where women were only allowed to talk about gender differences and enjoy feminine characteristics (cited in Wang, 1993).

Chinese women's studies have continued to see feminism as a Western rather than a global concept.

From a transnational perspective, Cui (2003) identified the ensuring problem of women's inequality in China as relating to the embodiment of women in the discourse of nationalism. The woman acts as an oppressed figure carrying the burden of external invasions and internal conflicts, and is, thus, allegorised as a symbol of resistance for national independence and the establishment of a new nation state. In this sense, the woman is more likely to be an object than a subject. Under the flag of Marxism and socialism in the PRC context, the woman's subjective position has been denied, while women have been placed as a subordinated class who work for the revolutionary cause, which neglects their economic and social position, thereby concealing social inequalities that women confront. In the socialist discourse, it has been claimed that the nation state liberated women from the feudal system and gave them opportunities to engage in social and economic spheres. However, women were regarded as social labour who contributed to the economic development of the nation and as a socialist model to present a particular ideological stance. From this perspective, Chinese feminist scholars, such as Li Xiaojiang, who tended to deny their feminist identity, have been influenced by the patriotic, nationalist and anti-Western education they have received, which has made them believe that feminism is a Western notion that cannot be applied in China (Cui, 2003). In this way, feminism is considered to be a hegemonic Western concept that China needs to reject rather than a comprehensive global force with which China could engage.

Although the international links have not been completely cut off, the current Chinese view of feminism shows signs of xenophobia and women's studies theorists tend to speak as representative of the nation (Edwards, 2010a). Any other feminist form beyond the socialist rubric of the one-party state has been seen as 'un-Chinese' and antagonistic. As Edwards (2010a) has argued, such positioning has not only damaged "those points of solidarity women share internationally in their experiences of living under patriarchy" but has also "underplayed their many similar interests with women elsewhere in the world" through "a trumpeting of its 'unique' circumstances and special cultural characteristics" (p. 68-69). This view is consistent with the CCP's diplomatic stance that upholds China's right to be free from global intervention in domestic affairs, which in turn reflects its sense of insecurity generated as a result of decades of isolation and xenophobic nationalism. Xu (2009) has described this "desire to indigenize Western theories" as reflecting "an understandable

anxiety on the part of Chinese women's studies scholars to contribute to theory building" (p. 208).

As Spivak (1993) has stated, the task for transnational feminist cultural studies is to negotiate between the national, the global, and the historical as well as the contemporary diasporic (cited in Caren Kaplan & Inderpal Grewal, 1999). In other words, rather than paying too much attention to the division between Marxism, post-structuralism and feminism, the connection between them deserves more attention. Some other feminists have considered China's Marxist ideological perspective of gender equality as both the target of contemporary Chinese feminists' critique and a source of their critical strength (Bert Klandermans, 1988; Wang, 1998).

In contrast to the PRC's feminist movements, Hong Kong feminists have taken a different path that has risen out of different socio-political experiences (Chen, 2011). Due to its colonial background, the majority of early Hong Kong feminists were English-speaking, upper-class women. These women established several women's organisations, including the Hong Kong Council of Women in 1947 and the Hong Kong Chinese Women's club in 1983. Hong Kong feminism was influenced by the second wave of Western feminism in the 1970s, while it also started its own wave after the mid-1980s based on its post-colonialist and de-colonialist situation. During this period, the following women's organisations were established: the Hong Kong Women Workers' Association (1980-present), the Hong Kong Women's Christian Council (1988-present), the Association for the Advancement of Feminism (1984-present), the Committee for Asian Women (1981-present), the Association of Women for Action and Research (1985-present), the Hong Kong Federation of Women (1993-present) and Queer Sisters (Gar-yin Tsang, 1995).

The 1997 handover from Britain to the PRC has been considered as a dramatic turning point for Hong Kong in almost every aspect and feminism has not been an exception. Hong Kong feminist and queer activists have been concerned about the CCP's censorship of social movements. At the same time, problems of self-identity have also bothered Hong Kong feminists. One of the key questions in the Hong Kong feminist movement has been whether or not to include women on the Mainland in their activist activities and whether or not they should take a leading role in representing the PRC's 'one country, two systems' (Po-king Choi, 1995).

Hong Kong feminist academic scholarship has tended to focus on social movements and practical solutions, such as women's maternity leave, abortion, equal pay and the right of inheritance (Lee, 2000). In addition, owing to the century of being a British colony, the articulation of post-colonial and feminist theories has been particularly favoured by Hong Kong feminists, including scholars Rey Chow (1995, 2007) and Gina Marchetti (2011, 2016, 2017). Mainland scholars, however, have been reluctant to engage with their counterparts in Hong Kong due to their denial of the applicability of Western feminist theories as noted above and generally loose connections between scholars from across these regions (unlike the connections formed in the commercial film world).

Having mapped the historical and socio-cultural development of feminism on the Mainland and in Hong Kong, and the continuing impact of Confucianist patriarchal tenets in contemporary Chinese society, two key questions arise, which will be addressed in the analytical sections of the study:

1) To what extent does Confucianism still play an active role in influencing female representations in films and social expectations or requirements for women?
2) To what extent have representations of female characters in Chinese cinema embodied shifts in attitudes towards feminism in China?

Female Representation in Chinese Cinema and Media

Gender issues have been canvassed in Chinese cinema studies, though the focus has been on prominent films made by female directors (e.g., Chris Berry, 1988; Lingzhen Wang, 2011; Chunfang Gu, 2013; Lidan Hu, 2017), particularly films by Ann Hui (e.g., Xiaojun Sun, 2010) and Sylvia Chang (e.g., Tingyu Cai, 2014), as well as by male directors who have focused on portrayals of women like Stanley Kwan (e.g., Xiulei Zheng, 2010). For female representations in films, representations of the female victim (e.g., Cui, 2003) and the female warrior (e.g., Lida Funnell, 2014) have attracted considerable scholarly interest, especially the woman warrior in martial arts (*wuxia*) films (e.g., Cai, 2005; Chen, 2012; Edwards, 2011). Such studies can be seen as a benchmark with which to compare or contrast to findings relating to the representation of women in crime films. This section examines the literature on the 'woman as victim' and the 'woman warrior' in Chinese films. It then examines representations of women in other Chinese media such as TV dramas and news media, including the female migrant worker and white-collar worker, the divorced woman, the woman seeking love, and the single woman. In doing so, the aim is to briefly map out the

academic research on various female constructions in the broader Chinese media and assess patterns or trends.

The woman as a victim

Women have long been represented as victims in Chinese films. Chinese film studies that have focused on the female victim have either primarily examined the ways in which women have been victimised by the feudal or patriarchal system, or the relationships between the female victim and the nation. In their book, *New Chinese Cinema: Challenging Representations*, Sheila Cornelius and Ian Haydn Smith (2002) argued that cinematic representations of women have long been influenced by the Confucian virtues of tolerance, patience and understanding. The two most important portraits of women in pre-1949 Chinese films were of wives who were repressed by a patriarchal family system, and of prostitutes who were bad girls who ended up in tragic circumstances. In these films, men were usually given the freedom to marry several concubines who were requested to remain chaste. However, things changed in the 1930s with the emergence of bourgeois ladies and professional women in Chinese films. The former usually appeared in stories set in Shanghai, where the bourgeoisie ladies enjoyed many elements of a Western lifestyle, including dancing, clubbing, music, cocktails and fashionable dress. Cornelius and Smith (2002) contended that this representation offered a sense of voyeuristic pleasure to the audience, but the films depicted these female characters as eventually dying or being the subject of social blame. Professional women, on the other hand, were generally constructed as having a sense of political idealism, while their sexual desires were suppressed. Although other kinds of female representation also existed in this early period, such as women who demonstrated their sexual desires or wisdom to handle complex family relations, it did not challenge the expected subservient role of women in a patriarchal family structure.

By studying the prominent film *Human, Woman, Demon*[19] (*Ren, gui, qing*, 1987) made by Huang Shuqin, one of the leading female directors among the fourth generation of film filmmakers[20], Mainland-based scholar Jinhua Dai (1989, 2002) argued that female characters

[19] *Human, Woman, Demon* constructs a story around a female Peking opera performer, who is famous for preforming a male marital role on stage. This film explicitly depicts the woman's unspeakable love for her mentor, a married man, as well as her unhappy marriage with a husband who opposes her career as an opera performer. It metaphorically reflects the existential and cultural predicament that women confronted at that time.

[20] Chinese directors have been generally classified into six generations. The first generation is known as the directors who worked in the early stage of Chinese silent films from its start in 1905 to the 1920s.

The second generation worked in the 1930s and 1940s and were famous for the realistic style.

in the fourth-generation filmmakers' works were placed somewhere between beautiful goodness and sacrificial offerings. They were represented as sexless or degendered. Romances between the male and female characters were mainly sorrowful or demonstrations of platonic love, in which female desire was expelled. Dai refers to this film as "the only contemporary Chinese film that can unequivocally be considered a women's film" (2002, p. 143) based on its female perspective. However, the female protagonist in this film plays a male role on stage and she struggles with her female identity and expected social role, which is under the control of the patriarchal system. In this sense, the female protagonist in this film is a victim of the patriarchy.

Besides the scholarly interests in the woman as a victim under the patriarchal system, relationships between the representation of female victimisation and the nation have also been given special attention in Chinese cinema studies. As Sheldon Lu (1997) has illustrated, "womanhood is often a trope for the nation, a national allegory" (p. 20). Two prominent works have been Cui Shuqin's (2003) book, *Women Through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema*, and Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar's (2006) book, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation*, both of which have focused on the fifth generation filmmakers' works. According to Cui (2003), in this fifth generation, the female victim played a prominent role, with a central theme of conflicts being between sexuality and national interests. Women's victimisation was usually relative to a national crisis, with both the woman and the nation being more represented as repressed by external forces beyond their control than as victimised by internal self-denial or sacrifice, as in the pre-1949 representations. Cui (2003) proposed a metaphor of 'woman-as-nation' which signifies women's bodies as being at the same fate as a nation that undergoes foreign invasion or civil division as a result of internal conflict. Women's defence and suffering from humiliation in turn come to symbolise the nation's defence or suffering at the hands of imperialist forces. When imagining the female body as the land of the nation, the motherland becomes

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The third generation worked during 1949 and 1965, stopped their filmmaking during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), because no artworks were approved except the eight model drama, and then they resumed after 1976.

The fourth generation primarily refers to the young filmmakers who graduated from the Beijing Film Academy in the 1960s before the Cultural Revolution, whose mature works were mainly produced at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s.

The fifth generation is both a chronological and aesthetic concept that refers to the young filmmakers who graduated from the Beijing Film Academy in 1982 and became the first group of graduates after the post-Cultural Revolution resumption of the national entrance examination system in 1977.

The sixth generation refers to the directors who started their education in the Beijing Film Academy in the middle of the 1980s, while their works came out in the 1990s.

feminised, yet ideologies and politics that impact on the society on the land are controlled by male authorities. The signification of 'woman-as-nation' foregrounds women as a symbol while expunging women's self-identity and eliding genuine female subjectivity[21]. In light of Laura Mulvey's (1975) classic feminist film theory of the male gaze, Cui's (2003) notion of 'woman-as-nation' demonstrates the feasibility of applying Western feminist film theories to Chinese cinema and provides a constructive framework through which to interrogate female victimisation, especially sexual violence against women, as discussed further in Chapter 4.

Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar (2006) have similarly argued that the representation of the female victim can be seen as a kind of symbol that signifies national crisis or progress. Exemplified by the characters that have been portrayed by the iconic Chinese actresses, Ruan Lingyu[22] and Gong Li,[23] Berry and Farquhar (2006) have argued that, in their films, the woman who resisted her family's arranged marriage could be seen as a common signifier of China as a nation rejecting elements of its past in the name of modernisation.[24] In Chow's (1991) opinion, the female victim has been a symbol of the Chinese nation, which has been represented as feminised because of her weakness, passivity and tragedy. The male filmmaker masochistically empathises with the female victim while distancing himself from her by constructing her as being 'other' due to her gender. Similar to Cui's (2003) notion of 'woman-as-nation', Berry and Farquhar (2006) saw Gong's characters in Zhang Yimou's films as symbolising China's suffering and struggle in the global marketplace. Berry and Farquhar's (2006) film analysis of the female victim in relation to the nation is important because it brings Mulvey's (1975) theory of the male gaze into Chinese film studies and provides an insightful understanding about the ways in which the female victim can be seen

[21] From this perspective, the female sexual victimisation in Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum (Hong gaoliang*, 1987) could be regarded as a metaphor for broader political, social and intellectual frustrations with regards to China's suffering from the Japanese invasion during which the film story takes place.

[22] Ruan Lingyu was a Chinese silent film actress. One of the most prominent Chinese film stars of the 1930s, her exceptional acting ability and suicide at the age of 24 years led her to become an icon of Chinese cinema.

[23] Gong Li is a Chinese-born, Singaporean film actress. She achieved international prominence through her close collaborations with Chinese director, Zhang Yimou, and won the Volpi Cup for Best Actress at Venice for her performance in his 1992 film *The Story of Qiu Ju*. She has been credited with helping to bring Chinese cinema to prominence in Europe and the United States. In 2006, she was voted the most beautiful woman in China.

[24] For Ruan's characters, sexuality was represented as simultaneously tempting and risky but eventually as individualistic and selfish, and tended to be portrayed as a threat to patriotism and the public, collective spirit. For Gong's characters, sexuality was presented as being impeded by feudal patriarchs rather than the collective cause, so pursuing another male sexual partner helped to liberate her from the patriarchal oppression (e.g., *Judou*, dir, Zhang Yimou, 1991). Berry and Farquhar (2006) analysed Gong's unattractive appearance in Zhang Yimou's films (e.g. *Judou*, 1990), and argued that this representation seems to be a protest against male desire, and a shift away "from simply objectifying the female character and towards an empathetic engagement with her based on her suffering" (p. 127).

as a symbol of the nation and how Chinese films mobilise female characters as allegories of the national crisis and patriarchal oppression.

The woman warrior

The woman warrior has long been one of the most prevalent representations of females in Chinese artworks, including in Chinese films. One of the most famous female warriors who has been frequently been represented in various media formats, including films, TV serials, and cartoons, in China and overseas, is Hua Mulan,[25] who is a fictional female figure in the narrative poem, *The Song of Mulan* (*Mulan Ci*), written during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (AD420-589). There has been extensive scholarship on Hua Mulan across various disciplines, including a monograph by Lan Dong (2011) who interrogated representations of Mulan as a warrior maiden who performed heroic deeds in battle while dressed as a male soldier in both Chinese and American contexts. Other research has included Louise Edwards' (2010b) study tracing the transformations of Mulan's story from its inception in the Northern Wei ballad through to the 2010 cinema versions, as well as articles by Shengyou Nie (1993) and Chongjie Chen, Selvi, Selvi and Vika, Bregas Mariza (2010) examining Mulan's girlhood and masculine disguise, and Qing Yang's (2018) article comparing Mulan's representation in Chinese literature and the American contexts.

As a classic woman warrior, Mulan's story has been the basis for many writers, critics and audiences to debate key features of "the Chinese moral and social universe", as Edwards (2010b, p. 177) called it, particularly referring to how individuals manage competing demands from their families and from the central state. As Edwards (2010b) has argued, Mulan represents a form of feminism that is constrained by an overarching preoccupation with the connection between the state and its subjects/citizens. Mulan's cross-dressing predominantly functions to amplify the significance of her devotion to her father and country because the transgression of gender norms places her in physical and moral danger. Nowadays, Mulan's story is frequently represented as an unproblematic tale about filial sacrifice in serving the nation, while her heroism appears from her dedication to her father and the nation under a rubric that presents a combination of family and state interests.[26]

[25] Mulan joined the army dressed as a man, taking the place of her old father. She made a great contribution to the war effort and returned to her hometown where she restored her female identity.

[26] As one of the most central codes of Confucianism, filial piety tends to be presented as being best performed through the demonstration of loyalty and sacrifice to the nation. Thus, Mulan's representation can be seen as a transformation of filial piety into a statist discourse of patriotism along with the decline of the discourse of resistance to the central state.

Within the nationalist and patriotic discourse, China's writers and directors have tended to depict Mulan's story as a noble sacrifice for the nation and the government, which makes Mulan an exemplar of radical politics in biographies of women published for the womenfolk of modern China.

For Berry and Farquhar (2006), Mulan's disguising of herself as a male solider to join the army effectively licenses a woman to participate in the public space, or *wai* realm, to connect with Rosenlee's (2006) Confucian theory discussed earlier. The seemingly liberated or transgressive woman warrior is also presented in a way that demonstrates that she is a good daughter of the family and the nation. This representation inscribes the nation as a patriarchal institution modelled on the Confucian family. The seeming appearance of women's engagement in a male-dominated domain (i.e., joining the army) does not suggest her equal position with men. Instead, it reveals a paradox that once women are released from the female norms set by a male-dominated culture, which require their subservice and silence, the masculine norms become the only absolute set of norms available to women (Dai, 2002). Overall, as Edwards (2010b) has concluded, Mulan's construction shows that a woman's relationship to both her family and the nation state is expected to be distinct from that of men. For both men and women, the benefit of the family and nation is more important than that of the individual, so an individual's sacrifice is most worthy. Such interpretations of the woman warrior as caught between the control of men and social crises can also be usefully applied to the study of female perpetrators of violence in crime films.

Apart from Mulan, other woman warriors in Chinese martial arts films have also been a frequently topic of analysis. For instance, Ya-chen Chen's (2012) monograph, *Women in Chinese Martial Arts Films of the New Millennium*, considers woman warriors in the martial arts world that appear to be liberated and beyond the influence of patriarchal control, yet claims that the liberation is never sustained or complete and is limited by the presence of a glass ceiling that marks the extent to which the patriarchal order is willing to accept the exercise of feminism and women's rights. Lisa Funnell's (2014) monograph, *Warrior Women: Gender, Race, and the Transnational Chinese Action Star*, considered the significance of Chinese female action stars in martial arts films produced across a range of national and transnational contexts. She examined the impact of the 1997 transfer of Hong Kong from British to Chinese rule on the representation of Chinese identities—Hong Kong Chinese, Mainland Chinese, Chinese American, and Chinese Canadian—in action films produced domestically in Hong Kong and in cooperation with Mainland China and

Hollywood. She argued that Hong Kong cinema has offered space for the development of transnational Chinese screen identities that challenge the racial stereotypes historically associated with the Asian female body in the West. The ethnic/national differentiation of transnational Chinese female stars is considered part of the ongoing negotiation of social, cultural, and geopolitical identities in the Chinese-speaking world.

By focusing on Ang Lee's Academy Award-winning film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (*Wo hu cang long*, 2000), Rong Cai (2005) canvassed gender imaginations by arguing that the martial arts world does not exist in a social or ideological vacuum; its wildness and irregularity are recognised and verified through interaction and negotiation with social expectations, especially in relation to gender norms. The woman warrior's transgressive desires are hidden between regularity and normality, which are constructed as abnormal and violent in Chinese films with ideological characteristics. A woman's violent initiative is likely to get her into trouble if it is performed without male approval; yet, if guided by a male approver, a woman's ambition can be salvaged. Cai's (2005) study is highly applicable to this study, especially to the analysis of the female perpetrator, because it helps to decode the patriarchal ideology behind the superficial appearance of the female perpetrator's empowerment in crime films, as well as how the female perpetrator's desires are rendered problematic and how they can be negotiated with the patriarchal ideology.

In addition, Edwards' (2011) study of Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (*Yingxiong*, 2002) demonstrated a kind of new image of the female warrior, which was different from the classic Hua Mulan-style woman warrior who needed to be disguised as a man to join the war. In *Hero*, women warriors were able to keep their feminine appearance and take on fighting skills to show the contemporary audience that pretty girls can be killers too. In contrast with Hua Mulan's concealed sexuality, women warriors in *Hero* were allowed to express their sexual desires. However, by being depicted as sexually vulnerable to men, blindly loyal to the family and neglectful of the greater political benefit to the nation, women warriors in this film were still trapped in the same patriarchal ideology. More importantly, as Edwards (2011) has argued, in the twenty-first century, the rise of social power by real women in society has produced resistance from the remnants of patriarchy, leading to tales that remind viewers of the essential weakness and vulnerability of females to men.[27] This framing of the woman warrior

[27] The twenty-first century woman warrior's new vulnerability, in physical, moral and sexual terms, serves to contain the threat she poses to the existing gender hierarchy.

usefully informs the analysis of the female perpetrator in crime films because it offers insights into how cinematic representations and narratives link to patriarchal anxieties permeating Chinese society.

In the Maoist era from 1949-1976, cinematic representations of the woman warrior mainly served the political requirements of the CCP, and depicted women as revolutionary soldiers, and supporters or builders of socialism, who were saved or liberated by the CCP. In this period, revolutionary films were a major source of a great body of cultural and artistic creations aimed at cultivating 'indoctrinating' people into socialist norms through entertainment (Sun, 2008, p. 97). Later in the 1960s and 1970s, during the decade-long Cultural Revolution, women were further politicised and militarised to be constructed as the CCP's loyal soldiers, who, like their male counterparts, were seen fighting or sacrificing their lives for the nation. This shift was on account of the CCP government's promotion of women's liberation, with women seen as potential workers in the new economic system, though inequalities in employment opportunities and payment existed (Cornelius and Smith, 2002). Yanru Chen (2008) referred to this kind of woman warrior in Mainland films as the "ideal woman" (p. 104). She was invariably revolutionary and had high levels of class consciousness against landlords, capitalists, nationalists, foreign invaders and other enemies and forces who were against the Communist revolution. This woman warrior was depicted as being full of endurance and in readiness for self-sacrifice in order to protect her comrades and defend the revolutionary organisations.[28] In this way, Mainland films during this period were intended to serve a propagandistic purpose with willing cooperation between the filmmakers and the propaganda apparatus.

The female socialist warrior in post-1949 PRC films was considered to be a concealed metaphor for the social status of intellectuals. Dai (1993), in a study that examined the female character's transition from an intellectual to a socialist woman warrior, stated that this metaphor involved the coexistence of the discourse of mainstream Maoist ideology and traditional ideology relating to women informed by Confucian principles. Yet, rather than focusing on issues relating to women's inferior position to men, such as fathers, husbands and sons, the representations of female intellectuals at this time paid attention to subjugation

[28] In other words, "the ideal woman was one who merged her own life and personality and even ideal/aspiration in the immense ocean of the Communist Revolution", while "the more completely a woman could lose herself in the revolution, the more she was treated as an ideal woman, to be adored and emulated by her comrades and followers" (Chen, 2008, p. 104).

and oppression in relation to their social class.[29] It expressed a particular hegemonic discourse in which a petit-bourgeois female intellectual could only obtain liberation by following the CCP's lead. In this sense, the female warrior here was presented as a symbol of the collective who were encouraged to be devoted to the Party.

Post-1949 Chinese films represented the male-female relationship in the ideological discourse of socialism, in which a man tended to serve not as a romantic partner to a woman, but as the woman's mentor to enlighten her awareness of the Party and the Revolution and help her become a qualified socialist warrior. Revolution was to be prioritised while the sexual desire between them was repressed. As Dai (2002) indicated, in this love story without love, the destructive violence, which was usually a crisis in history such as a war, functioned to exile their love and desire.[30] As Meng (1993) has suggested, "the state's political discourse translated itself through women into the private context of desire, love, marriage, divorce, and familial relations;… it turned woman into an agent politicising desire, love, and family relations by delimiting and repressing sexuality, self and all private emotions" (p. 118). In other words, Chinese women were projected as a national subject rather than as themselves. Although the representation of the revolutionary woman warrior is very different to representations of females in more contemporary crime films, the historical context helps us to understand the impact of the dominant ideology of the day on constructions of women in Chinese films.

While the focus of this study is on Chinese films, it is useful to compare with representation of the Chinese woman warrior in other global films. Olivia Khoo (2007), in particular, has examined Michelle Yeoh's[31] Bond girl character in the Hollywood James Bond film, *Tomorrow Never Dies* (dir. Roger Spottiswoode, 1997). For Khoo (2007), the exotic representation of this Chinese woman reflected stereotypes of Chinese femininity as being

[29] A typical case in this period is *Song of Youth* (*Qingchun zhi ge*, 1950, dir. Chen Huai-ai & Cui Wei), which tells the life story of a woman and her experience of joining the revolution. As Dai (1993) has argued, this film integrates the 'worker, peasant, soldier' aesthetic and policy by depicting an intellectual who valued individuality, democracy and freedom, and developed herself to be a Communist soldier.

[30] This can be seen in *The Red Detachment of Women* (*Hongse niangzi jun*, dir. Xie Jin, 1961), in which the male protagonist's enlightenment with the woman was emphasised while their love story was de-emphasised. As the director, Xie (1991) mentioned, the repeated concealment of desire was one of the heroine's main motives for action. The male character scarified his life in battle and the woman continued her role as a revolutionary soldier. The suspension of desire was transformed into a zeal for revolutionary action.

[31] Michelle Yeoh is a Malaysian actress who rose to fame with frequent roles in the 1990s Hong Kong action films, and is best known internationally for her role in the 1997 James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies*, and in the Chinese-language martial arts film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000).

sexy and attractive and portrayed the Chinese woman in a way that was to be fetishised and gazed upon just like China as a whole as it has modernised itself in impressive ways. Khoo's (2007) film analysis provides an alternative lens through which to interpret the representation of the woman warrior, which is to view her as a technological figure who is deeply embedded in the story of China's modernization.

Overall, the literature on women warriors discussed above, including the classic heroine, Hua Mulan, the woman warrior in martial arts films, the Maoist socialist female soldier, and the Chinese Bond girl in the Hollywood film, have focused on female identities, their social missions and connections between representations of women and socio-cultural discourses. While the woman warrior is generally seen in a positive light in that her violence is warranted and aims to bring social good, this study examines women committing violence in negative contexts and framings. Many of the notions connecting these representations of women to dominant ideologies in society will, however, be usefully applied to this new context of analysis of females as perpetrators of violence.

Other representations of females in Chinese media

Besides the large amount of scholarship on the representation of the female victim and warrior in Chinese cinema, some sporadic studies have paid attention to other female representations, including the female migrant worker and white-collar worker, the divorced woman, the woman seeking love, and the single woman. Such studies provide useful points for comparison with representations of women in Chinese crime films. Particularly useful is Jinhua Li's (2016) examination of women seeking love in relation to issues of gender identity, female sexuality and subjectivity through analysing two films focusing on the urban women's emotional life made by two prominent female directors Li Shaohong[32] and Xu Jinglei.[33] Li (2016) contended that the female character embodied postfeminist

[32] *Baobei in Love* is a 2004 Chinese romantic film directed by Li Shaohong, and starring Zhou Xun, Chen Kun, and Huang Jue. The plot tells of Liu Zhi (Jue Huang), a young man living a depressed life from his marriage with a dominating girl, who meets Baober (Zhou Xun) on a Beijing street one day. They fall in love and start to live a strange, mysterious life. One day Baober finds a videotape made by Liu Zhi who thinks he has lost life's meaning. She sets out to find him and save him through love.

Li Shaohong's *Baober in Love* (*Lian'ai zhong de baober*, 2004) utilised the unusual narrative style of blurring the boundaries between reality and imagination, love and fantasy, and the physical and psychological realms to create a space where the female protagonist felt a sense of agency and subjective autonomy. Jinhua Li (2016) suggested that *Baober in Love* de-politicised the female protagonist's traumatisation so that the film did not actively assume the antithetical position of social criticism against the urbanising process and grand political narrative of national economic globalisation.

[33] Li used the case of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, which is a Chinese film written and directed by Xu Jinglei and is her second feature film as director after *My Father and I* in 2002 . The film is an adaptation of Stefan Zweig's 1922 novella of the same name which was also adapted in 1948 by screenwriter, Howard

characteristics, such as emotional strength, independence, allegiance and the conscious seeking of gender agency. In the film, her trajectory changes from traditional passive feminism to affirmative postfeminist gender politics. Li (2016) argued that this alternative feminism in which the woman is shown to be actively participating in society, though according to patriarchal norms, might be better for women's rights than engagement in an aggressive battle against gender hegemony and patriarchy. Li's analysis offers useful ways for considering how female subjectivity is articulated in films and how feminist and postfeminist critiques can be applied to the Chinese context, which be usefully compared to in the context of Chinese crime films

In addition to the woman seeking love narrative, Li (2016) also investigated representations of female migrant workers, particularly in Li Yu's *Lost in Beijing*[34] (*Pingguo*, 2007), which has attracted significant scholarly attention in Chinese cinema studies. In this film, Li (2016) analysed the female protagonist, Liu Pingguo, as an eroticised object of male desire and the female body as a reproductive mechanism, which reinforces socialist gender politics. Li argued that the film renders women as allegorised victims who are made to suffer in contemporary Chinese society where economic development is uneven and gaps between urban and rural regions are radically increasing. Li further argued that the film reiterates a dichotomous gender discourse that precludes female agency when it places women on the opposite side of the powerful and dominant party. Stephanie Hemelryk Donald (2008) has also examined the same film and argued that contemporary Chinese media have been obsessed with the story of the middle class and that the narrative in this film suggests that there is no place for the young, especially poor young women, in contemporary China.

Koch. The film stars Xu and Jiang Wen as lovers during the 1930s and 1940s in Beijing. The film was produced by Asian Union Film & Media. Xu Jinglei won the Best Director award for the film at the 2004 San Sebastián International Film Festival.

[34] *Lost in Beijing* is a 2007 Chinese film directed by Li Yu and starring Tony Leung Ka-fai, Fan Bingbing, Tong Dawei, and Elaine Jin. It had its international premiere at the 2007 Berlin International Film Festival. The plot tells of Liu Pingguo (Fan Bingbing) and her husband, An Kun (Tong Dawei) who are a young migrant couple from the northeast of China who have moved to Beijing for a better life. Pingguo and An Kun live in a dilapidated apartment eking out their existence by working menial jobs, with An Kun working as a window washer, while his wife works in the Golden Basin Massage Parlor as a foot masseuse. Golden Basin is owned and operated by Lin Dong (Tony Leung Ka-fai), an unabashed womanizer, who is from Guangdong Province. His wife, Wang Mei (Elaine Jin) practices Chinese medicine. Lin Dong rapes Liu Pingguo and gets her pregnant, though neither An Kun nor Lin Dong can be certain of who is the father. Lin Dong, however, sees in Pingguo an opportunity to make things right with his barren wife as well as to settle things with Pingguo and her husband once and for all. Soon, the two husbands have concocted a scheme wherein An Kun initially receives ¥20,000 for his mental suffering. If the child has Lin Dong's blood type, he will go home with the massage-parlor owner and An Kun will receive ¥100,000. If however, the baby is An Kun's, no money is exchanged, but Pingguo and An Kun will keep the baby. Moreover, if Lin Dong again sleeps with Pingguo, half of his assets will go to Wang Mei in a divorce proceeding. During these negotiations, Pingguo remains conspicuously silent.

Young women are inevitably represented as symbolic fodder and as victims in contemporary Chinese society.[35]

The representation of the female migrant worker has also been studied in the context of official and commercial journalistic mass media by Wanning Sun (2004). By examining the media representation of Hong Zhaodi, a twenty-year-old young village woman, who was abused and forced to work as a prostitute but refused by committing suicide, Sun (2004) argued that the various representations construct the working woman in a way that places her at the intersection of indoctrination, fetishisation and compassion by arguing that all of these representations subject her to a controlling gaze and none of them actively expresses her subjectivity. Both official and commercial news media have presented her story of crime and abuse in detail, not only to attract the public's attention but also to assist in the construction of party-state hegemony.[36] The representation of the migrant woman has been an object of a controlling gaze by both the state and by a fetishistic and voyeuristic urban readership. Thus, the ideological viewpoints and the communication strategies of representing the migrant woman in the two formats of Chinese news media appear to be more convergent than divergent. In her study, Sun (2004) engaged Mulvey's (1975) classic feminist film theory of the male gaze and applied the notion of voyeurism and fetishism to analyse the migrant woman's representation in Chinese news media. It not only provided a constructive angle to look upon the representations of migrant woman, but also demonstrated the feasibility of drawing on classic feminist film theories in the Chinese media context.

The representation of divorced and professional women has been examined in the context of Chinese TV dramas. Based on an in-depth study of *Honey Bee Man* (*Woai nanguimi*, 2014) and *Go Lala Go* (*Du Lala Shengzhiji*, 2010), Shengsheng Cai (2016) proposed that Chinese

[35] In Donald's (2008) opinion, *Lost in Beijing* shows masculine competitiveness that is expressed in terms of social status and the trappings of money. The class gap between the poor migrant female worker and the rich man is exacerbated not only by the former's rural origins but also by the female protagonist's gender and age, because gender and sex reduce solidarity to tentative mutual arrangements based on dependency or desire. Since family relations in managing social order are considered to be the basis of all Chinese socio-cultural relations, this film depicts the power structure based on this principle which can be seen as a return to or a hardening of long-existing gender inequality that is no longer rhetorically tempered by Maoist dogma, while it is also embraced as a form of class logic to support the systematic and uneven distribution of wealth and power (Donald, 2008).

[36] To be specific, for official media, exemplified by a ACWF publication, ineffectively addresses the problems of injustice and gender inequality arising from female mobility, while it is unable to step beyond orthodox party discourse on social issues, in particular gender and sexuality. The official media has eagerly desired the maintenance of ideological supremacy and has a strong capacity to make their presence known and to achieve power in the market culture. Commercial media have treated the migrant woman as either a victim of crime who needs help or a transgressive figure who needs to be controlled.

TV dramas tended to construct an "ideal woman image", "a suitable female subject" with a "preferred femininity" (p. 77) – "a woman who symbolises gentleness, tolerance, devotion, resilience and positive energy" (p. 88). By doing so, the state discourse, upon which media discourse is predicated, creates an apt, virtuous and desirable model for its ideal Chinese divorced woman as being even-tempered, caring and strong, who does not complain about her unfortunate experience, but instead strives to be even more tender, tolerant and generous after the divorce. This construction re-shapes the 'unsuccessful' divorced woman into a submissive and traditional Chinese good wife and wise mother figure and rewards her with a happy second marriage. For Cai (2016), this construction of the 'model' Chinese divorced woman functions to soothe and negate the growing discontent of the public and possible social unrest in order to assist the state to achieve social stability and harmony.

Cai (2016) has also discussed the representation of female professionals working in a Western enterprise in the film *Go Lala Go* (*Du Lala shengzhiji*, dir. Xu Jinglei, 2010) and the TV drama with the same name in the same year, both of which were adapted from Li Ke's popular novel, *A Story of Lala's Promotion* (*Du Lala shengzhiji*, 2007). In the three works, the novel, film and TV drama, the female protagonist, Du Lala, is depicted as a strong, independent, skilful, hardworking and ambitious young professional, who dedicates herself to highly competitive work, actively improves her professional skills, prioritises her career over personal romance and ultimately gets promoted because of her own effort.[37] As a typical but rare case focusing on the female professional's career experience, *Go Lala Go* has also been studied by Su-lin Yu (2018) who emphasised female subjectivity in the neoliberal Chinese discourse. By engaging neoliberal rhetoric in a connotative way to cultivate a compelling female identity, Yu (2018) argued that this story juxtaposes the career success of the female protagonist with the new economic independence and transnational commercialisation of China. It celebrates an active, empowered, financially independent female professional in neoliberal market terms, suggesting a significant departure from earlier representations of the passive and weak Chinese woman. It also legitimises young Chinese women's agency through the neoliberal process of subjectification rather than subversion of the dominant patriarchal social order. Thus, *Go Lala Go* aestheticises the possibility and restriction of the neoliberal impact on modern Chinese women as they have individual freedom and an

[37] Cai (2016) investigated the reflection of the Western working culture in the Chinese workplace (e.g., cruel competitiveness, fair promotion, and exploitative nature), and the image of the white-collar professional lady working in a Western company (e.g., being talented, aspirational and career-oriented) with the confidence and inner-strength to challenge men, and with a middle-class identity in contemporary China that tends to be realised through consumption and career choice.

economic capacity in the global consumer culture. Cai's (2016) and Yu's (2018) studies on the representation of the female professional in *Go Lala Go* map out a new and exceptional image of the female office lady, which not only sets a benchmark for this study with which to compare or contrast the analysis of the female professional in Chinese crime films but also offers constructive insights into how to engage with the Chinese neoliberal discourse in film analysis.

Apart from fictional narratives like films and TV dramas, female representation has been studied in Chinese magazines and the news media. Sun and Chen's (2015) content analysis of mainstream Chinese magazines' framing of urban women between 1995 and 2012 showed that topics on marriage and personal relationships were usually predominant, while concerns over gender discrimination diminished, which suggested a revitalisation of traditional gender roles for women to stay in the domestic sphere. Of note, Shengwei Sun and Feinian Chen (2015) revealed that Chinese mainstream media have increasingly promoted traditional gender ideologies whilst highlighting the neoliberal rhetoric of "individual choice" and "self-improvement" (p. 1094) when discussing urban women's issues. Sun and Chen (2015) uncovered the ways in which the dominant public discourse has regulated gender norms in urban China. They argued that the alliance between neoliberal rhetoric that emphasises individual choice and traditional gender ideology that attributes women to the domestic sphere justifies the existing gender inequality. This inequality has been exacerbated by marketisation by framing women's private issues and domestic duties as a matter of neutral, rational and individual preference. Their results seem consistent with earlier contextualisations of the gender discourse in China as outlined above and the resurgence of Confucianism where women are now encouraged to re-subscribe to the Confucian virtues of being a good wife and a wise mother who look after the whole family and are submissive to the patriarchal authority. More importantly, the emphasis on individual choice in recent media frames suggests a postfeminist discourse, which underpins much of the Chinese mainstream media.

The representation of single women is another area that has been studied in the Chinese news media. Wanqi Gong, Caixie Tu and L. Crystal Jiang's (2015) content analysis focused on the stigmatised portrayals of single women in news media between 2008 and 2013 and found that Chinese news reports tended to depict single women as having conflicts with family members about their single status and being blamed for their single status by such factors as being too picky and not giving enough effort to dating. Gong et al.'s (2015) study results suggested that

news stories have unduly ascribed the responsibility for being single to the women themselves but this individual attribution has not been applied to single men.[38] Gong et al. (2015) have proposed that marital status has become one of the most salient social divisions in Chinese society, further reinforcing gender inequality. The creation of women's inferior position through representation has further reaffirmed the dominance of the patriarchy and legitimised the norm of heterosexual marriage in Chinese society. Both Sun and Chen's (2015) study and Gong et al.'s (2015) content analysis of female representation in news media have demonstrated an emphasis on the importance for a woman to engage in heterosexual romance and stay in the domestic domain. The results of the two studies provide a template for which to consider the ongoing saliency of Confucian values in contemporary Chinese society and media.

In summary, apart from representations of females as victims and as women warriors in Chinese films, other constructions of women, such the woman seeking love, the female migrant worker and the female white-collar worker, have been the subject of Chinese film studies. In other forms of Chinese media, including TV dramas, popular magazines and news media, the scholarship of female representations has covered the divorced woman, the female professional and the single woman. However, a film analysis of female representations in the genre of crime films, with a focus on the interaction between women and violence, has remained absent. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining representations of females as victims, perpetrators and professionals in Chinese crime films and exploring the ways in which the female characters engage in violent activities and relate to male counterparts. This chapter has thus far shown that the representation of females in Chinese media, including both fictional narratives and news media, have primarily shown a tendency to stigmatise women in various ways by focusing on heterosexual romance, encouraging women to stay in the domestic sphere, and to be submissive to the patriarchy. This study examines the applicability of these trends in the context of Chinese crime films.

[38] In recent news media representations, single women have been marginalised, discriminated against and regarded as deviants. Single women have been considered to be unfilial to parents and irresponsible with regards to social expectations. Similar criticisms have not been applied to single men, thus reflecting double standards in the Chinese news media.

Feminist Film Theories and Postfeminist Discourse

To examine representations of females and gender norms in the Chinese context, this study draws on feminist film theories, with a focus on classic feminist theories[39]. Many film scholars have argued that films both reflect the changing social image of women and present a distorted image of women. As Rosen (1975) has stated, "the Cinema Woman is a Popcorn Venus, a delectable but insubstantial hybrid of cultural distortions" (p. 13). These made-up female images satisfy the audience's imagination. Furthermore, Haskell (1987) has argued that film not only reflects "society's accepted role definitions" but also reinforces narrow definitions of femininity (p. 4). She has noted that "film is a rich field for the mining of female stereotypes…If we see stereotypes in film, it is because stereotypes exist in society" (p. 30). As Rosen (1975) has suggested, images that are more positive or real always depend on value judgements about what is more positive and real. Therefore, based on these theories, this study assumes that films are a mirror that reflect social expectations of women, while the representation of women in films also functions to reinforce the cultural and social definitions of female stereotypes.

To put feminist film theories into a historical perspective, according to Hollows (2000), early feminism criticism followed two directions: 'images of women in films', which was characterised by the sociological approach and focused on stereotypes of women, mostly in Hollywood films in the US context (e.g., Rosen, 1975; Haskell, 1987); and 'woman as image', which primarily focused on the ways in which women are objectified onscreen. The representation of females in Chinese crime films has tended to coincide with patriarchal preferences (e.g. objectifying passive women) and has been utilised as a 'realistic' code through which to amplify the filmic impact and acceptance, thereby further enhancing the dominance of the patriarchal ideology. Hence, these feminist film theories provide a way of understanding how film texts can construct and reproduce the idea of what 'reality' is, and in the case of this study, how film texts can construct and reproduce stereotypical images of women and their interactions with violence, how gendered performances are encouraged by cinematic representation, especially as victims.

More specifically, this study mainly draws on the feminist film theories of Mulvey (1975) and Elizabeth Cowie (1978), particularly in analysing the female victim. Although these authors produced classic feminist film theories decades ago, they remain useful for decoding

[39] The classic feminist theories applied in this thesis particularly refer to the feminist film theories established in the second-wave feminist movement in the 1970s. See more details in Chapter 1, Section 2.

the representation of females in contemporary films and can readily be applied to the analysis of Chinese crime films. While the film market on Mainland China has surged within the last decade, there are really only three decades (since the end of the Cultural Revolution) of experience in the production of diverse genres, including crime films. At the same time, long-term and ongoing censorship of film violence and content that does not support the dominant ideology in the Mainland has largely limited the creation of the crime genre. Although Hong Kong has long played a leading role in the production of crime films for a Chinese market, since the 2003 CEPA agreement, at least, a considerable number have been adapted to suit Mainland tastes and cultural norms in order to pass the censors and attempt to be successful at the Mainland box office.

Mulvey's (1975) theory of the male gaze is applied to this study to investigate how female victimisation in narrative cinema has been coded as an object or a spectacle by male filmmakers from a male-dominated perspective, while Cowie's (1978) theory of 'woman as a sign' contributes to an examination of the interrelationship between men and women that leads to female victimisation in the narrative. For the passive female perpetrator who uses violence for self-protection, the feminist film theories of Anneke Smelik (1998) and Teresa de Lauretis (1984) on female subjectivity are used to examine the ways in which the passive female perpetrator is transferred from a victimised object to a rebellious subject in the context of engagement in violent activities. The classic feminist film theories, which have to date been applied most consistently to 1960s and 1970s Hollywood films, can also help us to examine the representations of female victims and passive perpetrators in contemporary Chinese crime films. Below, I explain in more depth the notions of 'woman as image', 'woman as sign' and 'woman as object', which underpin the analysis in this study.

'Woman as image'

In her article, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' first published in *Screen* in 1975, British film theorist Laura Mulvey argued that the cinematic apparatus of classical Hollywood cinema inevitably puts the spectator in a masculine subject position, with the figure of the woman on screen as the object of desire and as the object of the male gaze. Viewers were encouraged to identify with the protagonists, who were overwhelmingly male, whereas women characters in classic Hollywood films were coded with a kind of "to-be-looked-at-ness". That is, women were displayed to be looked at, with the camera positioning and the male viewer constituting the bearer of the look (Mulvey, 1989, p. 19). She used psychoanalysis to understand the fascination of classical Hollywood cinema, which could be

explained through the concept of scopophilia, a term invented by Sigmund Freud, which refers to the erotic pleasure gained from gazing at another person as an object.

The notion of 'castration' is central in Mulvey's (1975) theoretical framework. The concept of castration refers to refers to the woman's inferiority or 'lack' compared to a man, particularly the lack of a penis. In this way, the woman's image is potentially threatening to men because the 'threat of castration' means that the woman signifies to men that they might lose their so-called positive attributes relating to their masculinity and become more like the feminine 'other' (Hollows, 2000). This is why the image of the woman in cinema is seen as a threat to male spectators. To deal with it, mainstream Hollywood cinema utilises a mechanism to mitigate this pressure by two forms of gaze – fetishism and voyeurism. Through these two forms, cinematic construction turns the woman into an object for male pleasure rather than a threat.

Fetishisation, or the excessive or irrational devotion to a woman, converts her into an image, which is regarded as safe and enjoyable, by turning some parts of her body into a fetish, such as her legs or neck. The fetishisation of the woman leads the spectators' attention away from the symbolic 'lack' and shifts attention to objects of flawless beauty. Voyeurism is the practice of gaining sexual pleasure from watching others when they are naked or engaged in sexual activity. This mechanism alleviates the threat that the woman presents by investigating her, digging out her background and thus rendering her controllable and compliant to male mastery (Hollows, 2000). In addition, narcissism describes the male spectator's identification with his own likeness. In this process, as Mulvey (1975) discusses, the male spectator may misrecognise himself in the idealised image of the male protagonist who is the subject of the narrative and has supreme power over it, while the woman must act as the primary erotic object in contrast to the masculine role. In this way the male spectator's gaze on the female body is directed through the male protagonist. In other words, "the male spectator looks at a male who controls the look in the film, a look whose legitimate object is defined as female" (Hollows, 2000, p. 48).

Mulvey's (1975) theory has a particular focus on spectatorship, claiming that the male character directs the male spectator's gaze towards the female character, so that the male spectator is made to follow the male protagonist's point of view. She identified three levels of cinematic gaze through the camera, characters and spectators, which objectify the female character and position her as a spectacle. In this sense, the representation of "the more

perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego" (Mulvey, 1989, p. 20) of the shining male hero dims the light on the passive and powerless female character. This framing makes the viewers unconsciously identify with the male rather than the female in films. While the present study does not examine spectators' views per se, it focuses on representations of female characters in relation to male characters in the same film world as viewed through the camera lens, which is assumed to reflect a conscious or unconscious attitude on the part of filmmakers towards female and male characters.

Mulvey's (1975) theory relating to the concept of the male gaze remains a useful critical lens through which to analyse the representation of women in films. Its underlying framework assumes that all mainstream cinema is organised around male desire, and patriarchal readings cannot be eliminated from cinema because the very conventions that underpin mainstream cinema are patriarchal. In the Chinese context, the majority of crime films have been produced by male filmmakers. Mulvey's (1975) approach to examining female characters as spectacle for male pleasure and her findings on female passivity and male activity can be readily applied to the study of Chinese crime films, and are particularly useful for examining representations of the female victim.

Although the application of classic feminist film theories in the field of Chinese cinema is limited, there are a few constructive works worth acknowledging. In the light of the second-wave of feminism with a focus on psychoanalyses, Cui (2003) adopted Mulvey's (1975) classic feminist film theory to analyse male violence against women and female transgression as a threat of castration in Mainland Chinese films. Cui's study focused on the connection between the representations of women and nation by arguing that the metaphor of 'woman-as-nation' has been used to signify foreign aggression and civil division to represent times when the nation-state experienced external or internal conflict. In light of Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, Cui's study pays attention to prominent films made by the fifth generation directors in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which sets a benchmark for this study to compare or extend in the post-2000 Chinese films, particularly the crime genre.

'Woman as sign'

This study also draws on the notion of 'woman as sign' introduced by British film theorist Elizabeth Cowie (1978), to analyse the relationships between men and women that lead to representations of female victimisation. Cowie drew on French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss' (1969) theory of kinship structures, which he saw as a system of exchange. In this

system, “women are produced as a sign, which is circulated in an identical way to words” (Cowie, [1978] 2000, p. 50). In other words, the woman can be circulated or exchanged from one familial unit to another through marriage, which changes her role from a daughter to a wife, or from a wife to a mother. Therefore, women become a ‘sign’ within exogamy, a sign that is exchanged in the kinship structures as a system of communication. In this exchange process, the woman is part of a semiotic chain of communication whereby two parties reach an agreement requiring one party to give up the ownership of this woman for another right. Cowie ([1978] 2000) pointed out that film stereotypically signifies the woman or an appropriate woman’s image to the public so it is significant to consider certain modes of female representation in order to figure out how women are constructed in society. In Cowie’s (1997) words, “[s]he was a sign of everything and anything but herself” (p. 16). Lévi-Strauss’ (1969) concept of kinship structures and Cowie’s (1978) notion of the woman as a sign can help to explain the ways in which women are set into various kinship relations through the process of exchange This notion of exchange is highly applicable to the analysis of women’s status in the patriarchal, order-centred Chinese culture that has underpinned Chinese crime films.

‘Woman as subject’

While Mulvey’s (1975) and Cowie’s (1978) theories will help to analyse representations of the female victim as an object in this study, the theory of the ‘woman as subject’ will assist in investigating the female victim as a subject, particularly in relation to the passive perpetrator who uses violence for self-defence. Drawing on Smelik (1998), this study views subjectivity as a process of continuous becoming rather than as a state of being. According to Smelik (1998), the process of becoming a subject occurs in a network of power relations in which sexual difference is a major constitutive factor. Thus, subjectivity both constitutes and is constituted by a set of agencies and experiences as well as by external material conditions. The awareness of sexual difference might encourage the female subject to change her own conditions, while the experience can be both productive of and conducive to political agency. In the case of feminist film studies, key questions that feminist scholars pay attention to relate to how filmmakers process their experience or awareness of social and cultural understandings about gender in the process of (re)producing representations of female characters in films.

Smelik’s (1998) study on female subjectivity drew on the work of Teresa de Lauretis (1984, 1987), who offered constructive insights into the relationship between ‘the woman’ in reality

and representations of 'the woman' in cinema from a semiotic and psychoanalytic perspective. According to de Lauretis (1984), the 'woman' is represented as 'the other', as different from 'man'. It is a fiction, a representation that is distinguished from 'women' which refers to the real referent living in a social context (p. 5). Therefore, the female subjective position is almost impossible because 'woman' is in a meaningless nowhere, where women cannot represent themselves, but are only constructed as the specular image of femininity in contrast to masculinity. Female subjectivity is defined as "a process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed" (1984, p. 158). The experience, as "the continuous engagement of a self or subject in social reality", makes a woman out of the female subject (p. 182). A particular experience of sexuality constitutes the female subject in her specific relation to social reality: sexual experience "engenders the female subject" (p. 182). In other words, women learn to be female, to know themselves to belong to a group through experience, which is not only personal, but also social. Female subjectivity is influenced by a certain habitual experience of sexuality both within herself and in relation to the outer world.

In light of Teresa de Lauretis's (1984, 1987) theory of female subjectivity, Smelik (1998) proposed three interconnected levels of female subjectivity, which are particularly applicable to the analysis the passive female perpetrator of violence in Chinese crime films. These levels are 1) "the subject as a social agent requiring self-determination"; 2) "the subject of the unconscious, with desires that are structured in a relational link to another or to others"; and 3) "the subject of feminist consciousness," understood here as a process that structures relations between the director, the film text and the spectator (p. 32). Examining these three levels can help to decode the different relational conditions that put the female characters in danger and encourage them to take up a subject position to resist male dominance, as well as how narrative and filming strategies present women's transition from an object to a subject.

Postfeminist discourse

While classic feminist film theories present useful frameworks for examining the objectification and subjectivity of the female victim, postfeminist theories[40] are helpful for investigating the activities of the female perpetrator and professional. Before discussing these postfeminist theories, an explanation of postfeminist discourse is provided. The term

[40] Postfeminist theories applied in this study particularly refer to the postfeminist media theories proposed and established in the Western context in the 2000s, primarily by McRobbie (2004, 2009), Rosalind Gill (2007), Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (2007, 2009) etc.

'postfeminism' became popular in media studies in North America and Europe during the 2000s, when it was debated as to whether feminism was still needed or not. Prominent studies of postfeminism in the Western context include those of Susan Douglas (1995), Angela McRobbie (2004, 2009), Rosalind Gill (2007), Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (2007), Negra (2009), and Rebecca Munford and Melaine Waters (2014). Postfeminist studies combine various ideologies, strategies and practices associated with liberal feminist critiques of freedom, choice and independence, and examine these within the context of a consumption-focused media landscape (Sarah Banet-Weiser, 2018). The 'post' in 'postfeminism', as Gill (2007) has argued, does not only refer to "a temporality as in 'after' feminism, or a backlash against feminism, but also a sensibility" (p. 148). As a sensibility, postfeminism celebrates female achievement through such successes as young women becoming educated professionals, gaining the freedom to make their own choices professionally and domestically, and women's physical and sexual empowerment. However, women's postfeminist freedom and increased visibility in the public realm has also been used to undo feminism. As McRobbie (2009) has argued, the circulation of such seemingly modern ideas as empowerment and choice prevent women from progressing towards a new revolution because they create the sentiment that these have already been achieved. More precisely, popular media, including films, work to spread a seeming impression of women's strengthened power, but this power is actually still located within traditional ideological rubrics, which Jean-Luc Nancy (2002) has termed 'pretences of equality'. Postfeminist discourse delivers the sense that gender equality has been achieved and women's rights have been fully recognised so the critiques of hegemonic masculinities are no longer needed.

Postfeminism, as a term, is defined by three general approaches (L. S. Kim, 2001). The first approach started in the 1980s and strengthened particularly in the 1990s and defines postfeminism simply as the era after the second wave of feminism. In the second approach, postfeminism is seen as a backlash against feminism and is underpinned by the sense that gender equality has been achieved and so feminism is no longer necessary. This approach is the one that is particularly prominent in the 2000s. The third approach sees postfeminism as "a useful conceptual frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements[41] including postmodernism, post-

[41] Anti-foundationalism is any philosophy that rejects a foundationalist approach. An anti-foundationalist is one who does not believe that there is some fundamental belief or principle which is the basic ground or foundation of inquiry and knowledge. See the belief that gender equality more in Childers, J., & Hentzi, G. (1995). *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

structuralism and post-colonialism" (Ann Brooks 1997, p. 1). As Brooks (1997) has argued, in the postfeminist era, patriarchy has not been overcome. Rather, feminism continually fights against patriarchy. Meanwhile, postfeminism functions to challenge the "hegemonic assumption that oppression is universal among women, race, and class" (Kim 2001, p. 321). As Brooks (1997) has illustrated, if the second wave of feminism was restrained by its own political agenda, postfeminism has been foregrounded as a result of critiques from inside and outside feminism. Throughout this thesis, postfeminism in the Chinese context is seen a kind of discourse in which it has been assumed by many people that women's status has been enhanced and that gender equality has been achieved, thus linking most strongly to the second understanding of postfeminism.

The very concept of feminism has been used to disavow feminist achievement and claim that young women have already been foregrounded in the areas of education, employment, sexuality and so on, which has led feminism to fade away (Banet-Weiser, 2018). In the Chinese context, it has been declared that women's status has strengthened and gender equality has been achieved through their active participation in education and employment. Studies of postfeminism have regarded white, middle-class Western women as the primary subject. Jess Butler (2013) has argued that neoliberal capitalism has impelled postfeminism to privilege white, middle-class women as the ideal subjects. Although postfeminism has been widely researched in European and American academic circles, as Simidele Dosekun (2015) has noted, postfeminist values, sensibility and media representations have circulated through transnational media. With the development of marketisation and privatization in the contemporary consumerist China, postfeminist discourse is currently highly visible especially in media and films, which necessitates a postfeminist inquiry in the Chinese context.

A precursor to this project, Marchetti (2011) interrogated sexual politics in contemporary China through a film by female director, Ning Ying. Engaging consumer culture-focused postfeminist discourse, Marchetti (2011) argued that women in Mainland China contradictorily moved between Maoist and global capitalist discourse, between patriarchy and consumerism, and between Chinese culture and a Western style. Beyond cinema studies, postfeminism has been applied in media and literary studies in the Chinese context in a number of ways. Thornham and Feng (2010) have analysed Chinese femininity in fashion magazines, comparing with postfeminist representations in Western popular culture to show a loss of a feminist subject position. Eva Chen (2009) and Kelly Tse (2016) have examined the negotiation between neoliberal ideology and consumerist agency in the process of producing

a postfeminist stance in Chinese female writers' novels. However, an application of postfeminist theories in the analysis of the representation of female characters in Chinese cinema has remained absent. Through interrogating the familiar topic of female representation within feminist frameworks in combination with consumer culture-focused postfeminist theories, this study offers a new trajectory in the theoretical analysis of films in the Chinese context. The inclusion of postfeminist approaches to the study of discourse allows for new insights into the understanding of women's status and gender norms in contemporary Chinese consumerist society.

In summary, this chapter has mapped out the gender discourse in the Chinese context by discussing theories in relation to the Confucian *nei-wai* realms and the three waves of Chinese feminist movements. From a Mainland Chinese perspective, it has been argued that Western feminism is inappropriate for application to the Chinese context because of the uniqueness of Chinese women. Scholarly research on the representation of females in Chinese cinema and media more broadly has also been discussed with most studies focusing on the woman as victim and the woman as perpetrator, while a few scattered studies have covered other female figures, including the woman seeking love, the female migrant worker and the female white-collar worker in Chinese films, and the divorced woman, the female professional and the single woman in TV drama, magazines and the news media. Based on these studies, the aim of this thesis was outlined, which is to bridge the gap in the analysis of female representations in the specific genre of crime films, which is one of the most prevalent and profitable commercial genres in the contemporary Chinese movie market and one that has been dominated by male filmmakers. In doing so, this study aims to interrogate the Chinese crime films tendentiousness toward women's status and consider how they reflect gender norms in contemporary Chinese socio-cultural discourse. Furthermore, this chapter has detailed the theoretical framework of the study by discussing classic feminist film theories and postfeminist discourse and theories. The next chapter specifically explains the methodology used for the film selection and the film analysis in this study.

Chapter 3. Methodology: Critical Multimodal Narrative Analysis

To analyse the representation of female characters in Chinese-language crime films, this study adopts a multidimensional method that I refer to as 'critical multimodal narrative analysis'. It is a combination of narrative analysis, critical discourse analysis and multimodal discourse analysis, whereby the narrative, visual and audio elements of the film text are explained through a critical analysis that relates the filmic elements to broader social, cultural and political concerns. The first section of this chapter explains the critical multimodal narrative approach while the second part introduces the films selected for analysis in this study.

Critical Multimodal Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis

This study draws on the three steps from Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou's (2008) theory of narrative analysis, in which a narrative is defined "a chain of events in a cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space" (David Bordwell & Kristin Thompson, 2004, p. 69). The first step is to identify the interactions between characters, such as between male and female characters, in the context of plots. Second, the power of narratives is contextualised – in this case, the gender relations are considered in relation to socio-political, hegemonic, and patriarchal norms. Third, the narrative is considered in relation to social theoretical concerns – in this case in relation to feminist and postfeminist theories as discussed in Chapter 2.

The focus of a narrative analysis is on examining the story and plots. As Thomas Caldwell (2005) has suggested, the story of a film refers to the diegesis existing entirely in the world of the film. The events of a story include those directly depicted in the films and the things that happen at the same time but are not presented to the audience. The plot of a film refers to all the events that are presented to the audience in the film, including the non-diegetic elements, such as the soundtrack and credit sequences. While the plot is not the entire part of the story, diegesis is used as a term in film studies to refer to 'the world of the story' including "all the story elements presented by the narrative, no matter whether they are actually seen or heard on screen or not" (Ed Sikov, 2010, p. 91). This study examines the arrangement of the materials in the film as it stands – the content relevant to the female protagonists in particular – to uncover which parts of the story are highlighted, weakened, or deleted and what sense is delivered through the arrangement. These elements are related to the chain of cause and effect, in which a character is usually the main agent who triggers and reacts to events

(Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). Thus, a major task for this film analysis is to find the anchor of each link in the criminal cause and effect chain, and the role that the female protagonists play.

While plots help to build a hierarchy of story information, this film analysis aims to examine the narrative at a deeper level by recognising objective and subjective narrations. The audience can be shown the narrative from the characters' point of view by seeing the characters' activities objectively, a perceptually subjective view by seeing the filmic world through the eyes of a particular character, or a mentally subjective view by seeing the filmic world from the mind of a character (Caldwell, 2005). As Bordwell and Thompson (2004) have argued, objectivity and subjectivity depend on whether the narration is expressed through the characters' external behaviour/performance or by what they see and hear. For instance, the depiction of a female protagonist's external behaviour/performance delivers an impression of female objectification, while filming from a woman's point-of-view or using her voice as a narrator could achieve a greater perceptual subjectivity, because through her internal voice the audience can understand her thoughts and mental condition in the film world. In this way, narrative films can present story information at various depths of a character's psychological life. In this film analysis, the objectivity and subjectivity of the narration provide an insightful perspective through which to understand the narrative perspective of Chinese crime films in relation to female characters. By integrating feminist film theories with objective and subjective narration techniques, this study investigates the ways in which female victimisation is objectified, while the study applies the theory of postfeminism to examine both objective and subjective narration techniques to assess how the female perpetrator and the female professional are represented as subjects.

The analysis of the visual elements in the selected films mainly involve a focus on the mise-en-scène and camerawork. Mise-en-scène (literally, 'putting into the scene') refers to all the visual elements in the frame supporting the film narrative, including such elements as the setting, lighting, costumes, and performers' acting styles (Sikov, 2010). Since mise-en-scène can have subtle influences on the audience's emotional and intellectual responses, an in-depth analysis of mise-en-scène helps to not only discover many under-the-surface meanings of a film and how the filmmakers position the audience, but also understand characters' traits, and themes and social values embedded in the films (Caldwell, 2005). The analysis of mise-en-scène in this study concentrates on four types of semiotic materials involving settings, lighting, characters' costumes, makeup and hair, and performing styles.

This study examines the settings in which the women in the selected films are engaged in violent activities and the functions that the settings play in these situations, including whether they are indoors or outdoors, expansive or claustrophobic. The settings provide relevant information about the time, place, location, and environment. These elements help the viewer make sense of the characters' feelings and actions (Jon Lewis, 2013), and help to offer an understanding of the women's position in society. In addition, the props (the physical objects that repeatedly appear in the film and offer valuable clues about the protagonists and the narratives) and motifs are also taken into account. For instance, in mainstream Chinese crime films, some props are usually filmed as short-cut clues to indicate or imply the characters' action, intention or mind state, while motifs are used to highlight a significant cue of an action in the film world. For instance, a wedding ring may symbolise a couple's love, while frequently filming the wedding ring in different conditions may appear as a motif to show transitions within their relationship.

Lighting is another powerful approach that filmmakers use to introduce time (day or night), the seasons, the location as well as the characters' moods and the films' themes. By analysing lighting techniques and the way the men and women are illuminated, their positioning and the ideological constructions that underpin them can be uncovered. The analysis of lighting mainly canvasses three aspects, including: 1) colour, intensity and texture; 2) framing with light; and 3) the direction of the light. The colour, intensity and texture of the light are used to evoke different moods, atmospheres, times, seasons, and climates of scenes. For instance, low-key and high-key lighting strategies create different levels of contrast between light and dark zones in the frame. Low-key light produces strong chiaroscuro with greater contrast, while high-key lighting generates a more upbeat and balanced appearance (Lewis, 2013). In this study, analysing the colour, intensity (how much light is on or around the characters or settings) and texture (how hard or soft light presents an intensive and uncomfortable or a tender and conformable atmosphere) contributes to an understanding of the female characters' physical and psychological conditions. Framing with light, which is used to unite or divide characters or objects in a frame, helps viewers to understand characters' positions and narrative themes by grouping them in equal or unequal light. For example, shining a bright light on men compared with a dim light on women may show their unbalanced position in a scene. Moreover, light from different directions can achieve various effects in a scene. For instance, a frontal light tends to produce a realistic image, a side light creates hard shadows onto the surroundings and helps to present scenes of horror and mystery,

backlighting generates artistic silhouettes, under lighting produces conventional shadows and a monstrous quality, and top lighting or putting a particular character or object under a spotlight helps create the sense that they have a leading position. Understanding how lighting is used can help us to interpret the characters' interactions with the external physical world as well as reveal their internal psychological conditions.

Characters' costumes, makeup and hair help to identify and signify the their social class, identities and mental activities. Costumes are regarded as a physical extension of a character's expression of personality by being presented in different colours, contrasting outfits and through changes of costume, which closely link to the film's narrative, allowing the characters' backgrounds, attitudes and emotions to be detected (Lewis 2013). Make-up, which is used to highlight, distort or hide some parts or traits of the character's face is also a standard approach to constructing personality. Furthermore, highlighted accessories involving personal props and the ways the characters interact with them can contribute to constructing personalities, emotions and social situations (Caldwell, 2005). Thus, an in-depth analysis of the characters' costumes, makeup and hair is an indispensable part of interpreting the representation of the women in the films in this study.

Finally, performers' acting style, including their appearance, gestures and facial expressions, is a significant element in the analysis of mise-en-scène. The choreographed positioning of actors and actresses also helps to communicate filmic meanings (Lewis 2013). Representation is analysed by considering the positioning of the characters in the foreground or background. The foregrounding of a male or female in a particular setting may present specific meanings about the power relationship between them. Performances may appear realistic and natural; or an actor/actress may perform in a stylised way to present the characters' unique identities or personality. Thus, an in-depth analysis of the performers' acting style is critically important for understanding the design and representation of the female characters.

The interaction between mise-en-scène and the narrative is also important, especially in relation to space and time. Particular attention is paid to depth cues that help create a sense of space and a three-dimensional world (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). The depth cues suggest that a space has both volume and several distinct planes, which can be analysed by examining shape, shading and movement onscreen, as well as the layers of space occupied by characters or objects, such as foreground, middle ground and background. For instance, the female and

male characters can be examined in terms of where they are arranged in the foreground, middle ground and background and the sense that this arrangement expresses in relation to gender relations in the filmic world.

The other visual mode this study considers apart from mise-en-scène is camerawork, which controls the audience's view and allows them to engage with the movements in the film world. The analysis of camerawork focuses on camera placement and movement. Camera placement mainly refers to angle and distance that help to decode the filming perspective, including whether the scene is shot from the perspective of a male or female character. Shooting from a low angle and looking up to an object may imply admiration, power or a threat, whereas from a high angle looking down may suggest belittlement, weakness or vulnerability. An eye-level shot may indicate equality, and a canted shot, which is filmed by tilting the camera at an angle on a subject, may address a sense of disorientation or giddiness. Also the distance between the camera and the subjects shows the parts or objects that filmmakers try to highlight and the functions of these parts or objects in relations to the characters. Camera movement, including horizontal and vertical movement, tracking, crane and handheld shots, lead the audience's eyes towards specific characters, objects, movements or other filmic events. These measures are all helpful in establishing a sense of drama and help to build particular types of relationships between male and female characters.

This analysis also pays attention to framing, particularly how the camera frames the dimensions and shapes in the process of presenting particular characters and events, including 1) the size and shape of the frame; 2) the way the frame defines on- and off-screen spaces; 3) the way framing imposes the distance, angle and height of a vantage point onto the image; and 4) the way framing can move in relation to the mise-en-scène. In a crime film, for instance, violent activities may be framed in different ways that includes or excludes particular people or body parts, particular mise-en-scène, and from particular angles. As Bordwell and Thompson (2004) have illustrated, when a shot's framing prompts the audience to take it as a character's vision, the audience can see the film world through the character's subjective point-of-view, which can help viewers to evaluate particular characters' thoughts and feelings.

Point-of-view, as a significant filmic narratology, provides a constructive lens through which this study can investigate female objectivity/subjectivity in relation to feminist film theories (see Chapter 2). Browne (1976) contended that "shot", "point-of-view", "character's point-

of-view" and "narrative point-of-view" are all important to examine and explain the linkages between different orders of seeing integrated within a film (p. 58). As a term in film theory, point-of-view is described as a subjective approach to presenting the character's vision (Monaco, 1981; Bordwell & Thompson, 2004), usually consisting of two shots: the character looking and the object looked at (Edward Branigan, 1984). Cinematic techniques like mobile framing, close-ups and camera movement produce different effects to the more objective approach of long shots, deep focus and static camera (Bordwell, 1985). The application of point-of-view as a key perspective to evaluate female subjectivity in films is utilised by the feminist film theorist Smelik (1998), who suggested that an analysis of point-of-view in relation to the female character can be considered on three levels, namely 1) the optical point-of-view within the story (where the audience sees what the female character sees), 2) the mental point-of-view within the story (where the audience learns the vision of the female character as the narrator), and 3) the metaphorical point-of-view on the female character within the cinematic discourse (the vision of the diegetic narrator). These three levels work together to create a subjective point-of-view both of and on the female character. In this way, point-of-view helps us to identify whether female position is represented as an object or a subject, and allows us to consider the ways in which the filmic language portrays women's objective and subjective activities.

Within the structuralist approach, point-of-view also pertains to two narrative levels (Smelik, 1998): the level of the narrative or story, including the relations between characters; and the level of the narration or discourse, which mediates the relationship of address between the narrator and spectator. Point-of-view is central to structure the interaction and difference between these two levels of storytelling (Branigan, 1984), while it is a construction produced by the text to communicate with the spectator, and thus plays a coordinating role in reconstructing the text (Browne, 1976).

The film analysis of the audio elements in this study focus on dialogue, music and sound effects, which involve loudness, pitch and timbre that define the overall sonic texture of a film. As Caldwell (2005) has stated, filmic sound contributes to creating meanings for the visual elements. It directs the audience's attention towards particular visual elements that the filmmakers want them to focus on, and creates expectations for the audience by coordinating with the visual elements. The sound has a close connection with images and creates meanings together with the images in different ways. In this study, the analysis of audio elements are

integrated with visuals and narratives to comprehensively interpret the relations between women's representation and violence.

In terms of sources, this study prominently considers diegetic and non-diegetic sound, because the former mediates characters and filmic events in the films, while the latter tends to be used to render atmospheres and moods, both of which have a significant function in terms of constructing characters and filmic worlds. Identifying the on- or off-screen diegetic sound helps in the analysis of what a character is thinking and gives the audience information about the mental state of the character. Sound also plays a role in echoing the visual track (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004).

The sound analysis in this study also concerns dialogue, music, and sound effects. Dialogue mainly covers all the spoken words in a film, including conversation, monologue (speech), scattered audible words and voice-over narration. Characters use spoken lines to convey their moods and to narrate events, and the tone of their voice emphasises key aspects of their emotions (Sikov, 2010). Moreover, examining musical accompaniment helps with the evaluation of the atmosphere in the film world that underpins the characters' actions. Through sound effects, which are evaluated by volume (the loudness or softness of the sound), pitch (the frequency level of a sound) and timbre (the feel of the sound) (Sikov, 2010), this study considers the characters' emotions and mental states at particular key moments. Silence, which can portray a sense of emptiness or repression, is also a significant factor in relation to sound.

Critical discourse analysis

To provide more contextual depth to the analysis of narrative elements, this study also adopts critical and multimodal approaches of discourse analysis (DA) to analyse the representation of female protagonists in Chinese crime films. Grounded in the social context of Mainland China and the Hong Kong SAR, this study has adopted a method of 'critical' discourse analysis (CDA) to analyse how interactions between different filmic elements can be interpreted in the context of broader social and political discourses by using film texts as the prominent data, feminist theories as the grounding theoretical basis, and filmmakers and critics' comments as secondary resources[42]. As a branch of DA, CDA places emphasis on the traces of cultural and ideological meanings, and pays attention to how and why macro-

[42] Although this study uses filmmakers and critics' comments, the film analysis mainly relies on close reading and textual and critical discourse analysis. Filmmakers and critics' comments are supportive but not central.

structures are reproduced in discourses (Renugah Ramanathan & Bee Hoon Tan, 2015). According to Emilia Djonov & Sumin Zhao (2014), CDA helps to analyse the relationship between language (and other modes, such as visuals, music and sound effects) and power by investigating how communication reveals, conceals, legitimizes, or subverts social inequality, boundaries, and the political or commercial implications. They believe that human communication is always social and can be defined and transformed within a social context. CDA is based on critical social theory, which aims to move beyond description and interpretation to explore the relationship between discourse and social structures (Lilie Chouliaraki & Norman Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, [1995] 2010). The purpose of CDA is to investigate social changes by examining how social inequality is produced and perpetuated, as well as how it is remedied or modified, including any other potential implications for adjusting it (Fairclough, [1995] 2010). For these reasons CDA is a useful tool for analysing both negative and positive social issues as represented in film texts, as well as how these issues are depicted through visual and audio elements. Moreover, Teun A. van Dijk (2003) explained that CDA focuses on how power abuse, dominance and inequality are presented in discursive social and political contexts. It emphasises how a social group's mental state is affected by social structures that may have an impact on how people highlight significant information in a text. In this study, CDA is used to investigate how female protagonists are represented within the patriarchal system and how gender inequality is produced and perpetuated in Chinese culture.

CDA, which draws on a variety of analytical frameworks and approaches, can play a crucial role in uncovering hidden ideologies and canvassing the presence of power in media discourse (Ramanathan & Tan, 2015). This study primarily draws on Fairclough's (1992) social theory of discourse. In his theory, discourse is seen as a social practice that negotiates various social entities. He stated that "language use in society is a form of social practice rather than an individual activity" (p. 63), and is correlated with the occurrence of power and ideology in discourse. From this perspective, filmmaking may be seen as a kind of social practice that expresses the ideological position of the dominant power. Fairclough's social theory of discourse provides tools for decoding filmic language as a form of expressing social practice and for probing issues of power and ideology in discourse.

Specifically, this study applies Fairclough's (1992) social theory of discourse because of its three principles regarding social practice. First, according to Fairclough (1992), discourse can

reflect and shape social structures. By analysing the relevant discourse, the social structures in Chinese society that are reflected in and shaped by the discourses of Chinese films can be uncovered, and can help to unmask the status of particular types of people, including women. Second, representations (e.g., of women) and relationships (e.g., with men) in films are not merely created by filmmakers' imaginations, but rather, are rooted in ideology. Thus, understanding the representations of females and the interrelationship between genders in films is considered a feasible way to gain insights into the social practices and ideology in Chinese culture. Lastly, social practice is considered conducive to understanding systems of knowledge and beliefs by leading to other functions of language, including identity, and relational and ideational functions. In this sense, a film analysis of female representations and discourses exploring social practices aims to deepen the understanding of the status of women that is well received and believed by the public in the Chinese context.

This film analysis draws on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of CDA involving text (written, oral or visual elements), discourse practice (the process of text production and consumption) and sociocultural practices (social and cultural practices in which the communicative event is situated).The analysis in this study focused on the film text, including the narrative (story and plot), visual (mise-en-scène and camerawork) and audio (dialogue, music, and sound effects) elements, as well as how these three types of elements interact to create meanings and representations, in this case, of women and violence. Fairclough (1995) considered 1) representation, which carries particular ideologies as related to ideational function (e.g., the representation of women and violence); 2) constructions of writer and reader identities related to interpersonal functioning (e.g., the ways the female characters are filmed and highlighted, and the status and roles they play); and 3) constructions of the relationship between the writer and reader as related to textual function (e.g., the relationship between filmmakers and the audience, and the ways in which filmmakers show the film content and female images to the audience). Fairclough's (1995) approaches decode specific word choices and choices of phrasing which help construct particular representations that underpin different ideologies. In this study, this refers to specific dialogue choices spoken by particular characters or the language of narration by an omniscient narrator. Combining linguistic analysis (the design of dialogues and lines) with an analysis of multimodal filmic techniques, such as camera angles and choice of colours, provides a constructive tool for explaining the ways in which dialogue choices and film techniques interact with the story, performance and the film world.

In this study, which has a deep grounding in the PRC socio-cultural context, including the post-1997 context in which Hong Kong has seen unification with the PRC, CDA plays a crucial role because the analysis of a communicative event also involves consideration of a wider context of institutional practices, including economic, political (e.g., power and ideology), and cultural (e.g., value) practices. Through an analysis of these practices, the way in which texts represent sociocultural practices can be uncovered as can the way in which sociocultural practices construct texts and discursive practices. Fairclough (1995) understood ideology as discourses that are "in the service of power". They are "propositions that generally figure as implicit assumptions in texts, and which contribute to producing or reproducing unequal relations of power, relations of domination" (p. 14). He argued that media discourses "contribute to reproducing social relations of domination and exploitation" (p. 44). This method is useful for uncovering the social relations of power, domination and exploitation between males and females in crime films in the Chinese context.

Multimodal discourse analysis

As applied to this study, multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) examines the ways in which female figures who are victims or perpetrators of violence are represented in films and how meanings around gender inequality are created out of the interaction of various modes in the film text, including the narrative, visual and audio elements. According to Djonov & Zhao (2014), MDA explores the meaning-making of different communication modes and media, as well as their dynamic interaction and the broader social and cultural contexts. Meaning-making involves various modes (e.g., written text, sound, behaviours, visual setting) and media (e.g., face-to-face, print, film) and a combination with the logic of space (e.g., sculptures), time (e.g., songs), or both (e.g., films) (Gunther Kress, 2011). Modes appear as a format to shape society, to reflect social concerns, foci, interests, needs and so forth. They can convey information about the groups who use these modes, why they use these modes, and their related social, personal, and professional experience. As Kress (2011) has noted, the aim of MDA is to examine the relations between a group of meanings and their semiotic manifestations as embedded in media. Its strength lies in detecting diversified communication forms that allow for a more systematic description of text and a deeper analysis that can draw out buried ideologies from other communicative modes and not just linguistic texts (David Machin, 2013). In film analysis, MDA may help to decode the interactions between different intersecting filmic modes to reveal the hidden social, cultural and ideological values. While many film theorists have considered the various elements of filmic meanings, scholars, such as Roberta Piazza (2010), have explicitly articulated the usefulness of a multimodal approach

to examine how dialogue may artfully interact with elements of mise-en-scène, for instance, to create meanings.

This study applies MDA with a 'critical' focus by drawing on Theo van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak's (1999) critical approach, which considers how different types of semiotic resources communicate particular discourses through the process of deletion, addition, substitution and evaluation. Firstly, 'deletion' mainly examines what has been omitted, such as participants, actions, or settings and so on, since a representation does not consist of all the aspects of a social practice. For films, plots only show the important parts of a story that filmmakers want viewers to see and deletes the parts they believe to be unimportant. As for 'addition', van Leeuwen & Wodak (1999) addressed three significant forms, including legitimation, purpose and reactions. Characters' legitimate measures to deal with crime and violent activities may be applied to an analysis of how legal practitioners handle female victims/perpetrators. Their motivations or purposes for committing acts of violence and for making other decisions may be considered in relation to how and why the female protagonists commit violence toward others, how women's victimisation affects men's decisions, and how women's/men's decisions affect crime solutions and social justice. Their reactions towards legitimation and purpose may be considered in relation to male and female characters' attitudes/reactions towards their situations in the crime world. As for 'substitution', van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) noted that the complexities of activities can be substituted by generalisations or vice versa. Social actors can be represented by types through how they look or through their role and actions. For instance, in the context of this study, the representation of women as soft, moral, submissive, or emotionally vulnerable may be seen as a substitution for women as a whole. Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) also argued that social practices can also be evaluated through an examination of how events and people are represented according to their goals, values and priorities.

Compared to van Leeuwen and Wodak's (1999) model, the concept of multimodality proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) provides a wider scope to consider: media texts are not exclusively made up of the integration of visual and verbal components. For example, a film includes various modes of communication, such as visual, verbal, sound, music and other communicative modes. Instead of regarding every mode of communication as having a specific task or function (as in films where images provide information about action and sounds present realism or music presents emotion), Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) have argued that multimodality is a view through which to examine the operation of common

semiotic principles in and across different modes. In their view, multimodal communication is a process in which a semiotic recourse is both articulated or produced, and interpreted or used, with production and design being forms of communication.

Overall, CDA and MDA have a close connection with this study's overarching approach of narrative analysis. By emphasising social and cultural meanings, the key function of CDA is to identify social wrongs and illuminate social issues represented in film texts. To achieve this goal, narrative analysis can help with decoding the narrative or story design and denoting which part or element of the narrative is socially positive or negative. In the films studied in this thesis, this method draws attention to the relationships women typically form in Chinese crime film and discourse analysis draws attention to the ways in which women speak and how they are spoken to in Chinese crime film. While MDA has a particular focus on decoding diverse communication formats within films, narrative analysis provides models for the analysis of specific elements such as the story, plots, mise-en-scène, camerawork and dialogue. In short, narrative analysis is a practical and circumstantial approach for probing the filmic details under the overarching guidance of CDA and MDA. In this study, while CDA and MDA can be used to help identify issues of gender inequality and women's oppression in the selected films by analysing visual and audio elements associated with women's violent activities, narrative analysis can be used to tease out more details, such as how the camera moves from to one character to another, how the lighting on women is implemented, and the meaning of the characters' facial expressions.

In summary, films are an example of a narrative resource that create representations situated in the broader social and political environment. They tell stories that occur at a particular time and place, and reflect filmmakers' sensibilities and social concerns. While narrative analysis helps to unpack the diverse cinematic elements such as lighting, costumes, setting, acting style and cinematography, MDA helps us to view the modes of communication as measures of social construction that shape and are shaped by society. In this way, MDA and CDA seek to denaturalise representations by uncovering assumptions underpinning the representations as well as omissions in the visual and audio sources and the power interests buried beneath them (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In short, narrative analysis provides ways of reading the segments/elements of film representations technically, while MDA and CDA contribute to reading these modes socially and ideologically. Based on these methods, the critical approach to multimodal discourse analysis enables this study to examine cinematic representations and particular representations of women alongside a critical consideration of broader social and

cultural discourses, which is crucial in unveiling the hidden ideological messages behind the representation of women.

Film Selection

A focus on award-winning mainstream crime films

This thesis focuses on award-winning crime films from the prestigious film festivals in the Chinese film circle, all of which are seen as mainstream films. While award-winning Chinese films have been widely studied (e.g. Hongliang Qin, 2016; Tian Lang, 2011; Nikki Lee & Julian Stringer, 2012; 2013; Zheng Lv, 2015; Yanjie Wang; 2015; Liu Yang, 2012; Yong Zhang, 2014; Juan Zhang, 2014; Zan Zou, 2013), the significance of film festivals themselves on the Chinese film market has been highlighted in only a few studies. This includes studies by Marijke de Valck (2007) and Cindy Wong (2011), which focused on Chinese films awarded in the most famous international film festivals – the so-called 'Big 3' of Venice, Cannes and Berlin International film festivals that are regarded as the global pinnacle worldwide (James Udden, 2016). Acquiring awards at the Big 3 film festivals has been desirable for filmmakers in Chinese cinema to gain a reputation on a global scale. As Udden (2016) has argued, festival success is beneficial to the careers of awarded filmmakers', particularly if they have not been successful in the commercial market. Being part of a global economy of cultural prizes, an award in a recognized festival can build up a kind of cultural capital resulting in 'capital interconversion'[43] (James F. English, 2005). For instance, garnering prestige from a major festival prize can be converted into economic capital through greater commercial success as a result of the recognition from the festival.

As Udden (2016) has argued, international film festivals were critical for the survival of both Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese cinema during the 1980s, because , unlike the Hong Kong film industry, both were experiencing restrictions as a result of being under the heavy control of governmental policies. International film festivals became an opportunity for both Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese cinema to be noticed by the West, which in-turn helped enhance greater respect within in local Chinese markets. However, with the recent decades of prosperity and commercialisation of the Chinese film industries, the recognition of local awards has risen dramatically, and local Chinese films have become much more appreciated in their own markets. The focus on Chinese film festivals, with their emphasis on films

[43] See more in English, J. F. (2005). *The economy of prestige: Prizes, awards, and the circulation of cultural value*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

popular among the Greater Chinese mainstream, rather than international film festivals, which have been more concerned with merit of quality, provide significant cases through which to examine gender discourses in contemporary Chinese culture.

The selected crime films in this study are considered to form a part of mainstream Chinese cinema dramas. In the most general sense, mainstream drama typically seeks to reflect a seamless cinematic reality that does not attempt to deconstruct or call overt attention to the process of filmmaking as an exercise in the (re)production of reality. In other words, mainstream drama invites the audience to engage in the film world and imagine themselves in it. As Kristin Hole and Dejiana Jelača (2018) suggested, the narrative imperatives of mainstream drama are generally premised on offering closure and normativity, which is different from art cinema's conventions of embracing ambiguity. Consequently, mainstream drama is designed to appeal to broad audiences, and is regarded as an effective way of introducing the audience to widely perceived perspectives on social issues, particularly, as Hole and Jelača (2018) indicated, patriarchy and women's position in society on a transnational scale. This link between film and social education underpins the decision to focus on award-winning films from mainstream drama, rather than, say, underground films, as the lens through which to explore gender norms in mainstream Chinese discourse.

While the difference between films winning awards and gaining commercial profits has been long debated, the fact is many films have been both successful at the box office and have won prestigious awards. Among the twenty-three selected films (all of which screened in Hong Kong, twenty-one of which screened in the Mainland and twenty in Taiwan[44]), the Mainland Chinese new year movie of 2004, the Mainland-made film *A World Without Thieves* earned RMB80 (AUD16.75) million in two weeks at the box office and RMB120 (AUD25.12) million overall,[45] making it the third most successful film in Mainland China that year.[46] It was also the most popular film in the opening week in the Hong Kong film market, grossing HK$7.2 (AUD1.32) million.[47] The coproduced film *Confession of Pain* (2006) was the 7th most successful film in Mainland China in terms of box office success in 2006, earning RMB74.311 (AUD15.56)[48] million and 10th in Hong Kong, earning HK$2.566 (AUD0.47)

[44] *2000 AD* and *Port of Call* did not screen in the Mainland, while *Silent Witness*, *Sparrow* and *2000AD* did not screen in Taiwan.
[45] http://www.cbooo.cn/m/1437, access date 21 May 2019.
[46] http://58921.com/alltime/2004, access date 24 May 2019.
[47] https://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/hongkong/?currency=local&yr=2004&p=.htm, access date 27 May 2019.
[48] http://www.boxofficecn.com/boxoffice2006, access date 27 May 2019.

million,[49] out of all the international, national and coproduced films screened that year. The co-produced film *Overheard* (2009) was the 6th most successful Chinese-language film at the box office in Hong Kong, earning HK$1.994 (AUD0.37) million,[50] while *Overheard* 3 (2014) was the 4th most successful Chinese-language film screened in Hong Kong, earning HK$3.082 (AUD0.57) million[51]. *Overheard* (2009) and *Overheard 3* (2014) earned RMB88.396 (AUD18.51) and RMB 308.7 (AUD64.63) million respectively at the box office[52] in the Mainland. For such films, festival success was complemented by box office success, making these films key examples of mainstream film.

Not all of the selected award-winning films were top grossing. Yet they are still important to consider as part of the Chinese film landscape and mainstream discourse. For example, *Breaking New* (2004) and *Eye in the Sky* (2007) earned significantly less than the top grossing films, with RMB6.5 (AUD1.36) and RMB7.92 (AUD1.66) million[53] respectively in the Mainland, although the performance of these two films in Hong Kong box office was good with HK$7.842 (AUD1.45)[54] and HK$4.13 (AUD0.76)[55] million. These two films are important given that they were produced and directed by Hong Kong filmmakers Johnnie To and Wai Ka-Fai (Milkyway Image production house) who have been particularly well known across Greater China for their crime thrillers and police films. These films have been popularised through online platforms and home theatres (such as through DVD sales) as well as film festivals, such as those selected for this study. As Jeffery Rouff (2012) has argued, whether they celebrate film as an art, as affirmations of cultural identity, or for market value, festivals enhance the shared, collective dimensions of cinema. Film festivals help increase media and public attention and recognition of films, whether they be blockbusters or smaller, specialised films, through the prestigious awards that are bestowed on them, and help to stimulate engagement with such films in the mainstream culture.

In the Chinese context, film festivals complement the box office – and vice versa – by offering a wider selection of films for the audience to choose from. Replicating the motivations of the PRC as a nation-state on a global stage, Chinese film market planners have

[49] http://www.boxofficecn.com/hkboxoffice2006, access date 27 May 2019.
[50] http://www.boxofficecn.com/hkboxoffice2009, access date 27 May 2019.
[51] http://www.boxofficecn.com/hkboxoffice2014, access date 27 May 2019.
[52] http://www.cbooo.cn/m/6083; http://www.cbooo.cn/m/565870; http://www.cbooo.cn/m/612127, access date 21 May 2019.
[53] http://www.cbooo.cn/m/255, http://www.cbooo.cn/m/3601, access date 24 May 2019.
[54] https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/大事件, access date 24 May 2019.
[55] http://www.cbooo.cn/m/3601, access date 24 May 2019.

attempted to integrate the Chinese film market into the international market through such strategies as coproduction with foreign producers as well as through launching China as a location for shoots. Overall, organisers of Mainland Chinese film festivals have been mostly interested in supporting the production of commercial filmmaking rather than regional or smaller scale films for artistic sake or niche audiences (Wong, 2011), resulting in a great portion of award-winning Chinese films being those that seek to cater to mainstream values. The award-winning Hong Kong films, especially the post-CEPA coproduction that cater to the Mainland market, have also shown a tendency of presenting the mainstream values rather than being restricted in the small scale niche interests. Nonetheless, there has also been a space in Chinese film festivals for films that are more experimental, which allow for a consideration of potential differences between box office hits and festival winners in terms of representations of women.

While Taiwan is not the focus of this study given the limited number of crime films made or recognised in Taiwan, it is important to note that the Taiwan film market is small and has long been dominated by Hollywood rather than being a key target of Mainland and Hong Kong filmmakers. Box office data from Taiwan is also limited to short annual top grossing lists, which rarely show popular crime films. While this study does not delve into the reasons behind this, the festival and box office data suggests that crime films are more popular among mainstream Chinese audiences in the Mainland and Hong Kong than in Taiwan. In the Taiwan film market, the only Chinese-language crime film that appeared in the lists of the top 20 box office films in Taiwan from 2000 to 2016 was *Monga* (2010), which earned TW$3.653 (AUD0.17) million and was ranked 4th that year[56]. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, although *Monga* won multiple awards at the GHA in 2010, it was excluded in this study because it mainly focused on men's battles and did not have a leading female character.

Selection criteria

This study involves an analysis of Chinese language (Mandarin and Cantonese) Mainland- and Hong Kong-produced crime films produced between 2000 and 2016, which directly depict criminal activities and their consequences as the main component of the narrative (Rafter, 2006), and focus on three main kinds of characters, namely, criminals, victims and avengers (or perpetrators), though boundaries between these characterizations may be blurred

[56] http://www.boxofficecn.com/twboxoffice2010, access date 5 June 2019.

(Leitch, 2002) as discussed in Chapter 1. Based on this definition of crime films, the selected films needed to have females in leading roles, and these females had to be involved in violent activities that are a part of the principle line of the narrative, either as victims who are physically or emotionally harmed by male counterparts, as perpetrators who use violence for self-defence or actively hurt others, or important bystanders who engage in violent activities (e.g. crime investigation, criminal actions) without receiving physical harm or using violence as a weapon. In these films, the violent activities form a central part of the narrative, with the leading female characters' engagement in the violent activities leading them towards a legal or illegal status. As stated above, this study also focuses on highly-acclaimed, awarding-winning films, which, through their recognition are deemed to be significant to Chinese viewers, filmmakers and critics, and are assumed to reflect mainstream values and perspectives across the Greater China region. The selected films derive from the three most prestigious film awards in the Greater China region, namely the Mainland-based *Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Awards* (GRHFA), the *Hong Kong Film Awards* (HKFA) and the Taipei-based *Golden Horse Awards* (GHA). While the GRHFA represents the governmental voice in Mainland China, the HKFA has had a particular focus on Hong Kong local films, while the GHA has assessed films produced across the Greater China region.

Only films produced between 2000 and 2016 have been chosen for analysis in this study because the post-2000 era reflects a time of increased prosperity in the Chinese film industry. In particular, China's joining of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001 allowed for more frequent cooperation with international studios and for participation in international film festivals, while the signing of the CEPA in 2003 paved the way for more intense collaborations and cross-fertilization between the Mainland, Hong Kong and other film industries (see Chapter 1). Chinese language films produced since 2000 have seen a remarkable improvement in terms of production values, artistry, and box office success both within China and overseas. These award-winning films have been judged by experts as being amongst the most creative films and have been acclaimed as extraordinary pieces with good quality. Also, these works have had wide exposure amongst audiences at both the national and international levels. Therefore, a focus on award-winning films will help uncover values that are wide-spread and well-received across the region, including gender norms.

Compared to the 'Big 3' international film festivals of Venice (began in 1932), Cannes (began in 1946) and Berlin (began in 1951), Chinese film festivals have a relatively short history. Film festivals were not introduced in the PRC until the early 1990s, and since the

beginning, they have all been state-sanctioned or supported. China's decision to host film festivals and mirror the style of foreign film festivals was, to a great extent, encouraged after the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour and famous policy-making speech in 1992, which signalled the approved marketisation and commercialisation of culture. This movement towards China's further opening up and reform directly led the reform of the Chinese film industry (Ma Ran, 2012). Crime films were gradually encouraged as part of an emerging commercialised and profit-driven film-making context.

This study focuses on the GRHRA as the only 'national-level' film festival on the Mainland. The GRHRA is organised by the China Film Association (CFA[57]) and is regarded as one of the most important and influential official film associations in Mainland China, with awarded films evaluated by national, film experts[58] as being amongst the highest quality produced by filmmakers from across the PRC, including the Mainland and Hong Kong and Macau. The GRHRA is a significant festival to analyse due to its role as a bridge connecting Mainland China's film circle with the CCP and the government.[59] Analysis of the GRHRA allows us to examine interrelationships between film production, mainstream ideology, and the government's voice, which plays a leading role in guiding the public perception on social and cultural discourses, including gender norms in China. On the Mainland, the Shanghai International Film Festival (SIFF, founded in 1993), and the Beijing International Film Festival (BJIFF, 2011), both of which are accredited by the Fédération Internationale des Associations de Producteurs de Films (FIAPF[60]), are also official, relatively big-budget events. However, this study excludes films from the SIFF and BJIFF festivals because they pay more attention to celebrities rather than the quality of the films themselves. They have been criticised by Western critics for being more like celebrity shows than standard international film festivals that focus on film quality (Wong, 2015). According to Chris Berry (2013), the SIFF is more of a showcase for the Chinese to see themselves as ascending to the

[57] CFA consists of reputable film practitioners based on Mainland China, including directors, screenwriters, producers, actors, actresses, cinematographers, artists, mixers, composers, commentators and scholars. It was established in 1949 and has had several influential film journals on the Mainland, such as *Film Art (Dianying yishu)*, *Popular Cinema (Dazhong dianying)* and *World Cinema (Shijie dianying)*. As indicated in its official website, this association has been led by the CCP and a member of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles.

[58] Such as the Chairman of CFA, Chen Daoming, Vice Chairmen, Yu Dong, Yin Hong, Yin Li, Jackie Chan, Ren Zhonglun, Wu Jing etc.

[59] For details refer to http://www.cfa1949.com/jianjie/, access date 8 June 2017.

[60] FIAPF is based in Paris, was created in 1933, and is an organization composed of 36 member associations from 30 of the leading audio-visual production countries. FIAPF has also been in charge of regulating international film festivals, including some of the world's most important.

global stage than an event that follows the general contours and expectations of the Western-oriented international film festival circuit.

A search for crime films that have won awards at the GRHRA found that the crime genre is as not as commonly recognised as other genres at the GRHRA, with only twelve crime films having been awarded throughout its history since 1962 and only two post-2000 films[61], namely *World Without Thieves* (dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2004) and *Silent Witness* (dir. Fei Xing, 2014), both of which are co-productions between Mainland filmmakers and filmmakers from Hong Kong and Taiwan. The two films depict appealing female professionals with typical postfeminist female portraits – a female thief with dazzling defrauding and stealing skills in the former and a female attorney with a strong capacity for controversy and investigation in the latter (see Chapter 6). Although the popularity of the crime genre in the Mainland movie market has increased in the past few years, it is significant to note that the genre appears to have been downplayed by officials on the Mainland given the few crime films recognised in the GRHRA .

In contrast to the GRHRA, crime films have been consistently selected for the HKFA since this festival began in 1982. By 2016, sixty-eight crime films have been awarded, and fifty of these have had female characters in leading roles, demonstrating the significance of the crime genre in Hong Kong. Seventeen post-2000 films awarded in the HKFA, which feature female characters engaged in violent activities in the dominant narrative in diverse roles (see Table 1) meet the criteria for inclusion in this analysis. In contrast to the GRHFA, which is open to Hong Kong and Macau filmmakers, the HKFA is a local film festival open only to Hong Kong filmmakers. The purpose of the HKFA is to promote Hong Kong films locally and broadly, recognise outstanding achievements, encourage professional development, and promote film culture.[62] The composition of the Board of Directors, which consists of local

[61] This thesis selected the post-2000 award-winning films as the analytical cases. See more about the justification for their selection in Chapter 1.

[62] For details, see http://www.hkfaa.com/association.html, access date 8 June 2017. The Board of Directors has comprised 13 Hong Kong professional film bodies – the Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry Association Ltd (M.P.I.A.), the Hong Kong Film Directors' Guild, the Hong Kong Theatres Association, the Society of Cinematographers (H.K.), the Hong Kong Stuntman Association, the Hong Kong Screen Writer's Guild, the Hong Kong Performing Artistes Guild, the Hong Kong Film Arts Association, the Society of Film Editors (H.K.), the Hong Kong Movie Production Executives Association, the Hong Kong Cinematography Lighting Association, the Hong Kong Chamber of Films, and the Association of Motion Picture Post Production Professionals. It has held monthly executive meetings to decide on policy matters that are executed by the Secretariat. The Secretariat has been responsible for the association's external and internal administration and management, while it has also arranged sub-committees to hold regular meetings and execute related matters. The sub-committees have annually invited professional filmmakers from different fields to participate.

Hong Kong film organisations, denotes that the HKFA evaluates films from a local Hong Kong perspective. However, although the HKFA is concentrated on nominating local filmmakers, given the intensified connection between the Hong Kong and the Mainland film industries under the influence of the CEPA as outlined in Chapter 1, there is an increasing tendency to select films that are coproduction. Nonetheless, the films that compete for these awards are required to have Hong Kong directors and production teams with individuals from Hong Kong in charge. The qualifying films have to satisfy three selection criteria, namely, 1) the director should have permanent residency in Hong Kong; 2) at least one production company should be registered in Hong Kong if the film is a co-production with the Mainland or another country, and 3) at least six work categorise should have one or more staff holding permanent residency in Hong Kong.[63] The criteria requires that all the members and qualified voters of the HKFA should be either high-level film experts or professional film practitioners who have Hong Kong residency.

Compared with the GRHFA and the HKFA, which focus on their own regions, because of the intensified coproduction between filmmakers across the regions the Taipei-based GHA[64] has since 1996 been open to all Chinese language films, including Mainland-made films, regardless of the production and investment nation and the actor/actress's nationality. In other words, the GHA has awarded many good quality Hong Kong- and Mainland-made crime films, not just those produced in Taiwan. This inclusiveness marked a shift from the early 1990s when it was only open to Taiwanese and Hong Kong films. While Taiwanese crime films would have been included in this study, there has only been one Taiwanese-based

[63] Among the 16 work categories are the producer, screenwriter, actor, actress, supporting actor, supporting actress, new performer, cinematographer, choreography, art direction, costume and makeup design, original film music, original film songs, visual and audio effect.

For nomination, the first-round of voting has been by a jury of 100 experts (film professionals recommended or invited by the HKFA) and the HKFA public voters who have all been film practitioners. HKFA voters have been required to be Hong Kong residents at or over the age of 18 years, and holding Hong Kong Permanent Identity Cards.

The second-round of voting has been by a jury of 55 experts (film experts and media practitioners recommended or invited by HKFA), 13 members of the HKFA and the Composers and Authors Society of Hong Kong to decide the final award-winning films. Refer to http://www.hkfaa.com/rules2016_eng.html, access date 8 June 2017.

[64] The GHA has also been one of the most influential film awards and has also been well respected in the field of Chinese language films worldwide. It has been organised by the Taiwan Government Information Office since 1962 and sponsored and run by Taiwan's Motion Picture Foundation since 1990. Having the longest history among Chinese film festivals, the GHA is equivalent to the Academy Awards in Taiwan.

Similar to the GRHFA and HKFA, the election of the jury of the GHA has consisted of top-level film experts and commentators recommended and invited by the GHA committee. The award-winning films have been elected by the jury through their discussion and three rounds of anonymous voting. The members of the jury have not been reappointed consecutively more than twice.

award-winning crime film and this film did not focus on a female character[65]. For this reason only Mainland and Hong Kong films have been included in the analysis.

With the trend of globalisation in the film industry and an openness towards including Chinese films made in other parts of the world, the GHA further enlarged its selection scope in 2003, inviting films that used non-Chinese languages as the main language dialogue, as long as a Chinese language (including Mandarin and dialects) was included in some way. Furthermore, with global cooperation, since 2007, films with a director and more than half of the crew who are ethnic Chinese have been qualified to join the competition. Nonetheless, the majority of award-winning films still used Mandarin as the main language. In recent years, with the increased quality of Mainland films, Mainland-made films have started to play an important role at the GHA. For instance, at the 55th GHA in 2018, Zhang Yimou's *Shadow* (*Ying*, 2018) was nominated for twelve awards, while seven Mainland films were among the nine films (the other two being Taiwanese) that received more than five nominations each.[66] It is important to recognise that Mainland films have obtained wide recognition from the authoritative GHA jury with various cultural backgrounds.

Throughout the GHA's history, forth-six crime films have been awarded, half of which were produced after 2000; fifteen have had female characters in leading roles. It is worth mentioning that many films have received awards at both the GHA and HKFA, including *Divergence, Flash Point, The Best Stalker, Connected, Life Without Principle, Night Fall* and *Port of Call*, and there has also been some overlap with the GRHFA, with *A World Without Thieves*, for instance, also receiving awards at the GHA and GRHFA. This cross pollination of awards suggests a widespread appreciation of the same films across Greater China, making them worthy of further exploration.

Comparing these three prestigious Chinese film awards, all of them have their own unique attributes making them invaluable cases to examine. As the most open film awards among the three, the GHA awards the most diverse range of films including those made in the Mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan and in the diaspora. The HKFA has a specific focus on local films made by Hong Kong residents, and films from this selection most specifically reflect the Hong

[65] The only post-2000 award-winning Taiwanese crime film, *Monga* (*Meng Jia*, dir. Doze Niu, 2009) is excluded because it does not focus on a female character.

[66] For details, please refer to the media report at https://www.jiemian.com/article/2544742.html, access date 8 June 2017.

Kong socio-cultural discourse, including on gender issues. Organised by CFA – an authorised organisation supported by the PRC government, the GRHFA largely reflects the official preferences in the Mainland China context, which ensures films awarded in this context embody socio-cultural perceptions that are permitted or supported under PRC ideology. Therefore, the three Chinese film awards respectively provide useful cases for uncovering mainstream values as accepted by jury from across Greater China, including the Mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan and beyond. The specific focus on Mainland and Hong Kong films, given the limited number of awarded crime films from Taiwan also helps us to uncover potential differences and similarities in gender representations across these regions.

Certainly, besides the three Chinese film awards included in this study, there are other burgeoning film festivals in the field of Chinese cinema. Apart from the SIFF and BJIFF mentioned earlier, the Changchun Film Festival and the Zhuhai Film Festival in Mainland China also play a role, but have not been as influential as the GRHFA. In the broader Asian region, the Busan International Film Festival is also one of the most prestigious and influential festivals. However, throughout 2000 to 2016, Chinese films were rarely awarded and the crime genre failed to show up in the awarded films list. Also of note is the China Women's Film Festival (CWFF), which began in Beijing in November 2013[67]. This festival aims to encourage female filmmakers to embark on a journey of self-reflection and discover the 'grey zone' between real existence and virtual imagination (Lydia Wu, 2014). The agenda of the CWFF is to promote females in filmmaking and raise the awareness of women's rights in China, such as reproductive and sexual rights, and suffrage through the exchange of ideas. These thoughts are represented and interpreted through vivid cinematic story-telling to give the audience a better understanding of what women are going through and the kind of rights for which women are fighting (Wu, 2014). This new feminist film festival shows that the feminist consciousness is of considerable interest in greater China and may impact on the filmmaking landscape more broadly. It also highlights how networking and idea-sharing between filmmakers on the Mainland, Hong Kong and other regions with an interest in women's rights and representations has become much more frequent. However, as no awards were given to crime films, the CWFF was excluded from this study. Moreover, it remains in the circle of a niche cinema experience outside of the mainstream films which are better known to the wider public. The CWFF films have thus been limited in terms of their

[67] Began in 2013, the first CWFF showed twenty-three films made by female filmmakers from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mainland China, Japan, France, the USA and Vietnam. The second CWFF held in Beijing, Shanghai and Xi'an in 2015 and the third held in Beijing in 2016. Then it ceased without official announcement.

acceptance and social impact. Nonetheless, the festival helps highlight by omission the lack of feminist crime films in the Chinese landscape.

After viewing all the award-winning Chinese crime films from the aforementioned film festivals, twenty-three films as shown in the Table 1 demonstrably met the criteria for selection in this study. The final selection included two from the GRHRA, seventeen from the HKFA, and eleven from the GHA. These selected films were produced by Mainland and Hong Kong crews or were co-produced by crews from across the two regions.

In summary, this study adopts a narrative analysis informed by CDA and MDA to examine the representation of women in relation to violence in twenty-three mainstream crime films that have been awarded in one or more of the Mainland-based GRHFA, the HKFA and the Taiwan-based GHA between 2000 and 2016. Through an in-depth analysis of the filmic language relating to the female characters, this study explores the ways in which the female representation reflects or is influenced by the filmmakers' standpoint, as well as by the socio-cultural discourses in contemporary Chinese society. Next chapter starts the film analysis by examining the representation of female victim in light of classic feminist film theories.

Table 1 List of Selected Post-2000 Award-Winning Crime Films

No.	Production year	Production region	Film title	Director	Award
1	2000	HK & Singapore	*公元 2000* *2000 AD*	陈嘉上 Gordon Chan	2001 HKFA Best Supporting Actor
2	2001	HK, TW & Korea	*特务迷城* *The Accidental Spy*	陈德森 Teddy Chan	2002 HKFA Best Film Editing/Best Action Choreography
3	2004	HK	*旺角黑夜* *One Night in Mongkok*	尔冬升 Derek Yee	2005 HKFA Best Director/Best Screenplay
4	2004	HK, MC & TW	*大事件* *Breaking News*	杜琪峰 Johnnie To	2004 GHA Best Director
5	2004	HK, MC & TW	*天下无贼* *A World Without Thieves*	冯小刚 Xiaogang Feng	2005 GHA Best Adapted Screenplay 2006 GRHFA Best Adapted Screenplay

6	2005	HK & MC	*三岔口* *Divergence*	陈木胜 Benny Chan	2006 HKFA Best Film Editing 2005 GHA Best Actor/Best Cinematography/Best Editing/Best Sound Effects
7	2006	HK & MC	*伤城* *Confession of Pain*	刘伟强 Andrew Lau 麦兆辉 Alan Mak	2007 HKFA Best Cinematography
8	2007	HK & MC	*门徒* *Protégé*	尔冬升 Tung-Shing Yee	2008 HKFA Best Supporting Actor/Best Film Editing
9	2007	HK	*跟踪* *Eye in the Sky*	游乃海 Nai-Hoi Yau	2008 HKFA Best New Director/Best New Performer
10	2007	HK & MC	*导火线* *Flash Point*	叶伟信 Wilson Yip	2008 HKFA Best Action Choreography 2007 GHA Best Action Choreography
11	2008	HK & MC	*证人* *The Beast Stalker*	林超贤 Dante Lam	2009 HKFA Best Actor/Best Supporting Actor 2008 GHA Best Actor
12	2008	HK, MC & TW	*保持通话* *Connected*	陈木胜 Benny Chan	2009 HKFA Best Film Editing 2008 GHA Best Action Choreography/Best Film Editing
13	2008	HK	*文雀* *Sparrow*	杜琪峰 Johnnie To	2008 GHA Best Cinematography
14	2009	HK & TW	*意外* *Accident*	郑保瑞 Soi Cheang	2010 HKFA Best Supporting Actress
15	2009	HK & MC	*窃听风云* *Overheard*	麦兆辉 Alan Mak 庄文强 Felix Chong	2010 HKFA Best Film Editing
16	2010	HK & MC	*线人* *The Stool Pigeon*	林超贤 Dante Lam	2011 HKFA Best Actor
17	2011	HK	*夺命金* *Life Without Principle*	杜琪峰 Johnnie To	2012 HKFA Best Supporting Actor/Best Supporting Actress 2012 GHA Best Director/Best Actor/Best Original Screenplay

18	2012	HK	*大追捕* *Night Fall*	周显扬 Roy Chow	2013 HKFA Best New Director 2012 GHA Best Sound Effects
19	2012	HK & MC	*消失的子弹* *The Bullet Vanishes*	罗志良 Chi-Leung Law	2012 GHA Best Make Up and Costume Design
20	2013	MC & HK	*全民目击* *Silent Witness*	非行 Fei Xing	2014 Best Supporting Actress
21	2014	HK & MC	*窃听风云 3* *Overheard 3*	麦兆辉 Alan Mak 庄文强 Felix Chong	2015 HKFA Best Actor/Best Supporting Actor/Best Screenplay
22	2014	MC & TW	*白日焰火* *Black Coal, Thin Ice*	刁亦男 Yinan Diao	2014 GHA Best Art Direction
23	2015	HK	*踏血寻梅* *Port of Call*	翁子光 Philip Yung	2016 HKFA Best Actor/Best Actress/Best Supporting Actor/Best Supporting Actress/Best New Performer/Best Screenplay/Best Cinematography 2015 GHA Best Supporting Actor

Note. HK = Hong Kong, MC = Mainland China, TW = Taiwan, HKFA = Hong Kong Film Awards, GRHFA = Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Awards, GHA = Golden Horse Awards.

Chapter 4. Violence Against Women: The Objectification of Female Victims

The female victim, which refers to a female character who suffers from male violence, was identified as the most common type of female representation in Chinese crime films in the data set, making up twelve of the twenty-three selected award-winning films in this study. This chapter begins with an in-depth analysis of the specific film techniques used to depict the female victims in the selected films where female victims are the central character (*The Accidental Spy* (2001)*; One Night in Mongkok* (2004); *Confession of Pain* (2006); *Protégé* (2007); *Flash Point* (2007); *The Beast Stalker* (2008); *Connected* (2008); *Sparrow* (2008); *Overheard* (2009); *The Bullet Vanishes* (2012); *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (2014); *Port of Call* (2015), drawing on Mulvey's (1975) notions of fetishism and voyeurism. The representation of the *hero rescues beauty* trope is then examined, which was observed in films across the genre, drawing on Cowie's (1978) theory of woman-as-sign. Finally, this chapter investigates the representation of violence against women in intimate relationships, drawing on Mulvey's (1975) notion of narcissism and Mary Ann Doane's (1982) theory of masquerade.

The excessive representation of female victimisation as discussed in this chapter relates to the notion of 'masquerade', initially introduced by Joan Riviere ([1929] 1986), who argued that femininity is not an innate or essential quality of womanhood, but a process through which the female is produced. It is a masquerade that conflates the woman as a person with the spectacle of her, while femininity becomes a concept that is created in contrast to masculinity (Doane, 1988). In this way womanliness is "worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it – much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not stolen the goods (Riviere, 1929, cited in Doane, 1982, p. 81). The gap between the women themselves and their feminine representations, in this case representations of the female as a vulnerable victim who is graphically shown to suffer under male attack, indicates the patriarchal power that defines femininity and restrains the female image (Doane, 1982). Depictions of women as victims in the films in this study may be seen as a mask that is worn as ordered by the male authority (the filmmakers, hegemonic society) and presented as a spectacle for male spectatorship. In this way, the theory of 'masquerade' links with Mulvey's (1975) theory of the male gaze that places the female body under male spectators' look. While Doane (1982) used the idea of masquerade to unpack the relationship between female spectators and women's onscreen representations, this chapter focuses on the ways in which the onscreen

representations of female victims are depicted as a spectacle and considers what this persistent victim mask implies in the context of contemporary Chinese culture.

In this chapter it is argued that female victims in the selected Chinese crime films that are produced and directed by male filmmakers are heavily objectified for the male spectator to gaze at and consume, which supports a sense of male hegemony, while the excessive representation of the female victim as complying with male requests and tolerant to male violence is presented as a strategy for surviving in the patriarchal order, which functions to attribute female victimisation to the woman herself. Overall, by engaging with traditional Confucian values that place the female victim in an inferior position in the *nei* (domestic) realm, these mainstream Chinese crime films explicitly present a sense of misogyny and advocacy of male dominance.

Silent Women in Claustrophobic Spaces: Female Victim as Spectacle

Dialogues and lines

The limited dialogues expressed by female victims as compared to male characters is an important technique used to enhance their sense of isolation and repression. The most typice cases are *Confession of Pain* and *One Night in Mongkok*. To be specific, female victim in *Confession of Pain*, Susan Chow, (acted by mainland actress, Xu Jinglei[68]), has one line in the scene after waking up from a coma after suffering an injury caused by an explosion. She asks her husband, Detective Lau Ching-hei (acted by Hong Kong actor, Tony Leung Chiu-wai) if he ever loved her. This line shows her ongoing desire to be appreciated by her husband even though he designed an 'accident' intended to kill her. In this way, the female protagonist's dependence could be seen as a way of highlighting her victimisation, which is a mask that the woman willingly puts on in order to manifest her vulnerability and inferiority. Detective Lau, on the other hand, has many more lines of dialogue in the film as well as a monologue. In the climatic violent scene of *One Night in Mongkok*, the female victim, Dandan (acted by Hong Kong actress, Cecilia Cheung Pak-chi) only speaks a three short sentences begging for male protection. In tears, she urges the male perpetrator to stop beating the male protagonist, Laifu (acted by American Hong Kong actor, Daniel Wu) for whom she has affection. Likewise, in *Protégé*, the female drug user, Jane (acted by Mainland actress, Zhang Jingchu) speaks two short lines in a weak, low voice as she invites her husband (acted

[68] Most characters in the analysed films have both Chinese (Mandarin/Cantonese) and English names in the cast list. This study adopts their English names.

by Hong Kong actor, Louis Koo) to exert male dominance in an extreme way by effectively telling him to "inject in the neck", an action which would lead to her death. On the other hand, her husband speaks many more lines as he persuades her to use drugs and make money. Jane's torpid language shows she has given up any hope of survival in the patriarchal world around her. Comparably, in *Port of Call*, during intercourse between the female and male characters, Wang Jiamei (acted by Mainland actress, Chun Xia) and Ding Zicong (acted by Hong Kong actor, Michael Ning). Wang says, "I want to die" four times, after which Ding agrees to help her by grasping her throat. The girl shows a smile of relief on her face and slightly groans. After a few seconds, the man hesitates; however, the girl puts his hands back on her throat saying, "why don't you help me?". Her short lines reflect her willingness to end her life and complicity in inviting male violence. Here, the girl's complicity is attributed to her victimisation and death, a clear example of a woman who has put on a mask of victimhood.

The female protagonists' short lines can be decoded as part of a cinematic process that restricts her voice and ability to express her feelings or emotions, thereby enhancing female compliance in the face of male dominance. One of the typical cases is *Port of Call*, in which the female protagonist, Wang, a teen prostitute, is severely humiliated by her male client for whom she has affection. The young man roughly grabs the back of Wang's neck, uses his forefinger to point to her and says to his girlfriend "Look clearly, do I need to pursue her?" with a tone of disdain. "Don't you like shit?" his girlfriend replies. The man asks Wang to explain to his girlfriend that they are only video game-playing mates, not lovers. Wang forces a smile with one short line, "No, we are not lovers. Only your girlfriend cares about you." Instead of being angry and revealing the man's lie, Wang chooses to remain silent and give in to his aggressiveness, thus, further indulging in the man's emotional abuse. This further places her in an inferior position and reduces her self-esteem, which eventually leads Wang to become suicidal. In this scene, despite the severe humiliation by the one for whom she has affection, Wang still reacts softly and remains tolerant and permissive. The short lines and soft voice limit her personal expression and allow her no power, thereby further consolidating her disadvantageous position in this triangle. Wang's tolerance suggests that she wears her mask voluntarily.

Besides having short lines, other female victims are shown to remain silent as if by choice when they confront male perpetrators in scenes of violence against them, unlike that dialogue of the male characters around them. For example, in *The Accidental Spy*, the male gang

leader, Lee Sang-Zen (acted by Taiwanese actor, Wu Hsing-kuo) who is also the female protagonist Yong's (acted by Taiwanese actress, Vivian Hsu) master, promises the male protagonist, Buck (acted by Hong Kong actor, Jackie Chan) to trade Yong in for the chemical weapon in his hands. In this scene, Yong dresses well and stands silently like a beautiful object being traded as a commodity, revealing her submissiveness to male dominance (see Figure 1). Drawing on Stout (1990), the female victim's silence here can be seen not just as the effect of victimisation, but also as a cinematic strategy to represent the female as an object; the female victim is simply being used as a tool as part of the male combatant's weaponry. By muting the female victim's voice, she is being cast out of the significant activity in the narrative – the social mission of fighting against criminals – which remains the domain of the male characters.

Figure 1 The Accidental Spy
The female character Yong walks in the reception room and her master Lee discusses the deal with Buck, which is to exchange her with the chemical weapon in Buck's hands.

The narrative design whereby female victims remain silent or are only permitted short spoken lines appears to demonstrate a surrendering to the male world in which men retain control over the use of language. The woman's voice is subjected either to male or institutional control (Silverman 1988). The women's silence can also be interpreted as a mask that she wears voluntarily in order to show a compliant attitude towards male power. Women in these films are not able to completely express themselves but are shown to speak for the patriarchal order. When a woman is permitted to use language, she tends to be directed to her expected socially submissive feminine position, while her victim mask requires her to either stay silent

or speak for the patriarchal order. Furthermore, her limited spoken lines also appear to act as an invitation to male violence – even to the extent of silencing her forever through helping her to die. In this sense, the female victim who surrenders to male dominance with limited resistance is qualified to be a 'good' woman as defined by the patriarchal order. Muting of the female victim appears to be a strategy, if an unconscious one, adopted by the patriarch to reassure its controlling power.

Mise-en-scène

Apart from limiting women's ability to express themselves vocally, filmmakers of Chinese crime films have also established a visually self-contained world for the female victim which represents these victims' sense of being constrained and repressed. In each scene, the mise-en-scène is densely arranged in a way that objectifies the women and indicates their limited ability to move about space. The scenes of violence against women are mainly situated in dark, shabby, concealed indoor spaces, which reflect a fearful atmosphere and deliver an impression of helplessness and breathlessness. Dramatising the relationship between the female character and her surroundings through the construction of claustrophobic and concealed spaces reflects a sense of female oppression and allegorises the way in which she is socially restricted in the patriarchal system. As Cui (2003) has suggested, if the looming artificial setting symbolises the social system, the powerless woman appears to be imprisoned in a cage. By putting the woman in this visual cage, in which her life is laid bare, her potential threat to men is minimised. She becomes an object of the voyeuristic gaze by being presented as controllable and compliant to male mastery (Mulvey, 1975; Hollows, 2000). In this way, female victims are presented as women as 'to-be-looked-at' (Mulvey, 1989).

Examples include *One Night in Mongkok* where the sexual assault scene happens in a cheap and claustrophobic hotel room lit by a dim yellow light. In *Flash Point*, the female character Qiu Ti (acted by Mainland actress Fan Bingbing), is kidnapped and tied up in an abandoned cabin in a remote suburb, while in *Port of Call*, Wang is strangled and dismembered in a shabby claustrophobic room in an old residential building. In *Protégé* a shabby claustrophobic room is the setting where Jane gets injected to death in a horrible manner, with a scene of her body being gnawed by mice as it lies limp on a dark, red couch. As Clarie Bielby and Anna Richards (2010) have argued, the alignment of women with death can be attributed to the 'unknowable' quality of each for the male sex". Representing the death of women allows male authors or filmmakers, in this case, to express the fascinating and threatening quality of the mystery of women and to contain it (Elisabeth Bronfen, 1992).

The claustrophobic space is not only represented in deserted locations, but also in more decent places. For instance, in *Confession of Pain*, violence against the female victim, Chow, happens in her neat and well-designed apartment, which reflects a decent socio-economic status. However, while indoor items, such as the sofa, table and bed are points of focus, the windows and access to the outside world are rarely captured by the camera. It is in this concealed indoor space where the male protagonist, Lau, repeatedly drugs his wife, Chow, to sleep, ending with an 'accidental' explosion in the kitchen to which he moves the sleeping Chow and ensures the windows are closed and the door crack is sealed. In *Overheard*, the female victim, Mandy (acted by Mainland actress, Zhang Jingchu) is shot in an underground car park which is concealed by concrete walls and filled by lines of cars that give the impression of being congested and blocked, limiting the victim's vision and heightening the sense of danger. Moreover, in *Sparrow*, all four scenes of the encounter between the female protagonist, Chung Chun Lei (acted by Taiwanese actress, Kelly Lin) and her emotional controller, Mr Fu (who takes Chung as his mistress, acted by Hong Kong actor, Lo Hoi-pang) happen in a luxury car where the two counterparts sit in a constrained space. Fu withholds Chung's passport (access to the outside world) in order to prevent her escape, while the luxurious car symbolises a cage in which she is entrapped by Fu and from which she cannot escape. In these films, the well-designed apartment, underground park and luxurious car indicate the protagonists' decent socio-economic status, yet for the female victim, these are cages that convey an inescapable inferiority in a male dominated society.

Although some films situate the scenes of violence against women in outdoor spaces, these spaces are still dark and concealed and reflect a claustrophobic feeling. In *The Bullet Vanishes* (see Figures 2 and 3) the female victim, Little Lark (acted by Mainland actress, Yang Mi) escapes from a male attacker through a narrow alley and runs into a dead end with a concrete wall that blocks her way. She is then grabbed by the attacker with a gun at her head as she is trapped in the dark alley with three walls around her, highlighting her inescapable and desperate situation. The only way out is in the direction of where the male character, Detective Guo Zhui (acted by Canada-born Hong Kong actor, Nicolas Tse) stands, meaning that this male figure is her only hope. In *The Accidental Spy*, the female victim suffers from drug addiction on a raft in the sea, which might otherwise be considered to be an open and expansive space. However, the camera focuses on a limited, area in the water surrounded by endless darkness. The male perpetrator, Lee, stands on his big yacht watching down on the female victim's small body in the water reflecting an impression of dominance

and suppression (see Figures 4 and 5). Representation of the outdoor spaces as claustrophobic highlights the vulnerability and inferior position of the female victim in the face of aggressive masculine power and, like the indoor spaces, becomes symbolic of the invisible cages of social female oppression.

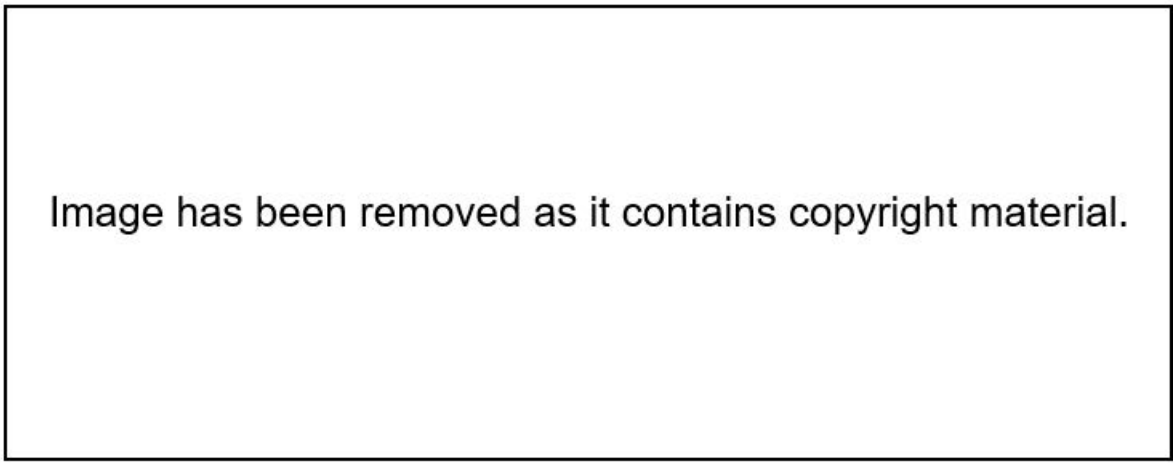

Figure 2 The Bullet Vanishes
The female protagonist Little Lark is threatened by a villain with a gun pointing to her in a dark alley.

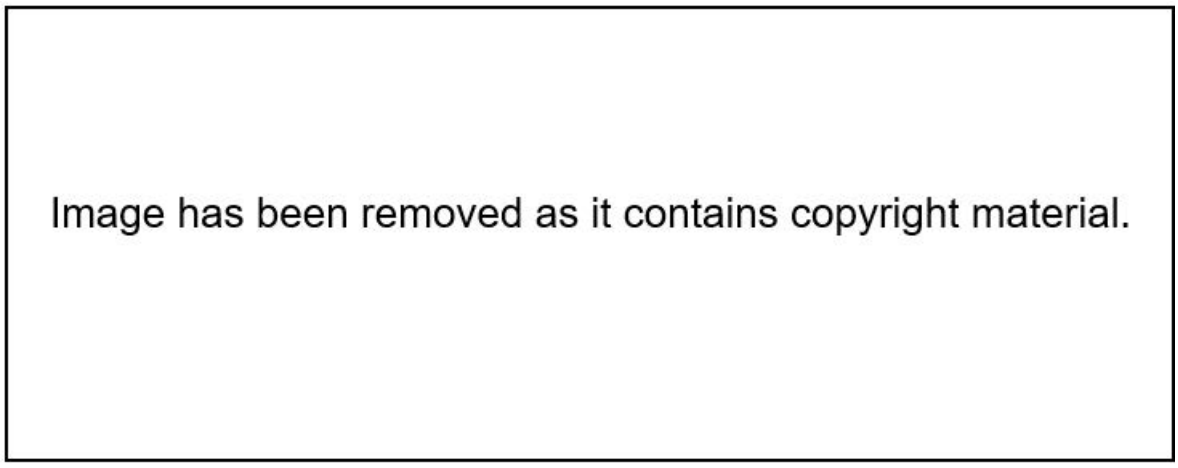

Figure 3 The Bullet Vanishes
The male protagonist Detective Guo saves Little Lark by shooting the villain in the head.

Figure 4 The Accidental Spy
Yong and Buck are on a small boat in the sea, while Yong's drug addiction is recurring.

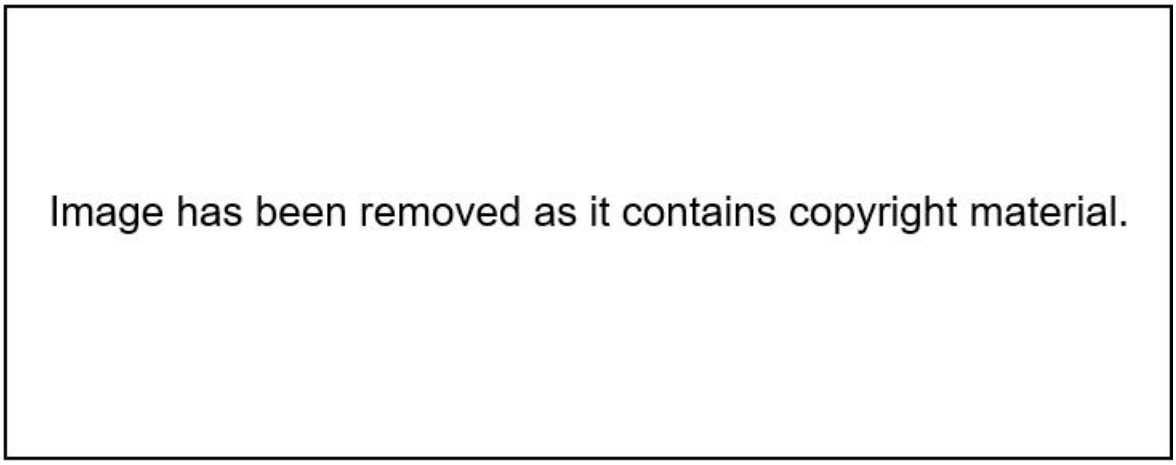

Figure 5 The Accidental Spy
Yong jumps into the water and swims to her master Lee's boat in order to get the drug.

To create the dark, claustrophobic settings, lighting and shadows are used strategically in ways that represent the female victims' grim prospects. In *One Night in Mongkok*, *Protégé*, *Flash Point* and *Port of Call*, the lighting in the scenes of violence against the female protagonists is dim and dark, yet the environment is bright in the scenes where the male victims are indicated. In *One Night in Mongkok* (see Figure 6) Lai Fu has plenty of light on him and in *Flash Point* (see Figure 7) the male protagonist, undercover detective Hua Sheng, has an automatic gun pointed at him in bright daylight. The differences in approaches to the

lighting of the female and male victims accentuates the female victims' suffering, passivity and 'dim' prospects, while highlighting the male characters' glory, heroism, braveness and dominance, often as they try to save the female victims. In addition, the male protagonist often has a wider range of lighting colours that signify his changing mood or conditions, while the female protagonist, as the object, tends to be lit with a single colour. In *Black Coal, Thin Ice* a scene of interrogation that takes place in a car reflects golden, blue and red lights on the male character, Zhang Zili's (acted by Mainland actor, Liao Fan) face (see Figures 8-10), while only showing a golden light on the face of the female character, Wu Zhizhen (acted by Taiwanese actress, Gwei Lun-mei, see Figure 11). This lighting technique was also confirmed by the director, Diao Yinan in an online interview, who mentioned that the three lighting colours on Zhang's face correspond to his contemplation of different facts of the criminal case,[69] which implies his male-dominated filming perspective. It also implies that the male character as a dominant figure has a multidimensional thinking ability, while the woman as a submissive figure reflects emotion rather than rational thinking.

Figure 6 One Night in Mongkok
The male protagonist Lai Fu is beaten by gangsters.

[69] The full interview is available at https://site.douban.com/190248/widget/notes/14621875/note/341294951/, access date 2 March 2019.

Figure 7 Flash Point
The undercover detective Hua Sheng is beaten by gangsters when he rescues her girlfriend Qiu Ti, who is taken as a hostage.

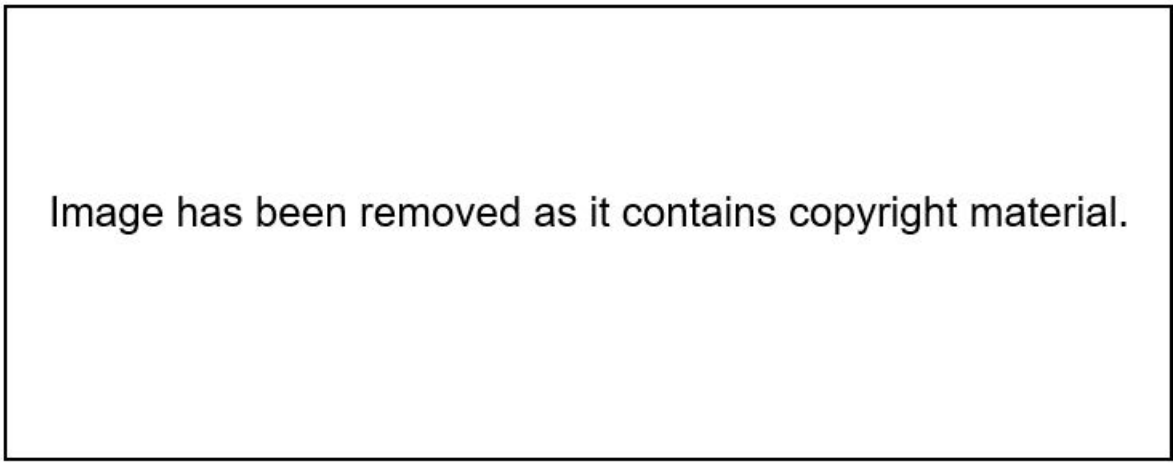

Figure 8 Black Coal, Thin Ice
The male protagonist Zhang Zili interrogates the female suspect Wu Zhizhen in a car. The yellow light is on Zhang's face.

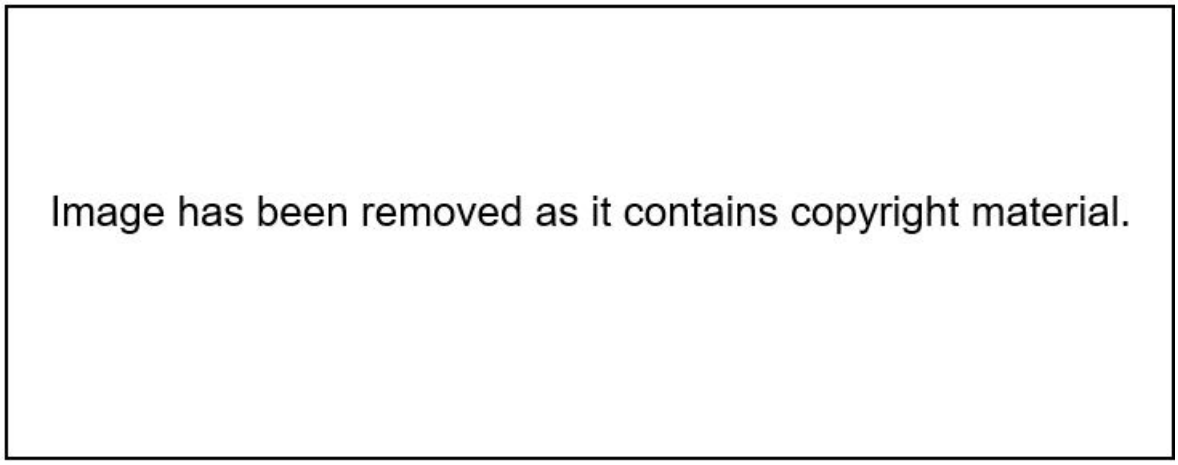

Figure 9 Black Coal, Thin Ice
The male protagonist Zhang Zili interrogates the female suspect Wu Zhizhen in a car. The blue light is on Zhang's face.

Figure 10 Black Coal, Thin Ice
The male protagonist Zhang Zili interrogates the female suspect Wu Zhizhen in a car. The blue light is on Zhang's face.

Figure 11 Black Coal, Thin Ice
The male protagonist Zhang Zili interrogates the female suspect Wu Zhizhen in a car. The yellow light is on Wu's face.

For the female victim, bright light is used to address the intensity of violence that she suffers. In *The Accidental Spy*, an intense light positioned high on Lee's yacht gleams down on the female victim, Yong, who is on a raft at sea. Suffering from an intense drug addiction, which Lee has established to control her, Yong jumps into the water and swims hard back to the man's yacht to get her drug fix. Facing the intense light, Yong's face is shown to be pale as she submits to Lee's control. In addition, the female victim, Ann Gao (acted by mainland actress, Zhang Jingchu) in *Beast Stalker* is injured in a car crash and falls on the ground unconscious. The scene is filmed with a sharp, bright light over her body from the top, which depicts the intense pain she is in (See Figure 12). Lighting techniques, therefore, clearly help to establish the intensity of violence and the imbalance of power between the female victims and the male perpetrators.

Figure 12 Beast Stalker
The female protagonist Prosecutor Guo is hurt in a car accident.

Lighting is also used to generate a sense of fetishism over the female body. As Mulvey (1975) has argued, fetishism particularly converts the woman into an image. By turning some parts of her body into a fetish, such as her legs or the side of her face, she becomes observable in a safe and enjoyable way. It leads the spectators' attention away from the symbolic 'lack' of woman, thereby disavowing the female threat to the male. While the female character's body parts above the chest, including her neck, face and hair, are lit to highlight her facial beauty and sexy clavicle, the lower parts tend to be presented without much light or are out of the frame, which presents a certain appearance of the female victim's fragmentary body (e.g., see Figure 13). Moreover, unbalanced lighting shows the unbalanced positions between different characters. In the scene where the female victim, Little Lark, is grabbed by an attacker who points a gun at her head in *The Bullet Vanishes*, the lighting on the female victim's face is dimmer than on the male hero's face, which aims to highlight the male hero's braveness and heroism.

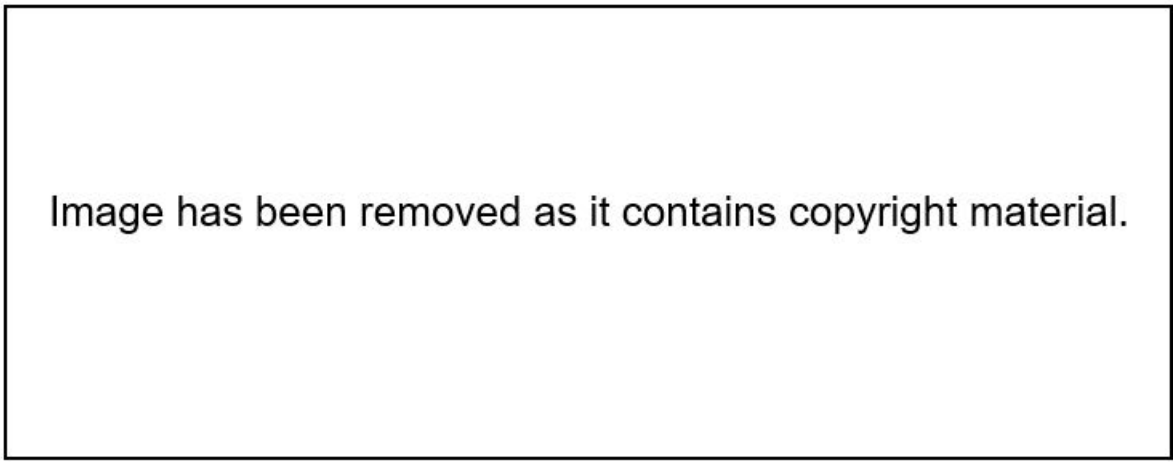

Figure 13 Protégé
The female protagonist Jane is lying on a coach after injecting the drug.

Camerawork and framing

In the camera and framing styles, the female victims' movements and gestures are often restrained and, as noted earlier, contained to restricted spaces. By focusing only on her upper body, the framing reflects a fragmentary body in which the female victim is rarely presented as 'whole'. In one scene in *One Nite in Mongkok*, where the female victim, Dandan, is beaten by the male gangster in a narrow corridor in a small hotel the audience only see above her waist. The man grabs her wrists and slaps her on the face, while the girl cries and shakes her head begging him with very little resistance. By her inability to use her legs to run away or fight against the male character's violence, the scene demonstrates her physical weakness, passivity and vulnerability (see Figure 14). In contrast, in the scene of Lai Fu's victimisation, the male victim's whole body is captured by the camera.

Figure 14 One Night in Mongkok
The female protagonist Dandan is beaten by a male gangster.

High-angle, medium and close-up shots, looking down on the female victim, followed by close-ups of particular body parts, are also frequently used to highlight the female character's pitiful form and her physically violated body. The close-ups help to present the female body as fragmented and partial and invites a voyeuristic gaze on these parts. As Cui (2003) has suggested, a close-up as an image-as-spectacle reveals women as extraordinary as well as incomplete. The cinematic close-up on particular body parts of the female figure sets her into fragments, which invite a voyeuristic gaze and signify the female body as a "socially violated body or culturally wronged identity" (Cui, 2003, p.113).

An extreme example of scenes in which the female body is presented as fragmented is in *Port of Call*, when the male killer is vividly depicted taking apart the female's body, especially peeling off the skin of Wang's face and chopping off her feet. In *Protégé*, in the female protagonist's death scene, the viewer is drawn to look down on the female drug user as she lies on the bed in a deteriorating physical condition. This is followed by a horizontal close-up of her neck as her husband injects it, allowing the viewer to witness a severe twitch and spasm in the neck as she is drugged to a horrible death. In *The Bullet Vanishes* the female victim is filmed from a high-angle medium shot as the viewer witnesses her upper body lying on the ground as she is attacked by a strong man. In contrast, reverse low angle shots are used for the male attacker, with the positioning created by the camera angles amplifying the power imbalance between the 'low' female and the 'high' male (see Figures 15 and 16). This approach of using high-angle shots for the female victim and low angle shots for the male

attacker, which are also reverse shots enabling the viewer to witness the scene from the point-of-view of the man looking down on the woman and the woman looking up to the man, amplifies the impression of their power gap and enhances female inferiority and male dominance.

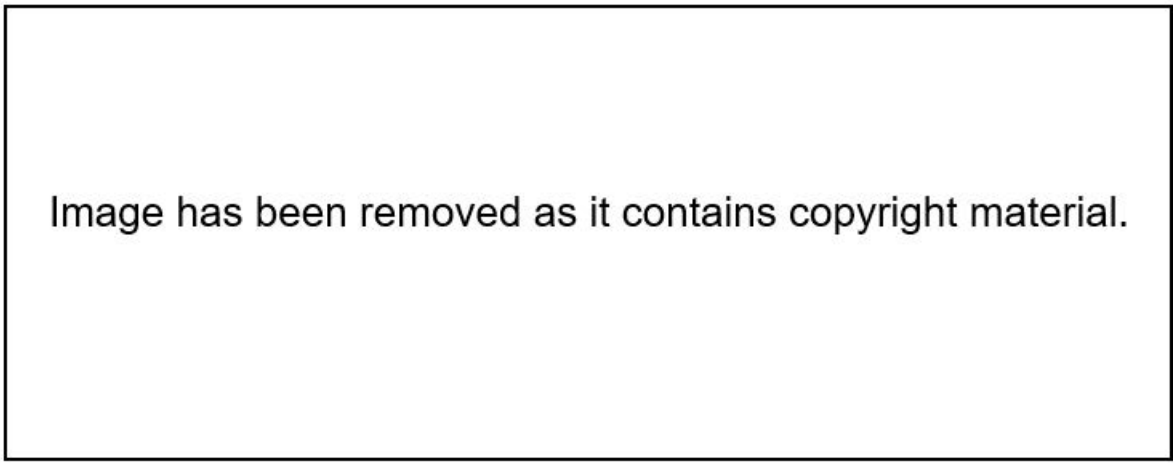

Figure 15 The Bullet Vanishes
The female protagonist Little Lark is under attack by a male villain.

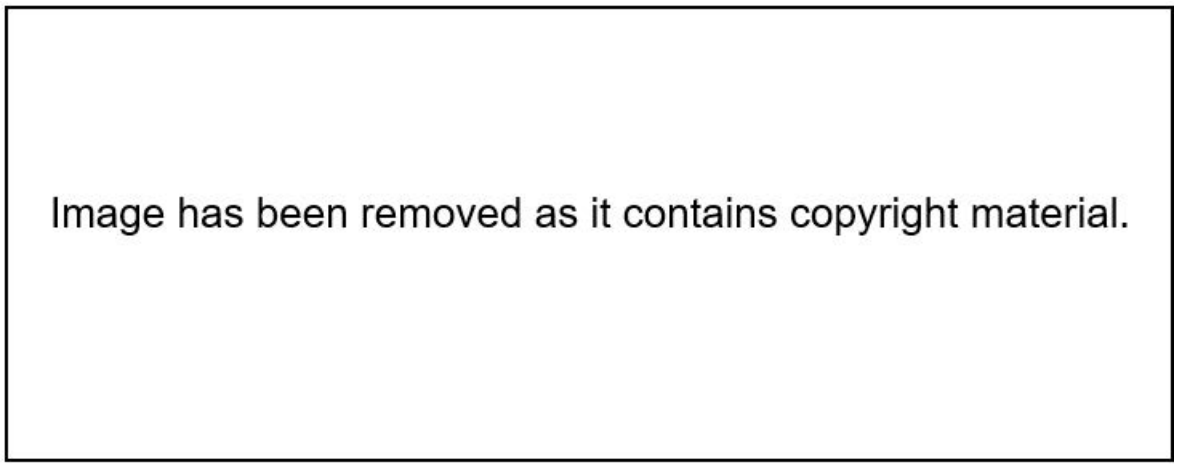

Figure 16 The Bullet Vanishes
The male villain looks down on Little Lark from a standing position.

At times, however, the camera angles are reversed in a way that seemingly gives the female victim subjectivity to some extent in inviting male violence. In *Port of Call*, the female victim, Wang, is filmed from a low-angle and the male perpetrator from a high-angle during their intercourse scene (see Figure 17). In this scene, the girl is the one providing sexual

service and seems to actively invite the man to do her a favour instead of her doing the man a favour. The favour she requests, though, is for the man to take her life. The scene shares similar features with porn films as identified by Stephen Maddison (2009) in that the films do not present the visual acts that signify female sexual pleasure, and are usually accompanied by acts of extreme degradation of the female character with explicit acts of violence such as strangling. The camerawork is structured around a gendered dichotomy based on who 'looks' and at whom. The female victim in this case becomes a motif for the relative visibility and invisibility of different women and the gendered power structures contained in the act of looking (Deborah Jermyn, 2003). In other words, the camerawork, which is controlled by the filmmakers, offers their perspective to construct the imbalance of gender power in film. As Christine Gledhill (1999) has suggested, simultaneous sublimation and repression of femininity is literally re-enacted in the way the plot and camera place the female figure in situations of fetishist idealisation or voyeuristic punishment. Thus, the sex and death scene of Wang does not only eroticise the female victim from a voyeuristic point of view, but also fetishizes her body so that the male perpetrator's sexual fantasy can be satisfied and his responsibility of perpetration can be shifted to the female victim herself.

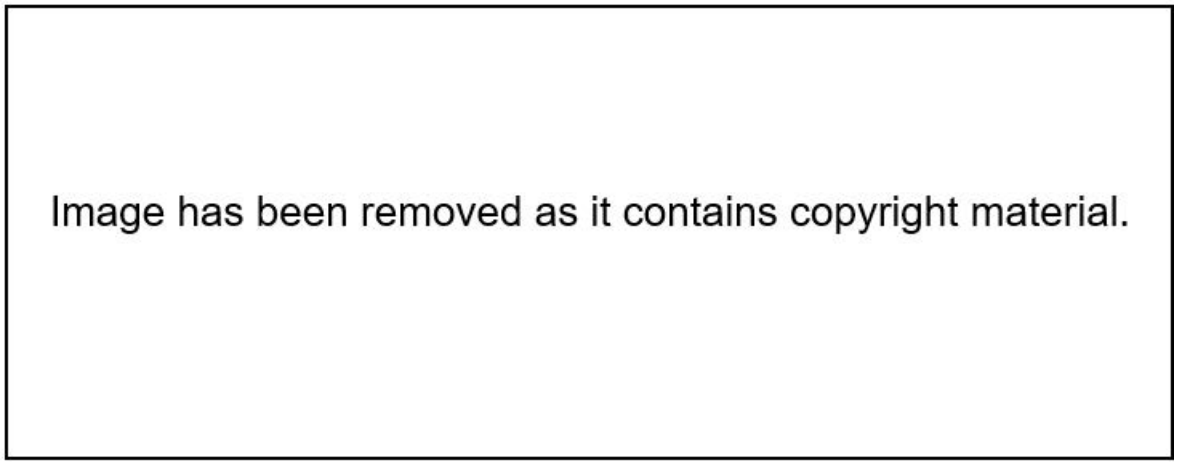

Figure 17 Port of Call
The female protagonist Wang Jiamei is strangled by her client during the intercourse.

Philip Yung, the director of *Port of Call*, noted that he explicitly depicted Wang's victimisation and sexual response to attract the audience to think more profoundly about wider social issues relating to prostitution, including the value of selling one's body to buy

material goods such as earrings, as Wang did in the film. Through the graphic depiction, he hoped the audience would 'break' through the surface of the story and 'enter' into a deep level to think about why the tragedy happened.[70] Although the director cites the desire to encourage debate about the issue, the scene represents a common male hegemonic viewpoint across the crime film genre.

In summary, female victims tend to be presented in an objectified manner which reflects a sense of fetishism and voyeurism. The female victims are often silent, and often unable to speak as a result of physical suffering from severe injury or drug addiction. When they do speak, their lines are short, timid and low in volume, and they seem to willingly invite male violence into their lives. The female victims also tend to be presented in claustrophobic and dark spaces, with their range of movement heavily restricted. They are often filmed from high angles in a way that encourages the spectator to view them from above, and their mutilated female bodies are often presented in camera close-ups and made available for close scrutiny and gaze. Overall, the female victim is presented as repressed, weak, inferior and compliant in the face of male domination and abuse. While female victims are objectified, male subjectivity is sought and reaffirmed (Cui, 2003). The vivid depiction of female victimisation as a spectacle constructs the female body as a projection, while the violence against women acts as the compensatory power which helps to realise male dominance.

Male Hero Rescues Female Beauty: Female Victim as Sign

This section focuses on a particular type of narrative that has frequently appeared in Chinese crime films, in which the female victim falls into a dangerous situation and the male hero tries to save her. In this *hero rescues beauty* trope, the female 'beauty' is presented as desiring to be saved by a heroic man, while the 'hero' desires to achieve his upright status by saving a woman. In this typical storyline in the context of Chinese crime films, the 'beauty' is usually taken as a hostage and is depicted as weak and helpless in the face of a powerful, evil attacker. She, thus, has to rely on the male 'hero' to save her life. Female vulnerability is highlighted to affirm the woman's powerless physical condition compared to the male villain's strength. The male hero, on the other hand, is shown to be brawny, brave and justified in taking heroic action, thus maintaining the 'proper' gender hierarchy of male domination. In this sense, this *hero rescues beauty* trope corresponds to the *nei-wai* model

[70] Philip Yung's interview happened during the Toronto Reel Asian Film Festival 2016. The full interview is available at http://www.filmdeepfocus.com/blog/2016/4/15/-x, access date 2 March 2019.

(Rosenlee, 2006) in which the male hero is placed in the *wai* realm in which he takes responsibility for doing a greater good, while the female victim in the *wai* realm is wounded implying this space is dangerous for women and it is a space where women do not belong. The female victim's impact on the narrative is to help reinforce and maintain social justice. However, the social impact is not directly exerted by herself, but rather by emotionally affecting her male partner, who is motivated by the woman's unjust victimisation. It is he who takes responsibility for completing the social mission and bringing justice. In this process, female victimisation and vulnerability may be seen as necessary steps to propel the completion of a social mission. She propels the story towards a just outcome, while the ultimate merit goes to the male character.

For example, in *The Bullet Vanishes*, although the female victim, Little Lark, is smart enough to release her birds to peck at her attacker's face, giving her a chance to escape, she is still unable to fight back as she is too weak in the face of her male attacker. Her abduction provides the leading male protagonist, Detective Guo, a perfect opportunity to show his sophisticated shooting skills by accurately shooting the attacker in the head from an extremely long distance. After her rescue, the film shows a romantic sex scene between Little Lark and Detective Guo. This scene suggests that she voluntarily offers sex to the hero as a gift of appreciation for his braveness, while she romantically wins the hero's love by having been through an ordeal which allowed him to save her. Sex with the female victim may also be seen as a prize for his victory. Little Lark's victimisation also comes across as a worthwhile part of the narrative rather than as a tragedy because if she had not been taken hostage, Detective Guo would not have been able to have found an important clue that helped to solve the case. Little Lark's victimisation, thereby, contributed to the hero's social mission. As a social contract, the hero's rescue of the beauty signifies that the woman's safety relies on her male counterpart. Saving the beauty contributes to achieving the male character's positive image as a saviour and a vindicator of justice.

The model of *hero rescues beauty* applies not only to the physical victimisation of female characters but also to emotional victimisation. In a number of films, the female protagonist is in a situation of intimate emotional abuse and must turn to the male character for help. These films show a combination of intimate partner violence and the *hero rescues beauty* trope. For example, in *Sparrow*, the female protagonist, Chung, is under the control of Mr Fu, a rich, old man, as his mistress. Fu is resourceful and holds her passport to keep her from leaving. Chung attempts to resist Fu's control by using her personal charm to seduce a gang of

pickpockets led by Kei to help her steal her passport back from Mr Fu. After a final contest between the two groups of pickpockets, Kei fails. Nonetheless, Fu decides to release Chung. Fu's action makes Chung appreciate his generosity and blames herself for her own treachery, even though she was subjected to emotional abuse from Fu. Chung's seeking help from the gang led by Kei through proactive seduction is an example of how a woman's sexual attraction is used as a trophy for which men can compete or collect, while her constraint or freedom depends on male control. Thus, the woman's freedom can be seen as a symbolic social mission or competition between men over which Chung has no direct control. As the actress, Kelly Lin, who plays Chung mentioned in an interview, Chung is like a sparrow in a cage who desires to be free. But she is uncertain about life, love and the future. The audience see her as beautiful, but internally she is complicated and sad.[71] Chung's resorting to asking Kei for help places her in a role where she becomes a link between the two groups of competing men, helping Kei's team towards heroism and allowing Fu to be seen as a soulful and generous man. Either way, Chung is situated in an inferior position and is unable to represent herself.

The *hero rescues beauty* trope can also be seen in films where the female victim is not successfully saved, but her victimisation still becomes a motivation for the male hero to make a morally righteous choice that brings the criminals to justice. In such cases, the female victimisation is not presented as a cruel sacrifice, but as a necessity for achieving social justice in which the male hero is able to maintain the social order. In *Overheard*, the female protagonist, Mandy, is shot by a gangster who is supposed to target her boyfriend, Johnny, who is the leader of the police eavesdropping team and who is involved in an illegal activity with his team members. Mandy's severe injury comes as a huge shock to Johnny and reminds him of the gangsters' brutality and his identity as a law enforcement official. After this incident, he finally makes the moral choice to cooperate with other police units to take down the criminal gang. This action reinforces his positive status as a crime fighter. *The Accidental Spy* seems showing analogous plots in which the female protagonist, Yong, dies of a drug overdose inflicted on her by her master, Lee. This sad situation motivates the male character, Buck, who has affection for her, to defeat Lee's gang and stop his massacre which involved killing people through the use of chemical weapons. His action eventually enhances his image as a hero and a world saviour. In *Protégé*, the leading female role, Jane, a drug user is

[71] The full interview is available at http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/c/2008-02-13/09331908928.shtml, access date 2 March 2019.

romantically connected to Nick, an undercover detective. Her tragic death through a drug overdose is a significant motivation for Nick to make a professional and moral choice by deciding to arrest the drug lord, Quin, who controls a large proportion of the drug market in Hong Kong. Before Jane's death, Nick was still hesitating because of his profound bond with Quin as a protégé and mentor during his years of undercover experience. Jane's victimisation and death come across as a necessary condition to motivate Nick to embark on his upright and social mission and, thus, maintain the social order. On the one hand, this framing shows a degree of recognition of female social influence towards positive social change, while on the other hand it demonstrates the expediency of women in their sacrifice as part of the necessary process towards social change, in which the male hero's uprightness and social status is ultimately secured.

While the majority of female victims are presented as weak and vulnerable, the one in *Connected* offers a different frame. The female character, Grace Chen (acted by Taiwanese actress, Barbie Hsu) is represented as a professional lady - a toy designer, who is kidnapped along with her family by a group of corrupted Interpol officers. She has the skills to repair a broken phone to call for help and uses language that persuades a male character, Bob (acted by Hong Kong actor, Louise Koo) who is a stranger to her, to risk his life to save her and her family. In this case, the female victim plays a significant role in the rescue mission. With a focus on Grace's victimisation as the core of the narrative, *Connected* still heavily concentrates on the vivid depiction of violence against Grace, including her kidnapping, beating and use of threats. Grace's intelligence is obviously underlined, without which her family would not be safe and the criminal gang would not be arrested. However, in this kind of *hero rescues beauty* narrative, Grace still acts as an intermediary between just and evil men, while her victimisation serves as the basis for the social mission of the male protagonist, which allows him to achieve his heroic image as he maintains the social justice.

Romance between male and female protagonists in the selected films also serves to enhance traditional male/female patterns of dominance/submission. As Michele Schreiber (2014) has argued, romance functions as a transformation agent, leading one or both participants to become a better version of themselves. In *The Accidental Spy, Confession of Pain, Protégé, Flash Point, Beast Stalker, Overheard, Connected and The Bullet Vanishes*, the male character acts as either an official policeman or an undercover detective who has the responsibility of completing social missions related to catching criminals and maintaining the social order. The woman, on the other hand, tends to be depicted as his attachment,

particularly as an intimate partner or a character for whom the male hero has affection. The female character is then placed in danger because of their relationship, and rescuing the woman is portrayed as part of the man's social mission as he attempts to catch the criminals. The transformation of the man into the rescuer/hero and the woman as the victim to be saved highlights a cinematic theme in the selected films in which the woman is not supposed to lead social change but is expected to follow the man's lead. The male hero, on the other hand, goes through a process of self-improvement as he moves beyond the simple saving of his lover and towards the saving of society at large. To emphasize their heroic role, the male protagonist in Chinese crime films tends to have a specific role in law enforcement, either officially as a policeman or undercover detective or unofficially as a vigilante, such as Buck in *The Accidental Spy* and Bob in *Connected*, while the female characters' job positions are more diverse, and related to more 'frivolous' occupations, such as Qiu who is a beer sales girl in *Flash Point*, Little Lark who is a fortune teller in The Bullet Vanishes, and Grace is a toy designer in *Connected*.

The *hero rescues beauty* narrative, particularly involving intimate relationships, can be seen through the lens of kinship structures where women are produced as a sign available for exchange within exogamy (Cowie, 1978; Lévi-Strauss, 1969). In Chinese crime films, the female victim as a sign and her victimisation or sacrifice is offered in exchange for securing the male hero's upright social status and eulogizes male greatness more broadly. From the perspective of the Confucian *nei-wai* model, the *wai* realm is framed as a place where only men can present their power and greatness. When women engage in these violent spaces, they are objectified as signs to be leveraged or exchanged by men but not as themselves. In these narratives, men produce history, while women enhance the melodramatic effect and help to intensify narrative conflicts. However, the woman is not offered her own position in these actions but acts more as a tool for exchange. Chinese crime films, as Cui (2003) has contended for Chinese films more broadly, reflect a psychological misogyny which allows women no place in history.

Intimate Partner Violence: Highlighting Female Compliance

This study adopts the term, 'intimate partner violence' instead of 'domestic violence' to describe the physical and emotional abuse that one person inflicts on their partner in the context of intimate relationships. According to Wallace (2015), traditionally, domestic violence primarily referred to a crime of abuse involving two individuals in an opposite-sex (heterosexual) marriage. Typically, the abuser was the husband and the wife was the victim.

The term ‘intimate partner violence’ was introduced to encompass a broader understanding of violence in relationships by moving away from the old view that abusive violence only occurred in marital relationships. The concept of intimate partner violence acknowledges that abuse can exist in any type of personal, intimate relationship, regardless of sexual orientation, marital status, or gender. Narratives involving male violence against women beyond the marital relationship is one of the most frequent manifestations of female victimisation in Chinese crime films.

The female victim in intimate partner violence in the films in this study tend to have a profound affectional bond with the male perpetrator, along with a passive and compliant attitude that makes it seem as if she is intentionally bearing male violence. The approaches of deletion and addition are applied to both visual and audio elements in the analysed Chinese crime films to highlight female victimisation and attenuate male perpetration, especially emotional abuse. It fosters an impression that a woman’s mental shackles are formed out of her own compliance and tolerance more than being the fault of the man.

Van Leeuwen & Wodak’s (1999) concepts of deletion, addition, substitution and evaluation (see Chapter 3) are useful for uncovering the framing of men and women in these intimate contexts. Deletion here primarily refers to a filming technique that abbreviates the plots or scenes where male characters are seen to emotionally harm women. The harm of women by men is mainly shown through the characters’ conversations or conjectured through the segmented clues, but rarely presented onscreen to the audience. As a filming strategy, addition is adopted to add explicit scenes which repeatedly highlight women defending their male abusers, as well as their affection for them, in effect enhancing the sense of female complicity and rendering an impression that the female’s victimisation is her own choice. In *Protégé*, Jane is represented as frequently bearing her husband’s abuse, such as asking her to engage in prostitution to buy drugs and riskily injecting drugs into her neck, which causes her death. We can also see similar female compliance in *Overheard* in which Mandy consistently overlooks her lover, Johnny’s, irresponsibility and repeatedly insists on wanting to be with him.

Based on the deletion in films of male abuse and addition of female compliance, these Chinese crime films build up a kind of relationship between the spectator and the onscreen image of the man, in which the male spectator can identify with his own likeness (see discussion of Mulvey, 1975 in Chapter 2). In this process, the idealised male protagonist,

who has supreme power over the narrative, guides the male spectator to gaze at the female as an erotic and victimised object, who is completely compliant with him, thereby satisfying both the male protagonist and the male spectator's sexual fantasy through female victimisation. If Mulvey's (1975) notion of narcissism primarily targets male spectators, the scenes appear to encourage female spectators to identify with the excessively compliant woman based on her own choice. While individual female spectators may criticise this exaggeration or 'masquerade' of female compliance, the dominant construction, nonetheless, renders a sense that female victimisation should be attributed to the women's own thoughts and actions more than those of their male perpetrators, thereby enhancing traditional gender norms.

As a form of intimate partner violence, emotional abuse frequently occurs between intimate partners in the selected Chinese crime films whereby the woman is dominated by her male partner through various non-physical violence, including through constraint, manipulation, betrayal, abandonment, lying and cheating. As a victim of intimate partner violence, the woman is often constructed as a passive, non-complaining receiver of violence. Explicit male emotional abuse is excluded from the visual elements, so that any clues are only slightly revealed through the characters' conversations. In the *Beast Stalker*, the cheating by Ann Gao's husband, which causes their divorce, is witnessed in a scene in which she argues with her husband on the phone. In this scene, only the woman is seen, while the man is only heard in the dialogue. His visual absence and the strategic editing of the male out of the scenes of emotional abuse reduces the effect of male violence, making it seem as if it is not so severe.

Another typical case is *Flash Point*, which features a seeming romance between the undercover detective, Hua Sheng and his girlfriend, Qiu. Their romance starts from a carnal relation in which Qiu is seen to be neglected. Her superficial happiness and lack of complaints places her in a complicit role that appears to support the male emotional abuse against her. Her affection for Hua functions to present an appearance that it is her own choice to be with him, even though he effectively abandons and ignores her, except when he cannot find any other girls to be with. Being an undercover detective lurking in the criminal gang with the aim of bringing justice to society helps to justify Hua's lack of commitment in the relationship.

Besides the deletion of male emotional abuse, another frequently used idiomatic strategy to justify male violence in the selected Chinese crime films is to add visual scenes highlighting

the male abuser's expressions of affection towards the female character. *Overheard* is a typical example in which a visual scene of the romance between the male and female protagonists assists to foreground the man as being gentle and loving towards the woman, which seemingly underscores the effect of his emotional harm. The male protagonist, Johnny (acted by Hong Kong actor, Sean Lau Ching-wan) regards Kevin (acted by Hong Kong actor, Alex Fong) his girlfriend Mandy's ex-husband, as a good friend, so he refuses to make their relationship public to avoid hurting Kevin. Johnny even helps Kevin to install a surveillance camera in Mandy's house to help discover who her new boyfriend is, all with Mandy's full permission. While installing the surveillance camera, Johnny feels guilty. However, Mandy insists on being together with Johnny by saying "it's my choice to be with you", showing her tolerance towards him. In a romantic scene, Johnny is outside Mandy's door away from the security camera with a bunch of flowers. He kneels and takes out a ring signifying that he is proposing, while Mandy comes to the glass door, kneels to see him horizontally and puts her ring finger towards the ring against the glass.[72] The lovebirds cry with tears, which is filmed through reverse close-ups of their facial expressions, and a full shot of their kneeling postures accompanied by slow romantic music (see Figure 18). This scene highlights the male protagonist's affection for the woman in a way that seems to dispel his emotional irresponsibility, thereby maintaining his positive image and enhancing the woman's submission in their relationship.

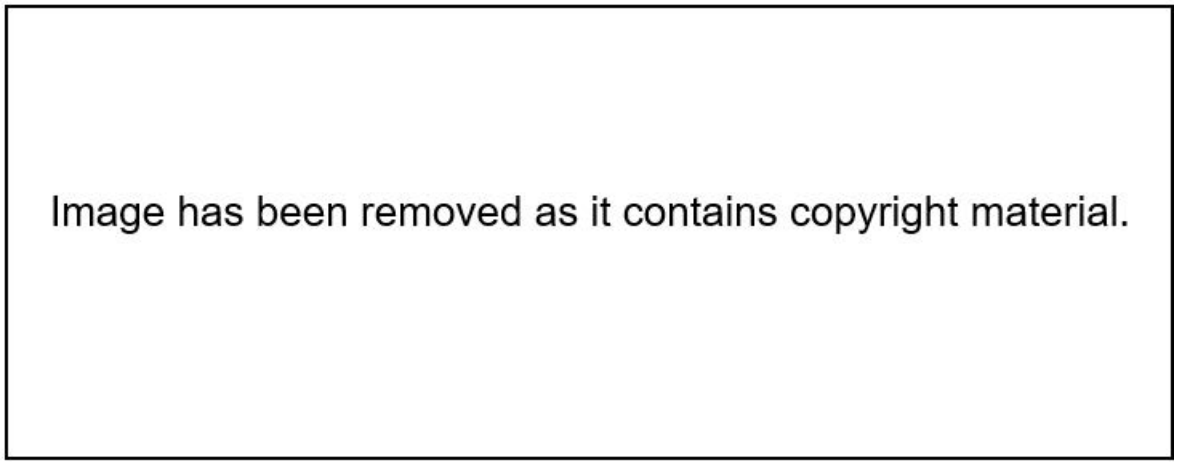

Figure 18 Overheard
The male protagonist Johnny proposes outside the window.

[72] The surveillance only films inside, so Johnny isn't filmed when he is outside.

Alternatively, though some films present visual scenes about the processes or measures of men's emotional abuse against women, male emotional abuse tends to be represented as unaggressive, gentle, and even as understandable. It conforms to van Leeuwen and Wodak's (1999) notion of substitution (see Chapter 3) whereby the male protagonist is generalised as a particular type of kind-hearted person with positive virtues who cares about the female protagonist. Being 'good people', these constructions of male lovers help to present their emotional abuse against women as forgivable, thereby supporting the gender norm of male dominance. *Confession of Pain* is a typical case in which the male protagonist, Lau, approaches and marries Chow as a part of his revenge plan to kill Chow's father, a plot about which Chow is unaware, meaning that their marriage is primarily based on Lau's lie. After killing Chow's father, Lau attempts to kill Chow in an 'accidental' explosion. When Chow is in a coma, Lau confides in his best friend, Detective Yau Kin-Bong (acted by half-Taiwanese and half-Japanese actor Takeshi Kaneshiro) with an element of empathy and care saying, "She was a part of my plan, but when I saw she was injured, I felt it did not matter if she was my enemy's daughter. She was my wife, my family, just like my dead parents, sister and grandma". Furthermore, when Chow is heavily injured and in a coma, the film shows a series of scenes of Lau's gentle care for her, such as massaging her, wiping her face and reading newspapers to her, which effectively diminish Lau's image as a violent man. In a hospital scene, Lau puts the wedding ring back on Chow's finger in a way that highlights his guilt (see Figure 19). When Chow wakes up with the realisation of Lau's lies, she asks him why he is still there. Holding her hands, Lau answers that he hopes she will be fine. When Chow dies, Lau affectionately removes the sheet to take a last look at her face. In the end, Lau shoots himself in the head. Lau's behaviour in taking care of Chow in her dying days and his confessional monologue in a calm and guilty tone effectively converts his image as a violent perpetrator, who both emotionally deceives and physically harms his wife, into a conscientious man who realises his mistake, which evokes the audience's sympathy and forgiveness for his past violence.

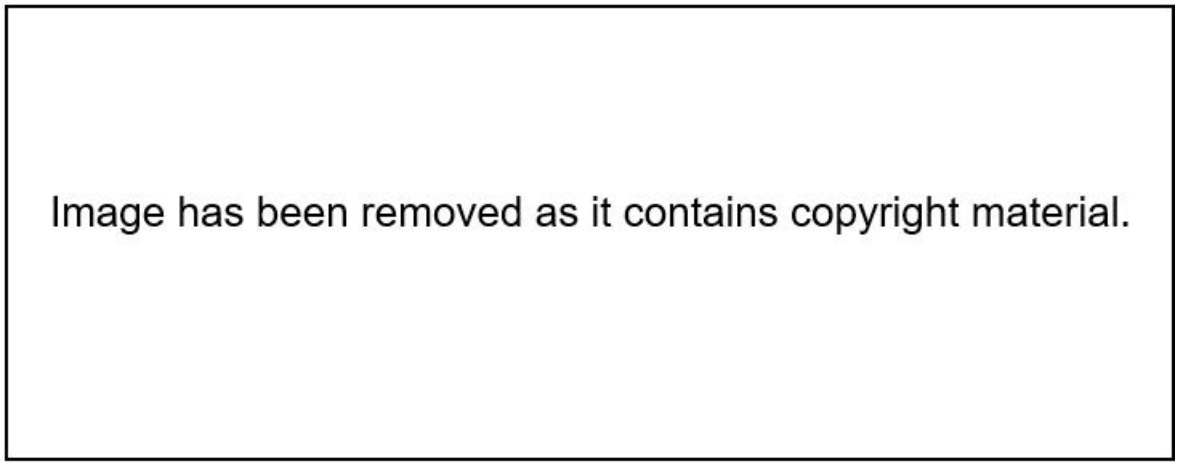

Figure 19 Confession of Pain
Lau puts the wedding ring back onto Chow's finger.

If the emphasis on the male's affection for the female functions to reduce the male's emotional abuse, highlighting female affection for the male emotional abuser effectively shifts the responsibility for the female victimisation from the man and to the woman, implying that she is more responsible for her own tragedy than the man. In *Port of Call*, the suicide tendency of the female protagonist, Wang, is frequently implied. Being emotionally betrayed seems to be the trigger for her decision to take her own life. This decision suggests that affection for a man is supposed to be a woman's main purpose, without which her life is meaningless. As Firestone (1970) has argued, the concept of love is a kind of ideological cover-up or disguise for the relations of power that prevail in heterosexual relationships. In this sense, the emotion of love serves to disguise the actual political meaning of sex by putting it within the context of a confusing and misleading set of expectations. Sexual love is revealed as a part of the ideological structure that encourages the execution of male power over women with the full participation of women (Firestone, 1970). For women, falling in love with a man is not a metaphor but an action, and each time it is repeated, it reinforces their subordination, both individually and collectively (Eisenstein, 1988). As Rosenlee (2006) has discussed in relation to the *nei* realm of traditional Confucian values (see Chapter 2), the man is privileged as the sole bearer of a patrilineage, and the woman is rarely endowed with a permanent social place of her own without entering a heterosexual or familial relationship, which indicates the nameless nature of the woman's personhood. Thus, a heterosexual or familial relationship becomes the only legitimate social recognition for a woman, but it does not apply to men. In other words, a heterosexual relationship is regarded as a definitive marker of womanhood. The recognition and realisation of womanhood and woman's social

status depends on her relationship with a man rather than on herself, thereby re-locating the woman back into the traditional gender hierarchy.

In *Port of Call*, the emotional abuse against Wang by her client acts as a catalyst to trigger her will to die. Her mental state is shown to have been traumatised in various ways, including through family issues, school and career frustrations. Males are highlighted as having significant roles in her life, but her victimisation is presented as something she brought upon herself. As a teenage prostitute,[73] Wang's emotional abuser was a young man, who was a client for whom she had affection. The emotional abuse is mainly represented in one plot in which the young man humiliates Wang with harsh words in front of his girlfriend and asks Wang to clarify that they are not lovers (as discussed above). Wang's attitude of being tolerant and submissive in the face of humiliation consolidates the sense of female inferiority and male dominance in this intimate relationship. The trauma she faces increases her vulnerability, reduces her self-esteem, and facilitates her sense of self-abandonment and her will to die. To show how Wang has fallen for him, the director uses two flashbacks of a romantic sex scene to depict the young man's blandishment and Wang's naiveté, which rationalises Wang's position of being an emotional victim and manifests her falling as a matter of her own life choices. In the flashback, Wang's initial death wish also surfaces. She puts an energized light bulb into her mouth and the man asks if she is afraid of electrocution. Wang answers, "Is it easy for a human to die?" (see Figure 20) This is the first time that Wang mentions death in the film, which is a hint about her ending and implies the thought of death has already existed in her mind. At this point, this flashback does not only function to present her passiveness in a relationship but also notifies the audience that Wang's death should be more ascribed to herself than others.

[73] As a background, Wang has newly migrated from the mainland to Hong Kong. She tries hard to learn Cantonese and adapt in the local community. She is not popular in school and does not have a good relationship with her mother, who married a paralysed man to get Hong Kong residency. She begins work as a prostitute, mainly because she cannot realise her dream of becoming a model.

Figure 20 Port of Call
Wang and his client, the man she has affection for, in a hotel room.

Apart from underlining the male abuser's affectionate expression in visual scenes, female compliance is often presented through the female character's defence or explanation of her male partner's abuse. In *The Accidental Spy*, suffering from a drug addiction, the female protagonist, Yong, tells the male character, Buck, about her past life experience through her trembling voice. As the camera zooms in to a close-up of her pale face, she says "I'm an orphan. He (Lee) is my master. He provides for me. He says pretty girls should enjoy pretty things. If not for him, perhaps I would have died in the orphanage at the age of thirteen. He saved my life." From her lines, we can see that although Lee is responsible for getting her addicted, she does not blame Lee. Instead, she appreciates and respects him for saving her life, which suggests her voluntary submission.

Sparrow has shown the female protagonist in an analogous mental condition. In a scene that the female protagonist, Chung, meets Kei's (acted by Hong Kong actor, Simon Yam) four-member gang on a rooftop, her lines defend her emotional abuser, Mr Fu, highlighting her state of submissiveness in the relationship. In a sobbing tone, she says "Mr Fu is good to me. My life has been good lately. What I eat and wear have been the best". Then she turns around to face the camera with tears in her eyes and says "He uses many resources to help me. I owe him too much. He is so old now. I should take care of him". Suddenly, she changes the sobbing tone to an expectant tone, saying "No…I should leave him to find someone I love."

Her expression presents not only her appreciation to Mr Fu but also the internal mental conflict she faces in deciding whether to stay with him or leave to seek true love. Her monologue emphasises Mr Fu's kindness despite his control over her. Hence, this scene indirectly reflects the male emotional abuser's positive side which is presented through the female victim's defence of him. This reduces the effect of the male emotional abuse and enhances the sense of compliance of the female victim.

The representation of females in intimate relationships in the selected Chinese crime films do not challenge traditional Chinese gender norms and patriarchal beliefs and values that have been heavily influenced by Confucian philosophy over hundreds of years (R. S. Gallin, 1992). The oppression of women in Chinese culture has continued to be maintained by social and political elites and remains deeply rooted in the current state ideology which underpins the kinds of films that are sanctioned for public viewership. The familial virtues within the Confucian framework, as discussed in Chapter 2, which form the basis for the concepts of civility and humanity in Chinese culture, have also been used to generate, sustain and justify the ongoing social abuse of women (Rosenlee 2006). As Waston (1991) has contended, a Chinese woman cannot be and is not fully personed. As in many of the selected Chinese crime films, including *The Accidental Spy, Sparrow, Overheard, Confession of Pain* and *Port of Call*, the female victims' engagement with men is prioritised as their recognisable social identity, whereas their career is either ignored or problematised. It sets up a foundation for woman's namelessness, making the woman's compliance with male dominance seem well-reasoned. As Rosenlee (2006) has argued, by rationalising female inferiority and her passive role in an intimate heterosexual relationship, women's tolerance and compliance are expected and encouraged in the *nei* realm. This kind of romance in which a woman may justify a man's abuse over her, as represented in films and other media, may well inform the ways in which viewers think about their own love lives and can persuade the audience to accept the traditional gender hierarchy (Schreiber, 2014; David R. Shumway, 2003).

The female victim is not presented as entirely passive in accepting the commands of her male partner in the selected Chinese crime films. On the contrary, she is seen to actively make some decisions. Wang in *Port of Call* actively appears to choose to become a prostitute and to make up her own mind to give up her life. Jane in *Protégé* appears to voluntarily start to use drugs and invites her husband to inject the strong drug into her neck that causes her death. Yet, while they may make the decisions, what they actively seek are not positive things, and their decisions lead to their own tragedies. In the psychoanalytically focused

second-wave feminist discourse, which theorises sexual difference within the framework of binary opposites, active male/passive female, normative female subjectivity is automatically positioned as passive (Elizabeth Hills, 1999). Unlike the female post-victim perpetrator, examined in Chapter 5, who is able to present herself as active by engaging in masculinsed roles, the unilateral female victim discussed in this chapter is shown to be active only to a certain extent, often in the construction of her own demise.

Female victimisation from intimate partner violence involving male power suggests a male-dominant perspective in Chinese crime films, in a context where violence is regarded as the valued attribute of a man (Albert Bandura, 1978), a way to define a boy and a man, and a way of articulating one's right to be a man (Richard A. Bryan, 2008). Such highly acclaimed films, as the case studies examined here, may be part of a social reflection in which masculinity can be achieved through violence against women. At the very least, violence can be seen as a proposition that attracts popular attention, if not immediate influence over the action of a man toward a woman (Sarah Eschholz & Jana Bufkin, 2001). In the socio-cultural context of the PRC, the oppression of women has been deeply rooted in a state ideology constructed by social and political elites, while the Confucian framework emphasises familial virtues centred on the concepts of civility and humanity and serve as a foundation for generating, sustaining and justifying the social abuse of women (Rosenlee, 2006). The inferior role of women framed in the *nei* realm in traditional Chinese society, and in these contemporary films, reflects a rigid gender norm that is in line with Confucian decorum. In Chinese culture, violence against women is both condemned as well as condoned. On the one hand, Chinese culture emphasises harmony, discipline and self-restraint in interpersonal relationships (Robin Goodwin & Catherine Tang, 1996) and does not praise violence. On the other hand, patriarchal values and corresponding rigid gender norms that remain from traditional Confucian culture encourage the exploitation of women and even aggression toward them (Ko-lin Chin, 1994; Gallin, 1992; Christina Gilmartin, 1990; Honig & Hershatter, 1988; Tang, Lee, & Fanny Cheung, 1999). Hence, Chinese women tend to be consistently placed in an inferior position within societal and family contexts through this patriarchal cultural practice.

Despite the rapid socio-economic and political changes in the PRC during the past few decades, patriarchal values are embodied and persist in media models, as discussed in Chapter 2. Gender stereotypes and conservative attitudes towards family roles have been endowed by public and social service professionals (Tang, Shuk-han Pun, & Cheung, 2002;

Tang, Wong, & Cheung, 2002). Masculinity at present has retained the elements of competitiveness, effectiveness, action orientation and the use of violence to solve certain problems (Erica Scharrer, 2001). Also, masculine characteristics are generally considered to be more desirable than feminine characteristics (Tang et al., 2008). Though Chinese society has become less rigid about female roles and status than before, public attitudes towards women have remained negative if they fail to please men or dare to defy male dominance. A battered wife is typically represented as a bad or disobedient woman who fails to fulfil her family duty if she is unfaithful to her husband, fails to please her husband by being unable to produce a son, and/or refuses sex (Tang et al., 2008). This kind of woman may be viewed as deserving to be physically disciplined by her spouse. This social belief of legitimating women as victims provides a justification for the male perpetrator's violent behaviours and undermines the wrongfulness of the male perpetrator in an intimate relationship.

Overall, the representation of woman as victims in Chinese crime films presents an underlining sense of the gender norms in the patriarchal culture. This gender norm stereotypically features men as powerful, strong, rational and active, and women as soft, weak, insecure, passive and dependent (Marc O' Day, 2004). The basic problem of this formulation derives from the dichotomous conceptualization of gender that depicts masculinity as active and femininity as passive (Wong, 2005). Gender defines the appropriateness of behavioural, psychological and social characteristics of males and females and constructs the way people construe themselves (Susan E. Cross & Laura Madson, 1997). This process interacts with other dimensions of social difference, while the dynamics of gender issues may differ depending on one's particular mix of social identities and roles (Nancy Felipe Russo & Angela Pirlott, 2006). The Chinese Confucian value of being a good wife who devotes herself to her husband and makes his needs a priority is the role expectation for a female in a marriage that leads to the social opinion that women are supposed to be obedient. As Russo and Pirlott (2006) have illustrated, when the expected gender roles, male entitlement, female objectification, and power discrepancies have been legitimised and rendered invisible, violence against women is rationalised and perpetuated. The social structure and gender norm in the Chinese context reflect inequitable gender relations that serve to maintain the legitimacy of male privilege. This gender inequity reinforces a patriarchal perception that women's subordination is seen as normal, natural and expected, whereas powerful and competent women are stigmatized and disliked (Laurie A. Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Peter Glick, 1999, 2001). It tends to shape gender differences in perceived entitlements and can endow different meanings to the resources that women and

men bring to their relationships, which further influences the media representations of the heterosexual relationship onscreen. With this norm that has long been formulated in the Chinese context, Chinese crime films, most of which have been produced by male filmmakers, are consciously or unconsciously imbued with the representation of submissive and objectified female characters.

In summary, as this chapter has shown, the female victim in Chinese crime films has been objectified through the use of fetishist and voyeuristic (drawing on Mulvey, 1975) filming strategies, including muting her voice, shortening her lines, putting her into a claustrophobic space and filming her from high-angle close-ups. For the *hero rescues beauty* trope, the female victim has been produced as a sign (drawing on Cowie, 1978) and her victimisation has been represented as worthy of motivating the male hero to make a morally righteous decision to bring the criminals to justice in order to assist him in achieving the upright social status. By highlighting female affection for the male and her compliance with the male abuser in a heterosexual relationship, the selected Chinese crime films reveal a male-dominated narcissist filming perspective from which the male spectator is guided by the idealised male protagonist who has supreme power over the narrative to gaze upon the female as an erotic and victimised object, thereby satisfying both the male protagonist and the male spectator's sexual fantasy and narcissism through female victimisation (Mulvey, 1975). Furthermore, the inferiority of the female victim is consistent with the traditional Confucian values of placing women into the *nei* (domestic) realm, while the selected Chinese mainstream crime films continue to uphold the flag of misogyny and male dominance. The next chapter provides an in-depth film analysis of the female perpetrator of violence who attempts to use violence to defy the patriarchal authority.

Chapter 5. The Female Perpetrator of Violence: Powerful or Powerless?

Chapter 5 (pages 115-142) of this thesis have been removed due to copyright restriction.

Chapter 6. The Female Professional: Engaged in a Postfeminist Masquerade

In contrast to the last two chapters that examine the female victim who is harmed by violence, and the perpetrator who uses violence to harm others, the female professional, as the final major representation of female characters in award-winning Chinese crime films, is not directly involved in any violent activities, even though she might be involved in criminal activities. While the previous chapter drew related the female perpetrator of violence to the 'phallic girl', this chapter relates the professional woman to another of McRobbie's (2009) four categories of the postfeminist masquerade – the model of the 'working girl'. It also draws on Negra's (2009) analysis of the retreatist *chick flick* to examine the representation of female professionals who appear respectively in the form of a detective, a spy, a financial consultant, a thief and a lawyer in the following award-winning Chinese crime films: *2000 AD* (2000), *Breaking News* (2004), *A World Without Thieves* (2004), *Eye in the Sky* (2007), *Life Without Principle* (2011) and *Silent Witness* (2013). An examination of the representation of the female professional's working capacity and relationship with the male figure suggests that the female professional tends to be placed in an 'in-between' position where she is highly professional in her work, yet remains under the control of her male counterparts who appear as her supervisor, colleague, intimate partner, rival or client. In these representations, like that of the female perpetrator of violence, it will be argued that the professional woman is presented as a postfeminist masquerade in a way that shows an impression of female empowerment through her professional attributes. However, her final salvation by the male hero (for the policewoman) and her retreatist action of leaving her career (for the rule-breaker) relocates the professional woman in the end to an inferior position in her workplace or back to the private *nei* realm.

This chapter draws on McRobbie's (2009) model of the working girl to examine the representation of female professionals who are shown to have an outstanding capacity of professionalism in the workplace. The working girl model is based on the rising status of women as they gain education and employment opportunities and are able to earn a wage in the 21st century. In the meantime, their employable capacity emerges as an encouraged or required quality for successful women. For McRobbie (2009), education and employment contribute to re-designing young women as subjects who acquire a working capacity and stop challenging the existing gender hierarchies, because of their currently visible social position. Working women are encouraged to be freed from the traditional requirement of being sacrificial mothers and wives, while self-improvement substitutes the feminist values of

solidarity to promote female individualisation and condemn women who fail to achieve it. It suggests that young women's identities are no longer recognised primarily by their position within the familial and kinship structure. However, they are required to possess personal skills and body images to make themselves presentable and employable in the workplace. Thus, women's identities are highly marked by their qualifications and occupations. This re-positioning has been a decisive factor in the new deal for women that is mainly embodied in the field of education and employment.

For employment, according to McRobbie (2009), the working girl tends to compromise herself to remain visibly fragile and traditionally feminine and vulnerable to keep being desirable to men. Drawing on Rosemary Crompton's (2002) term 'social compromise', McRobbie (2009) has argued that the working girl expresses a kind of social compromise in the working environment, where women's power is limited under male dominance, for example, by being managed by a male supervisor or being surpassed by male intellect. Crompton's (2002) study focused on working mothers who return to work after the birth of children with a double duty in the household and workplace. McRobbie (2009) re-articulated Crompton's (2002) framework by applying it to the postfeminist masquerade, which is regarded as a strategy of undoing feminism and re-configuring normative femininity. She contended that the social expectation of the working mother's dual duties is underpinned by a kind of male domination because women are required to take on the working responsibility of men as well as continue with their traditionally-assigned domestic responsibilities, while women's social compromise is seen as a process of gender re-stabilisation. With a shift from supporting women's economic dependence on men as the breadwinner towards supporting women to be involved in employment so that they can support themselves and their families too, the social compromise requires women to play a dual role of being active in the workplace and taking care of the household at the same time (Crompton, 2002). The government in many countries supports women's double role through the media and popular culture, which are dedicated to glorifying working mothers and wives by the dissemination of postfeminist self-improvement and self-perfection ideas which in effect help to consolidate masculine hegemony. This new deal or 'sexual contract', as McRobbie (2009) termed it, entails social compromise both in the workplace and the household. While women are required to fit into the new flexible economy through self-improvement in their working capacity to prove their competitive value and to make themselves successful, the new contract also requires women to compromise career aspirations to undertake domestic responsibilities in a way that conforms with conventional gender hierarchies. Both McRobbie

(2009) and Crompton's (2002) discussions of women's double duties closely reflect contemporary Chinese contexts where women have also been expected to perform in both the domestic and public spheres. For this reason, their frameworks can be usefully applied to the analysis of the representation of professional women in Chinese crime films

In Chinese films, the double duty for women has also been presented and eulogised in a way that reflects changes in Chinese political ideology. As Dai (2002) has argued, if Mao allowed women to engage in the public sphere by joining the revolution and entering the job market, Deng Xiaoping required women to retreat into the domestic sphere in the name of liberating humanity. This is based on an assumption that it is in a woman's nature to want to care for her family and take the responsibility for domestic work. Being a virtuous house wife or a caring mother came to be interpreted as an indispensable feature of 'humanity'. Since then, women have had to make a double payment through their roles as citizens engaged in the workforce and housewives (Dai, 2002). As forces within Chinese society have grabbled with exploring the contours of China's civilization and its traditional, 'backward' cultural elements, Dai (2002, p.129) has noticed that the woman in Chinese cinema has tended to be constructed as "a sacrificial lamb of backwardness, an offering to civilization, an iconic victim of political and historical violence, then imprint of historical evolution, and the location of an ethereal redemption" (p. 129).

This chapter applies the postfeminist model of the working girl or working woman in her attempt to navigate the professional public/*wai* sphere, beyond the traditional private/*nei* realm, to examine the representation of the female professional in Chinese crime films.

This chapter also draws on findings from research on the *chick flick* genre, more commonly discussed in the Western context, which has typically focused on the lives of the female professional. The *chick flick* refers to a commercial film genre that aims to appeal specifically to female audiences with its reflections of glamorous femininity and pure, simple visions of success and independence for the female characters (Suzanne Ferriss & Mallory Young, 2008). The term, 'chick' was first used in the academic arena by Rochelle Mabry (2006), and Ferriss and Young (2008) further developed it in the context of discussing issues of solidarity and empowerment for the modern girl. By articulating it within the postfeminist framework, Ferriss and Young (2008) argued that *chick flicks* present cultural characteristics that reflect a chick postfeminist aesthetic. This aesthetic highlights femininity, prioritises romance, aims to enhance female pleasure and values consumer culture. The female character in a *chick flick* is

identified by pursuing heterosexual romance in her life and actively choosing to perform a kind of femininity. Negra (2009) has framed the working girl as a new archetype in the postfeminist labour market, arguing that the modern *chick flick* has offset the threat of the career woman by highlighting her intention to seek romance in the workplace and not career progression. Thus, though the female professional is presented to be capable in the workplace, prioritising her romance with men rather than her career goals sets her back to the pre-feminist gender hierarchy (Negra, 2009). In postfeminist culture, the significance of seeking an appropriate and lucrative job by a woman has receded in preference for a concern over personal romance (Suzanne Leonard, 2007).

Besides romance, Negra's (2009) notion of retreatism is also useful for examining the professional woman. Negra (2009) examined the female professional's recurrent role of retreatism in postfeminist culture, particularly in plots that have shown the rewards of a woman's downshifting of her career and returning to her hometown. In these stories, the heterosexual romance often involved a "retreatist epiphany" in which the female professional realises that her family is more important, while her education and career are problematic (p. 21). This "choosing the home" story is characterised in several aspects, including removing the woman from the contaminating, cynical corporate workplace (p. 34). Significantly, a representational schism between the home girl and the working girl is revealed, and returning home becomes a criterion of the professional woman's social recognition. Through a cinematic strategy of defaming the woman's work environment and glorifying the hometown, the depiction of the retreatist woman lengthens the distance between the public and domestic spheres, or *wai* and *nei* realms, thereby showing that retreatism is the salvation for the woman whose public professional role is contingent and insignificant (Negra, 2009). While Negra (2009) focused on the *chick flick* genre, her notion of retreatism is applicable to the analysis of representations of female professionals in Chinese crime films as the depictions of the unfriendly work conditions for these professional women show many similarities. Furthermore, Negra's (2009) notion of retreatism to examine conflicts between women's public/professional and domestic lives can be usefully interwoven with Rosenlee's (2006) Confucian theoretical framework relating to the *nei* and *wai*, allowing for an integration between Western postfeminist theories and Chinese cultural values in the analysis of the female professional. The subsequent analysis of the professional woman in award-winning Chinese crime films draws on the notion of retreatism to uncover their expected places in society as represented in the films and examine how the postfeminist masquerade is

negotiated in workplace contexts in which the woman appears to be capable of generating a certain degree of success.

The Policewoman: Masquerading in a Role Meant for Men

The representation of the female professional, especially as a policewoman or detective, in relation to her performance of masculinity and empowerment has been frequently examined in the context of American films (Phillipa Gates, 2004; Linda Mizejewski, 2004, 2005). Particular genres, such as film noir (Gates, 2009) and police action films (King, 2008; Frankly T. Wilson & Ashley G. Blackburn, 2014), depict female detectives that are either more interested in heterosexual romance or more likely than men to become involved in a heterosexual affair. Among the minimal amount of scholarship on the portrayal of the female professional in Chinese cinema, Jason Siu (2013) has provided an insightful understanding of the stereotype of the female police officer in Hong Kong crime films and TV shows. Siu (2013) has argued that the female detective tends to be given a weak and submissive role, thereby positioning the modern woman through the lense of Confucian traditions. This section particularly focuses on the female professional in law enforcement in *Breaking News* and *Eye in the Sky*, and discusses their representations under the dual umbrellas of postfeminist discourse and Chinese socio-cultural values. In contrast to Siu's (2013) argument and drawing on McRobbie's (2009) model of the working girl within the postfeminist masquerade framework, it will be shown that while the female detectives in the two analysed films are depicted as having outstanding working skills in their profession, their final rescue from danger by male heroes downplays their professional expertise, which is presented more as a masquerade that shows an impression of their empowerment. In each of these films, the merit of bringing the criminals to justice and maintaining the social order is still given to the male heroes, which reinforces male dominance in the workplace.

The policewoman has been a particularly prominent representation in Hong Kong crime films. In the golden age of the Hong Kong film industry (1980s-1990s), the classic portrait of the police woman as warrior was foregrounded by a group of renown Hong Kong female stars in films such as *The Inspector Wears Skirts* tetralogy (*Ba wang hua*, 1988-1992, starring Sibelle Hu, Sandra Ng and Kara Wai). In the new millennium, after the 1997 Handover of Hong Kong, the representation of strong female police officers in Hong Kong films tended to decline, yet has endured in numerous Television Broadcasts Limited[75] (TVB) TV serials

[75] Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) is a television broadcasting company based in Hong Kong. It has been known as the most dominant broadcaster in Hong Kong, primarily for its TV serials.

(e.g., *Armed Reaction* trilogy, *Tuo qiang shijie*, 1997-2001; *Forensic Heroes I & II, Fa zheng xian feng* 2006- 2008; *On the First Beat*, Xue jing chu geng, 2007; *The Mysteries of Love, Tan qing shuo an,* 2010; *Lives of Omission*, *Qian xing ju ji*, 2011; *Line Walker, Shi tu xing zhe,* 2014). Given Hong Kong films have heavily relied on the Mainland film market for profit, the shrinking of Hong Kong films with strong policewomen may be seen as catering the Mainland audiences, while Hong Kong TV shows still target locals.

In the years since the handover and the 1997 Asian financial crisis, Hong Kong police crime cinema has reflected a backlash against feminism, which has been evident through the representation of victimised and compromised female police officers, and even the complete removal of female characters from the centre of the narrative in many police crime films. While the Hong Kong police crime genre was quickly revived after the financial crisis, marked by the grossing success of the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy (*Wu jian dao,* 2002-2003, dir. Andrew Lau) and crime films by producer and director, Johnnie To, and producer, director and screenwriter Wai Ka-Fai (Sun, 2018), the focus has been on depicting men's battles and female characters have rarely been foregrounded.

The female characters Inspector Rebecca Fong (acted by Hong Kong actress, Kelly Chen), in *Breaking News* and Constable Ho Ka-po with the code name, Piggy (acted by Hong Kong actress, Kate Tsui) in *Eye in the Sky* are represented as having two sides. On the one hand, by being depicted as progressive women, they are given the power to solve criminal cases and drive forward the crime narratives; on the other hand, their power is eventually surpassed by male power in the male-dominated professional space, which eventually re-sets the two female law protectors into an inferior position. As Gates (2004) has argued in the context of the American detective genre, while the woman is brought to the centre of the narrative with a seemingly greater degree of agency as the protagonist who drives the narrative action forward, this agency is tempered and contained. The female detective is presented as a professional woman operating in a male-dominated world of criminal investigations. In this context, a woman with authority and power over men tends to be regarded as a potential disruption to the expected gender hierarchy (Gates, 2009). She must be placed in a proper position, as Kathleen Gregory Klein (1995) has contended, to push off-centre the dichotomies between male/female, public/private, and intellect/emotion. At this point, the female detective becomes a congenial figure that can be put in her proper place. Klein's (1995) so-

called ‘proper’ position in the context of Chinese crime cinema can be seen as an ‘in-between’ space where the female professional is allowed to be empowered with outstanding expertise and professional skills in conducting a crime investigation and discovering the truth, but she is ultimately contained and her success is devalued because she tends to become a victim of criminals and show less intelligence than the hero or criminal. From this perspective, the policewoman’s merit is highly recognised, even highlighted as a significant narrative catalyst throughout. However, female power is not fully authorised by the symbolic order. On the contrary, it is contained or has a limited range that does not surpass the control of male power. In this sense, the woman’s professional expertise is presented as a masquerade showing her seeming empowerment in the workplace, while the ultimate ending of highlighting the male hero’s greater braveness or expertise re-stabilises female inferiority and male dominance in the professional arena.

Both *Breaking News* and *Eye in the Sky* focus on two aspects of the female detectives’ careers, namely the depiction of female ambition and professionalism in the workplace and the depiction of their relationships with male colleagues, rivals or work partners. The male counterparts are primarily presented as prevailing over the women with their boldness, cautiousness or resourcefulness which contribute to the completion of the mission relating to bringing the criminals to justice and maintaining social justice. In *Breaking News* (2004), Commander Rebecca Fong’s ambition and proficiency are first manifested through her proposal to turn a police operation into breaking news to retrieve the credibility of the police at a critical moment. The credibility of the police force drops to a nadir level because an ambulatory TV news unit live broadcasts the embarrassing defeat of a police battalion by five bank robbers in a ballistic showdown. When the gang of robbers is finally surrounded by police in a residential building, Rebecca acts as the operation commander who has overall control of the mission to rescue the hostage and capture the criminals. She communicates with the media to show the public the success of the police operation. Her strategies include distributing to the media press releases as well as embellished pictures and edited video clips that deleted the scenes of the police’s retreat and highlighted their braveness in fighting against the armed robbers. Meanwhile, she gives an order to release the emotional interviews of the dead police battalion’s families, as well as the police survivor who capitulated to the robbers. The interviews are well designed, focusing on the glory of the dead hero and the survivor’s responsibility for his family which serve to emotionally move the audience and reclaim the good name of the police. Another interesting plot is during the ‘meal battle’. The gang leader, Yuen (acted by Taiwanese actor, Richie Jen) hides in an apartment with

hostages and awaits an opportunity to escape. To taunt the police, Yuen releases pictures of their deliciously cooked meal online to show that the police cannot capture them. Responding to the robber's mockery, Rebecca immediately gives the order to distribute lunch boxes to all the police on duty and the media who are waiting outside. She says "I'm letting the public know that the police are human. They are hungry and they need to eat", demonstrating her expertise and competence. Overall, as an operational commander, Rebecca shows strong professional skills, decisiveness and confidence as an empowered female character.

At the same time as depicting their professional strengths, both *Breaking News* and *Eye in the Sky* pay attention to representing the policewomen's relationships with male counterparts including supervisors, colleagues and rivals. These scenes serve to emphasise the 'double life' of the police woman who is both supported and suppressed by men in her profession. Rebecca is shown engaging with her male supervisors, colleagues and the criminals. At first, her attitude toward her male supervisors is displayed aggressively, while the male supervisors' tolerance functions gives an impression of her empowerment in the workplace. Her straight face, loud voice and aggressive tone vividly presents her overbearing side, which contrasts with her supervisor, Eric Yeung's (acted by Hong Kong actor, Cheung Siu-fai) gentleness and rationality. Interestingly, this representation is consistent with Gate's (2004) analysis of female police in American movies. According to Kelly Chen[76], who played Rebecca, she intentionally performed Rebecca in a masculine manner with a high volume and harsh tone to show her strength in the male-dominated work environment. During the operation, Rebecca asks Eric to disclose some information to the press, but Eric shows a reluctant attitude; then she sharply takes the role of delivering a public speech in front of the media, while Eric silently stands behind her. After the 'meal battle', Rebecca sends the SDU (Special Duties Unit) into the building for a surprise attack. Considering the hostages' safety, Eric objects to her rash action, but Rebecca shouts at him with a loud voice "I don't need your agreement, I need your support", then continues to give the order, disregarding Eric's reasonable objection. However, her action does not work well and the criminal, Yuen, escapes from the sealed building and leaves behind him a massive crossfire between SDU and criminals and explosion. Then she gives Eric a written script and asks him to deliver another speech to the media, which not only shows her manipulative side but also places the man in the position of publicly taking the credit for the police's actions. The relational

[76] The full interview is available at http://ent.163.com/ent_2003/editor/movie/movienews/040630/040630_258903.html, access date 2 March 2019.

depiction of Rebecca and Eric presents the female professional as an unreasonable and aggressive leader, even though her professional skills are fully recognised. It defames the image of the female professional by giving the impression that a powerful woman is unreasonable and arrogant, which is the opposite to the commonly expected female image of her being kind and soft. The passive male supervisor, Eric's endless tolerance can be interpreted as a kind of concession to Rebecca's ambiguous romance with C.K. Wong (also known as C.K. acted by Hong Kong actor, Simon Yam), Eric's supervisor. The female professional's peremptoriness during the mission is authorised by a higher-level male power, C.K., which means she is still under male control.

Breaking News has a short scene in the beginning that shows the ambiguous romance between Rebecca and C.K. As a higher-level leader, C.K. convenes an urgent meeting to discuss how to retrieve the police's credibility after the massive media coverage of the embarrassing defeat of a police battalion. He ignores others' suggestions and particularly shows interest in Rebecca's 'operation show' idea, then appoints her as the commander to lead the mission. After the meeting, he follows Rebecca into her office and attempts to talk personally with her. C.K. tries to touch Rebecca's shoulder. She responds with coldness and avoids it, saying, "You know, I'm a simple person. Black is black, white is white. It's that simple". C.K. answers, "Emotion is not that simple." At this moment, the camera frames them in a medium side-angle shot, showing the two characters standing very close, face-to-face (see Figure 28). This scene shows that Rebecca and C.K. have an ambiguous, affectionate relationship in which Rebecca is the less powerful person. Although C.K. recognises Rebecca's brilliant idea, this scene manifests an unspeakable implication that a woman gaining this opportunity to lead a mission might not be deserved based on her professional merits, but rather based on her personal relationship with the boss. The woman's power in her professional context is still shown to be under the control of the male, regardless of her performance.

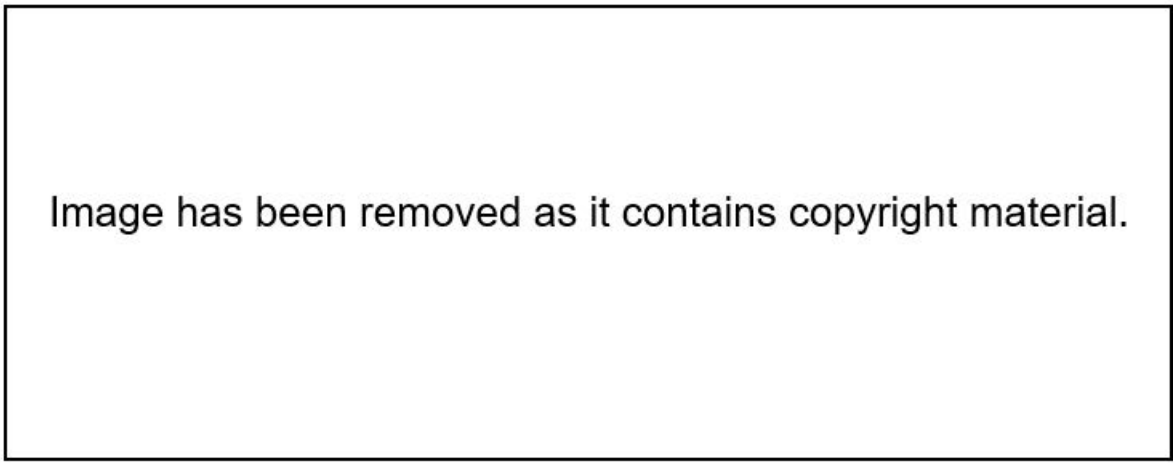

Figure 28 Breaking News
The female protagonist Rebecca Fong is talking privately with her supervisor C.K.

The relational depiction of Rebecca's interaction with her rebellious subordinate, Detective Cheung (acted by Hong Kong actor, Nick Cheung) also shows her powerlessness in terms of both the management and capture of the criminal. Similar to findings relating to American films, where the male hero is more likely to maintain an anti-organizational individualism that sets him against the higher authority (Sparks, 1996; Baker, 2006), while the woman tends to work more closely with the legal authorities (Tasker, 1998), in *Breaking News*, while Rebecca runs the police operation, Cheung engages in unprompted action against Rebecca's orders, and this non-permitted action is presented as more effective than hers. Cheung's team beats back Yuen's gang several times, surpassing the actions of Rebecca's SDU, thus strengthening Cheung's individualistic heroism in contrast to Rebecca's failure. In the end, Cheung is presented as a hero who rescues Rebecca and kills the criminal. While Rebecca's turgid operation is presented as not effective enough to capture the foxy criminal; the disobedient detective acts as the final hero by saving his boss, which suggests that no matter how competent the female professional was, her power could not be compared with Cheung's machismo. It also implies an underlying seemingly reasonable sense that the woman is ultimately to be defeated by a man and requires a male hero to rescue her, no matter how competently she performs in her profession. When Yuen is shot dead and Rebecca is saved, Eric says to Rebecca "You played the hero". However, Rebecca downplays this by asking her colleague to bring Cheung to the press conference, saying "Bring Cheung. He played the hero too." Through this line, it seems that the female protagonist's heroic role is still recognised by both her supervisor and the public in this narrative at some level. It also shows Rebecca's transitional attitude towards Cheung, moving from objecting to his individualistic action to

recognising his contribution, which situates the woman in a position of admitting her limitations and supporting the male hero's honourable status.

The relational depiction of Rebecca's interactions with the criminal gang leader, Yuen, also reveals limitations in the woman's competence. In this operation, Rebecca's plan seems to be repeatedly suppressed by Yuen. In the first round, when Rebecca's team discloses the edited video clip of SDU's pushing the criminal gang backwards into an apartment, Yuen pays Rebecca back by releasing the pictures of them beating up the SDU. Later, Yuen has the idea of putting pictures of their expertly cooked meals online to taunt the police. After the 'meal battle', when Rebecca sends the SDU into a surprise attack, Yuen has already predicted her move and figures out a solution. He is aware of the media downstairs who are witnessing this moment, so he points his gun at the head of the hostage, who attempts to climb out of the window to escape. This leaves Rebecca no other choice but to withdraw the SDU in consideration of the hostage's safety. Finally, Yuen successfully escapes from the building, which is surrounded by armed police, with the help of well-designed camouflage. Also being able to take Rebecca as a hostage, all along the way, Yuen's plan is always a step ahead of Rebecca's, indicating the professional and sophisticated woman's inferior ability in terms of competence. In short, a professional woman is presented as smart, but a professional man is smarter.

Breaking News depicts the relationship between Rebecca and Yuen as ambiguous and romantic. On the one hand, their standpoints are opposite to each other, since Rebecca is the upright police commander in charge of capturing Yuen, while Yuen is the gang leader who holds hostages and seeking an opportunity to escape. On the other hand, Yuen seems obsessed with Rebecca by flirting with her and praising her beauty when she tries to talk to him online. Rebecca's only face-to-face interaction with Yuen is when she is taken hostage. In this scene, Yuen hijacks a minibus, taking Rebecca with him. Even though Yuen is aware of being in great danger, he still flirts with her, saying, "You look more beautiful than onscreen" and "What kind of boyfriend do you like to have?" Rebecca answers, "I don't have one. How about you?" "I don't have a girlfriend either," says Yuen. Their conversation about romance makes the atmosphere ambiguous, as they are alone in a concealed space. Then, Yuen handcuffs Rebecca together with one of his hands, and fires the gun with his other hand. The camera films the pair from a high, overlooking angle depicting Yuen's crossfire with the police, and dragging Rebecca with him in a chivalrous style, whereas Rebecca seems to not have any control. In the end, Yuen is injured by Detective Cheung, leans against a car

and points his gun down at Rebecca, who kneels in front of him. This full shot is filmed from a side angle showing a high-positioned male criminal and a low-positioned policewoman that suggests their power imbalance at this moment (see Figure 29). Yuen says to Rebecca, “If I have a choice, I will choose you as my heroine.” Then, he raises the gun and shoots to the sky in a way that immediately attracts Cheung to shoot him. When Yuen falls to the ground, the camera captures Rebecca’s shocked facial expression in a close-up, from the point of view of Yuen, which expresses her confusion about why Yuen commits suicide instead of shooting her. At this point, the criminal, Yuen, is not demonised in the narrative, because he does not actually hurt hostages and even shows a kind attitude toward them. Additionally, his temperate flirting with Rebecca is represented in a romantic and chivalrous style, especially his final action of choosing death rather than hurting her. For this plot, depicting a cross-boundary relationship between an aggressive female police commander and a macho male criminal creates a romanticised, imaginary space for the audience to appreciate or regret their sad ending. In the end, the woman is still situated in an inferior position as the weak hostage and a potential victim who is vanquished by a man either physically or intellectually.

Figure 29 Breaking News
The criminal Yuen is pointing a gun down on Rebecca Fong.

This romanticised representation of a female police commander and a male criminal is comparable to Lindsay Steenberg’s (2011) analysis of the American crime film *Taking Lives* (dir. D. J. Caruso, 2004) where the narrative is centred around a pathological romance between a female profiler and a male serial killer. As Mizejewski (2005) illustrated, the crime film genre uses violence as the central trope for defining the relationships between the different sexes. In this kind of relationship, the transgressive woman has long acted as a

register for anxieties about female sexuality and power. This crime genre is likely to reveal the limitations of the postfeminist heroine by showing their and immoral sex and problematic behaviours that are supposedly precludes. In *Taking Lives*, the narrative focuses on violent, sexualised acts committed by the male serial killer who is sexually and compulsively attracted to the female profiler. Steenberg (2011) has argued that this pathological relationship delegitimises the female profiler's professionalism. This point can also be used to explain the romance between Rebecca and Yuen in *Breaking News* which works to counteract Rebecca's professionalism and reduces her sense of credibility, expertise, and empowerment. In *Taking Lives*, since the female profiler's expertise is questioned as a result of her sexual relationship with the serial killer, she has to re-establish her authority in spite of her body rather than through it (Steenberg, 2011). While in *Breaking News*, though there is no critique of the ambiguous romance between Rebecca and Yuen represented in the film, the scene efficiently impairs the sense of female authority that has previously been established and softens her image as an aggressive, female police commander. Steenberg (2001) has also argued that the kind of pathological romance seen in *Taking Lives* might be viewed seen as a disciplinary tactic to pathologise the female professional who is unable to reconcile her femininity with her expertise. In *Breaking News* the depiction of the woman's femininity, while not obviously pathologised, there is a sense of an irreconcilable conflict between being professionally excellent and sexually attractive. Therefore, depicting her femininity becomes a way to delegitimise her professionalism and reduce her power in the workplace.

In contrast to the sophisticated female police commander in *Breaking News*, *Eye in the Sky* depicts a female rookie, Piggy, who participates in on-the-job training at a police surveillance unit and is mentored by her male supervisor, code-named, Dog-head (acted by Hong Kong actor, Simon Yam). Unlike the professional depiction of the female protagonist in *Breaking News*, *Eye in the Sky* emphasises Piggy's relationship with Dog-head. Her professional proficiency, which is developed over time, is built up through her interactions with Dog-head. Thus, though Piggy grows from bring a rookie to a mature investigator and finally makes a major contribution in locating the criminals, her merit is linked to her male mentor, which means her power is given and authorised by the male controller, who is presented as having more sophisticated skills and stronger power.

The relational depiction between Piggy and Dog-head marks three stages of Piggy's professional progress. First, Piggy passes the task of joining the surveillance unit, in which she is required to track Dog-head. Piggy shows her competence as a surveillance investigator

unit and impresses her supervisor Dog-head. Second, Piggy's immaturity in the profession is embodied by her emotional and unstable mental state. While on a mission to track the gang leader of the heist, code-named Hollowman (character's name is Chan Chong-shan, acted by Hong Kong actor, Tony Leung Ka-fai), Piggy watches a police battalion being shot by the Hollowman. She immediately panics and tries to help the wounded police battalion, which makes her lose track of the surveillance target. Piggy's intention to save the injured colleague's life is noble, but her panicked mental state onsite and her lack of action in calling for backups leads to the loss of clues relating to their investigation, and emphasises her immaturity and inexperience in the profession.

The last relational depiction between Piggy and Dog-head comes at the climax of the film at a critical moment of Piggy's professional breakthrough. In the middle of the mission, Piggy sees Hollowman by chance when she is on a mission to monitor another target. She immediately gives up her target and follows Hollowman, which further suggests that she is ill-disciplined and emotional. Piggy's undercover surveillance is discovered by Hollowman, which places her in danger. Dog-head appears to shift Hollowman's attention away from Piggy but gets himself stabbed by Hollowman. However, Dog-head urges Piggy to leave him and retrieve the target. This plot is represented through a montage in which two parallel scenes keep switching from one to the other. In one moment, Dog-head is seen bleeding on the ground and is close to death. In the next moment, Piggy is looking for Hollowman in the crowded street in the rain with pedestrians holding up umbrellas that reduce her vision (see Figure 30). Listening to Dog-head's fading voice through her earphone and finding no trace of Hollowman, Piggy cries tears of desperation. As for the camerawork, this scene primarily switches between a high-angle, full shot of the crowded, rainy street and the close-up of Piggy's face showing an expression of despair. By contrasting the faceless pedestrians covered by umbrellas and the drenched Piggy alone in the rain, this scene metaphorically visualises Piggy's painful and tough maturation process. A while later, when the rain stops and the pedestrians put away their umbrellas, Piggy's visual field gets clearer and she re-locates Hollowman and achieves the major feat of capturing him. During Piggy's progress, she attempts to correct her dereliction of losing Hollowman twice, leaving Dog-head to suffer a severe injury from his earlier attempt to covering for her. Though Piggy plays the role of the final hero who completes the mission, unlike the previous examples in which men were shown to be given the glory, her achievement is based on the male mentor's training and sacrifice. As Gates (2004) has argued in the American context, the female detective can only become successful as a masculinised or de-feminised woman, and when she embodies

feminine traits, such as being emotional, she is branded as a professional failure. Thus, although Piggy is presented as professionally advanced, the drama presented can also be seen as a masquerade that shows an appearance of her proficiency and empowerment, yet the underlining narration situates the female professional in a subordinate position to the senior male mentor in terms of experience, professionalism and emotionality.

Figure 30 Eye in the Sky
The female protagonist Piggy is looking for the target in the rain.

Police crime genre films with female protagonists outwardly show an appearance of successful women in the male world of law enforcement and in the fighting of male criminals. While policewomen are depicted as positive figures, this genre often articulates two strategies, as Gates (2004) has discussed, involving over-identification as both the heroine and the victim, and her masculinisation. Meanwhile, the professional policeman is usually presented as a stable and self-controlled individual. Besides the masculine characteristics in both cases, Rebecca in *Breaking News* does not reveal many feminine behavioural traits except for her green V-neck blouse; Piggy's femininity mainly emerges in terms of her emotional instability in *Eye in the Sky*. Both struggle with becoming (potential) victims, as Rebecca becomes the hostage of the criminal, Yuen, while Piggy is nearly caught by Hollowman and would have been in danger if it were not for her mentor's rescuing. The policewoman is often shown to have the potential to become a victim of the man she hunts (Gates, 2004). In other words, she is strong in her profession, but weak when it comes to confronting men. As King (2008) has suggested, job segregation appears as a theme

alongside gender difference. The police crime genre affirms a separation of professional spheres that restrains women's performance in the profession and gives the most effective power struggles to the male characters. It is thus clear that equating heroism with manhood and depicting heroines' difficulties as resolved through male colleagues' assistance are typical elements of plots that work to contain the potential threat of women. Women in the police crime genre are obviously tough and proficient, but not enough to solve the crime by themselves; therefore, the stronger male power needs to intervene to ensure final success. In the highly male-dominated area of law enforcement, the policewoman tends to be constructed as a site for the working through of masculine anxieties incited by the involvement of a female presence in a traditionally masculine profession. While policewomen have the ability to prove themselves, their success is ultimately devalued through a re-inscribed containment of their professional ambition. In other words, female empowerment in the workplace comes across as a postfeminist masquerade in that no matter how accomplished she becomes, she remains under the unbreakable, patriarchal glass ceiling.

Post-2010, well-acclaimed Hong Kong films have tended to focus on men's battles with policewomen who are either vulnerable victims who expect salvation, or caring assistants who support male heroes (e.g., *Cold War, Han zhan,* 2012; *The White Storm*, *Sao du,* 2013; *Drug War, Du zhan*, 2013; *Line Walker, Shi tu xing zhe,* 2016; *Cold War II*, *Han zhan II* 2016; *Taste of Crime, Di ya cao,* 2018). The strong and professional female police officers in Hong Kong films are mainly from decades ago when this portrait was much more prevalent. The more recent absence of female police officers in Hong Kong commercial police crime films can be seen as a sign of a 'backlash' against feminist achievement. Interweaving neoliberal consumer culture with individualism, the postfeminist discourse seemingly offers women more freedom to engage in the public sphere by becoming professionals, while also placing them in complicit roles of supporting male dominance. Through these widely distributed and highly acclaimed cultural productions, the audience is subtly encouraged to accept the current female condition of being proud of their achievements in ascending to take on professional roles in the *wai* realm while also regarding their complicity with hegemonic norms and limited influence as inherently normal.

The Rule-Breaker: The Female Professional Who Retreats

This section focuses on female professionals in other working areas, where they cross legal and moral boundaries and dare to break the rules of the industries in they are associated. This section involves the analysis of four female protagonists, namely the spy in *2000 AD*, the

thief in *A World Without Thieves*, the investment consultant in *Life Without Principle*, and the lawyer in *Silent Witness*. Though these female protagonists are deeply involved in criminal activities, they are shown to be kept at a distance from violence, being neither a victim nor a perpetrator. In contrast to the policewoman whose power is shown through her professional role, the power of these four female characters is mainly presented through her transgressions in terms of breaking the rules in their profession or violating concepts of morality or the law. These women seem progressive and empowered in their professions; yet, there are still constraints at all levels, making them show a retreatist attitude in the end, which is seen through their withdrawal from their occupations at critical moments. While these withdraws seem to expresses a sense of free choice, they actually reduce the level of professional power these women seem to have in the workplace. As Negra (2009) has argued, retreatism is regarded as a salvation for women whose public professional roles are contingent and insignificant. When professions seem unfair or cruel to women, retreatism becomes a salvation. At the same time, the women's romantic relationships with key male figures are foregrounded.

Salina (acted by Singaporean actress, Phyllis Quek) in *2000 AD* is an undercover spy who works for a corrupt CIA agent, Kevin Wong (acted by Hong Kong-based Taiwanese actor, Andrew Lin) to seduce the programmer, Grey Li (acted by Hong Kong actor, Ray Lui) in order to steal a special program designed by Grey that has been designed to deal with the Millennium Bug. Her proficiency is seen by her success in becoming Grey's girlfriend and approaching Grey's brother, Peter (acted by Hong Kong actor, Aaron Kwok) to obtain the program after Grey's being murdered. Along the journey with Peter and his best friend, Benny (acted by USA-born Hong Kong actor, Daniel Wu) to look for Greg's program, Salina develops an ambiguous romance with Benny. As soon as she gets the program through Peter, she gives the program to her boss, the corrupted CIA agent, Kevin, who has been bullying her for long. Salina chooses to resist by taking the program and fleeing with Benny. Salina's decision to change sides is due largely to Kevin's overbearing dominance. Under pressure from her male boss, Salina's defects from the unjust side with Kevin where she is a spy and a cheat to the just side with Peter and Benny, where she is a positive protector of justice. This transition of identity involves a retreatist action away from her previous spy career that is displayed as a disrespectful and dangerous area for women. With a typical ending for crime genre films where criminals (the corrupted CIA agent Kevin and his team) have been hunted down, the final scene of this film shows Salina accompanying the wounded Benny to an ambulance, holding his hand with affectionate eye contact, saying, "You are so brave."

Despite Salina's engagement with the criminal activity, there is no scene showing any legal consequences for her. Although Salina and Benny's romance is shown ambiguously without specific indications throughout the film, Salina's retreatism from her career of being a villain spy to develop an affectionate relationship with Benny suggests that leaving her profession for her heterosexual relationship with Benny is a retreat that saves her. It frames the woman in the heterosexual relationship by defining the female identity and position in the *nei* realm, and suggesting the inappropriateness of the woman's engagement in the *wai* realm – in this case, as a professional spy.

While Salina's retreatism breaks the rules of being a professional spy, in *A World Without Thieves,* Wang Li (acted by Taiwanese actress, Rene Liu) and Xiao Ye's (acted by Mainland China actress, Li Bing-bing) retreatism break the rules of being a professional thief. As a professional fraudster who steals and cons people for a living, Wang Li suddenly considers retirement and makes an anomalous decision to protect the naïve peasant, Sha Gen's (acted by Mainland Actor Wang, Bao-qiang) money from being stolen by Uncle Lee's (acted by Mainland China actor, Ge You) gang. Her reason for this transgressive decision turns out to be that she is pregnant and wants to do a good deed as penance. She is moved by the honesty and kindness of Sha Gen and wishes to believe in his naïve idea that everyone in the world is a good person. The whole narrative of this film is based on Wang Li's retreatism from being a thief and her transition to being a mother and an advocator of the law. In this transition process, Wang Li's lover and partner, Wang Bo (acted by Hong Kong actor, Andrew Lau) becomes the main rival against Uncle Lee's gang. In the end, to maintain Sha Gen's dream and support Wang Li's wish, Bo sacrifices his life to defeat Uncle Lee, which brings the money back to Sha Gen, and establishes his image as a hero who maintains social justice, even though he was also previously engaged in illegal activities. In this story, Wang Li's retreatism seems more obvious and complete than Salina's. Wang Li's intention to withdraw because of her pregnancy sees her disappear from the public sphere of the profession (the realm of *wai*) and into the domestic sphere of motherhood (the realm of *nei*). Wang Li regards the protection of Sha Gen as a kind of penance, realising that retreatism is the only path to her salvation. Like Salina, Wang Li appears to choose this retreatist path for herself rather than being forced by external pressure.

The portrait of Wang Li in *A World Without Thieves* seemingly displays an intelligent and independent female professional thief whose voluntary retreatism highlights her 'free choice'. However, Wang Li is not presented as the heroine who actually executes on her self-

protection plan. Rather, it is her partner, Bo, who becomes the final hero. Returning to the *hero rescues beauty* model outlined in Chapter 4, it appears that the woman's social impact is not completely denied, but it is driven by a male hero who takes the woman's victimisation as motivation to come to terms with the prevailing injustice in the world and to finally take the necessary action to defeat the criminals so as to maintain the social order. In *A World Without Thieves*, Bo's motivation is not Wang Li's victimisation but her pregnancy. In the end, Wang Li's empowerment, presented through her professional skills and a strong mind-set, is finally overweighed by Bo's higher-level of power and heroism, during which the woman is relocated back into the traditional domestic space of motherhood. The supporting female protagonist, Xiao Ye, who is Uncle Lee's loyal heeler, also betrays Lee by giving him up to the police, which in effect turns her into an accessory. Whilst not being punished by the law, like Wang Li, Xiao Ye's retreat from Lee's gang where she can repent becomes her only salvation, which can be seen as an allegory to reflect that retreatism from the profession more broadly is women's only salvation from the rough world of men.

In contrast to the above two cases that depict skilful women in controversial professional roles, Teresa Chan (acted by Hong Kong actress, Denise Ho) in *Life Without Principle*, who works as an investment consultant in a bank, is not depicted as having an outstanding ability in her profession. She is under heavy pressure to achieve sales goals, which reflects a sense of being constrained in the workplace, as also seen in *2000 AD*. In a group meeting, her name appears last in the performance list, showing a large gap between her achievements and the end-of-year standard. She works hard until midnight, calling potential clients without a positive response. Teresa is shown to have problematic desires that drive her to go beyond moral and legal boundaries, but the foregrounding of her work pressure makes this violation understandable. To improve her performance, she unconscionably persuades one of her clients, a retired old lady to subscribe to a high-risk fund and falsifies the lady's consent to complete the subscription procedure. For her another client Yuen (acted by Hong Kong actor, Lo Hoi-pang) when Teresa happens to see his death in a carpark (caused by robbing), she pockets Yuen's HKD5 million cash that he withdrew but did not take, and asked Teresa to put it back into his account again. When Teresa meets the police officer who investigates Yuen's murder, she fails to tell the truth and keeps hold of the money. Having a large amount of money, she resigns from her job and happily leaves the building with an ice cream, finally getting rid of the high-pressure workplace and performance worries. The frequent usage of front angle close-ups of Teresa's face that show unstable emotional expressions demonstrates her internal struggle regarding whether to deceive the old lady by investing it in a risky fund

or whether to hold onto Yuen's money. This thought process implies she is naturally not a bad person but is forced to become one through her unfriendly working environment. In such a high-pressure workplace and a weak overall financial situation in Hong Kong, the female professional experiences hardship and impertinence by her supervisor. Therefore, resignation, which is also a form of retreatism, becomes a salvation for the woman to live happily thereafter. The representation of Teresa as the cross-boundary rule-breaker, taking advantage of both the retired lady and Yuen, suggests that her professionalism has been problematised by her cruel work environment, which reduces her professional ethics and makes retreatism seem like a sensible option. In the light of the *nei-wai* model, Teresa's problematic behaviours and the pressure she confronts in her profession can be seen as a way to defame women's credibility in the *wai* realm in order to discourage their engagement in this space.

In *Silent Witness*, the female professional's retreatism is more complicated. This film introduces Zhou Li (acted by Mainland China actress, Yu Nan) as a shrewd lawyer who is highly professional and good at sophistry. However, being hired by the merchant prince, Lin Tai (acted by Mainland China actor, Sun Hong-lei) to defend his daughter who is accused of murdering his celebrity girlfriend, Zhou Li's strategies are driven by Lin Tai rather than herself. This narrative shows Zhou Li to be a bold rule-breaker who violates her professional ethics, who does under-the-table deals in the legal profession and also surreptitiously goes against her client. Before the first trial, Zhou Li receives a mysterious video sent from an anonymous email address claiming the he/she filmed the murder scene and wants to make a deal. Zhou Li pays a large amount of money for the video that indicates that Tai is the actual killer rather than his daughter. Considering her position of being hired by Tai, she is not supposed to do anything against her client, and exposing Tai's crime could cause her a loss of income. However, as a lawyer, her conscience does not allow her to let the killer get away. So, she sends this video anonymously to the prosecutor to let him expose Tai's crime. Zhou Li's struggle between her professional ethics and her sense of morality drives her to cross professional boundaries. When Zhou Li finds out that the video is actually made by Tai, aiming to disguise himself as the scapegoat for his daughter, she realises that Tai was always the one controlling the game. Tai had sent the video to Zhou Li anonymously in the belief that she would follow her conscience and expose it and so that he could be arrested and his daughter could be released, which suggests he is more intelligent than Zhou Li.

Zhou Li's retreatism is not shown by withdrawing from the profession but through backtracking as a way of showing remorse. This happens in a three-step process in which she

first withdraws from pleading for Tai's daughter's innocence, then withdraws from being allied with Tai by sending Tai's crime evidence to the prosecutor, and finally regrets her early decision after discovering the truth aiming to make amends with Tai. In this process, Zhou Li's professional ethics and skills are questioned because of her under-the-table deal and misrecognition of the fake evidence, which reduces the female lawyer's credibility and professionalism. In the end, Zhou Li offers to defend Tai for free because the innocent Tai is mistakenly believed as the murder based on the mysterious video that Zhou Li sends to the prosecutor, which shows her intention to correct her mistake of under-the-table deal and misrecognition of the fake evidence. This could also be seen as a kind of redemption that she tries to seek for herself. Thus, it seems that even though the initial retreatism leads the woman in the wrong direction, an alternative way to retreat could be the offer of salvation to bring her back on the right track, which is pleading for the innocent people, but only if she admits her professional mistake.

Silent Witness represents a male-dominated, legal, professional arena where the women as the minority in this profession follow the men's rules. Foregrounding the female lawyer displaces the overt interrogation of patriarchal power by placing the female lawyer on trial and interrogating her role as a woman and as a lawyer (Cynthia Lucia, 2005). Rifkin (1993) has argued that the law is a paradigm of maleness; thus, films involving the female lawyer can be regarded as a site where cultural attitudes towards women, patriarchy, and the power of the law can converge. As Lucia (2005) has suggested, the figure of the female lawyer strongly registers the anxiety that can arise when the law and patriarchy collide with the feminist agenda. When the anxiety is strengthened, it can simultaneously question the validity of the idealised, culturally defined law and the assumption that women in the practice of law are a destabilising force. Thus, the female lawyer's sophistication and violation could be a potential threat to this idealised legal system, which is dominated by male power. While it is no longer convincing to blindly diminish female power, the female lawyer's professionalism needs to be restrained to some extent to secure the stabilisation of this idealised legal system. In this case, Zhou Li's diminished professional skills and lower level of intelligence compared to Tai exemplify the constraints of women in this professional sphere. As Lucia (1992) has contended, the female lawyer is presented as dangerously ambitious while her masculine traits and independence are undercut by the representation of her as personally and professionally deficient. The patriarchal system is characterised by the gender-based relationships between domination and submission, superiority and inferiority, and power and powerlessness (Polan, 1993). In *Silent Witness*, Tai has the power to manipulate Zhou Li,

while Zhou Li's transgression, which is embodied in her violation of professional ethics (under-the-table deal of evidence), leads the audience to understand Tai's sacrifice, thereby retrieving his upright status. In this way, women's engagement in the *wai* realm – being a professional is somehow problematised while male power in this space is highly recognised. In asserting a stabilised position for phallocentric power, the female lawyer and her transgression become the cinematic focus in a way that increases the male hero's excellence.

The analysis shows that retreatism in the form of withdrawing from a professional role or backtracking after making a professional mistake diminishes the female protagonist's professional competence and offers her a way out of the working environment where she is highly constrained and stressed. In the above cases, there is also an emphasis on the relationship between these professional women and men in their lives who appear either as a romantic partner (*2000AD* and *A World Without Thieves*) or a financial provider (*Life Without Principle* and *Silent Witness*). This frame which focuses on the professional woman's heterosexual relationship gives tacit consent to the female's emotional and material demands for male power. If retreatism functions to disparage the female professional's empowerment in the workplace, the romantic or business engagement with the male character showcases her comparable powerlessness. In other words, the female professional's power is allowed to be used within a restrained range but needs to be surpassed by a stronger male power.

The heterosexual relationship in the above four award-winning Chinese crime films are comparable to findings relating to representations of women in romance films in the American context. Scheriber's (2014) summary of six narrative stages of American postfeminist romance films, involving the first meeting, the courtship, the consummation, the problem, the resolution, and the end, can be usefully applied to understanding the romance that occurs in *2000AD* and *A World Without Thieves*. As Scheriber (2014) has explained, the problem derives from one of the other plot points of the film, initially unrelated to the romance, but subsequently becomes the result of one of the protagonists not being completely honest with him or her. In the problem-solving phase, love functions as a transformative agent, stimulating one or both central characters' self-perfection. This transformation works as the impetus and reward for one character's willingness to progress beyond the emotional place where he or she had started the narrative. Applying Scheriber's (2014) narrative stages, in *2000AD*, the problem begins with Salina's identity as a spy who is working for criminals, while the resolution begins with Benny's life being in danger, which in turn motivates Salina

to abandon her previous professional identity and adjust herself by changing sides. Thus, the man acts as both an emotional support and a saviour by taking Salina away from the criminals. In *A World Without Thieves*, Wang Li's sympathy for Sha Gen and her decision to protect him are identified as the problem, while the problem is solved by her partner, Bo, who plays the hero and sacrifices himself for getting Sha Gen's money back. Thus, his heroism and sacrifice help the couple to transform their lives away from illegal activities and towards side of justice, thereby giving Wang Li an opportunity to rid her life of her illegal pilfering and become a loving mother. As Scheriber (2014) has argued, death as the ultimate transformer teaches the character about the significance of love. In this film, Bo's death does not only glorify the male character's uprightness but resets him as the woman's saviour who frees her from her illegal profession and her insecure lifestyle. In both narratives, though the female character seems to have made her own choice to become being a rule-breaker, her happy ending is attributed to a man's salvation.

While unlike the *chick flick* genre, seeking heterosexual romance is not the woman's focus in the crime genre, with the appearance of romance seeming to occur in either a casual affair or an existing stable relationship. The internal struggle and self-questioning of the female professional during her rule-breaking process is highlighted. In *Silent Witness*, the lawyer Zhou Li's final investigation, in which she finds Tai restoring the crime scene where he filmed himself as the murderer to fake the evidence and take the blame for his daughter, can be seen as a process of her self-questioning about her previous wrong judgement. It serves a meaningful purpose by exposing the constraints on the empowered female self and debunks the attempts of the genre's consumerist discourse to gloss over reality and propagate a myth of equality, universal access and freedom of choice (Chen, 2009). With the keywords of free choice in postfeminist discourse, the female professional is endowed with the self-consciousness that, on the one hand, negotiates the female's increasing social status, while on the other hand, elaborates a kind of advocacy for female self-discipline, which addresses women as subjects, not objects, as well as self-empowering agents (Chen, 2009).

Apart from romance, the interaction between the female and male characters frequently involves a business relationship in which the man plays the role of the wealthy provider, even though the female protagonists in *Life Without Principle* and *Silent Witness* are portrayed in what would be deemed financially lucrative roles as a financial consultant and high-priced lawyer respectively. While they are supposedly shown to be middle class and financially empowered, the male providers are shown as wealthier and more intelligent. Specifically, by

depicting the woman's theft of the rich man's money, *Life Without Principle* presents the woman's problematic desire for wealth as undermining her professionalism, while male with financial power in turn attracts the woman's envy. In *Silent Witness*, Zhou Li is displayed as financially empowered with the capacity to use her money to trade evidence. However, as her client, Tai is represented as an extremely rich businessman who generously pays her a large bonus and has the ability to re-create the crime scene to make a fake video as evidence to free his defendant daughter. As Scheriber (2014) has argued, class plays an unspoken but significant role in American postfeminist films. The wealth and mobility of the female protagonist underline her personal dilemma and have a significant impact on her love affair. Similarly, in the Chinese crime films in discussed here, although *Silent Witness* does not involve a romance between the female and male characters, the male's wealth is shown as a fundamental element of the plot. With a particular focus on middle-class values as a result of capitalist structures, highlighting female financial power expresses the wide-spread recognition of women's strengthened economic status in postfeminist culture. Nevertheless, underlining men as the financial provider suggests that male financial power has to overwhelm the female to enhance the male's dominant financial position.

Middle-class values, which are a central issue of postfeminist dynamics, are embodied in the female rule-breaker's portrayal. Departing from passivity and dependency, the female professional in the crime genre is positioned in a privileged group who not only enjoys financial empowerment, but also individual freedom. As Chen (2009) has argued, such female empowerment and autonomy are expressed in the consumerist language of me-first, assertive individualism, and free choice. In the analysed crime films, the woman celebrates her professionalism and ability to manipulate authority as a source of female power and a showcase of individualistic freedom. However, her capacity and transgressions are only allowed to be exerted in a limited space and must be authorised by a higher-level male power. In short, the woman is authorised to excel if she does not go too far. By appropriating the feminist term of empowerment, these films stress the necessity for women to embrace and adjust to the mainstream patriarchal culture and its conventional discourses.

In summary, the female professional in award-winning Chinese crime films is depicted as having an outstanding work capacity in the professional arena. However, her relational depictions display a compromise with a more expert and powerful male. The female professional's transgressions, which are presented through the breaking of professional moral or legal rules, function as a trigger to motivate the male with power to get involved, solve the

problems and overwhelm female power in the end. A woman's voluntary, retreatist behaviour from her profession indicates a sense of free choice, but also reduces her professional power. Therefore, female professionalism is represented as a masquerade that showcases female empowerment in the workplace, while linking it firmly to voluntary retreatism.

Based on this narrative analysis, the prevalence of powerful and attractive female professionals can be interpreted through the lens of a postfeminist masquerade that disguises the ultimate goal of re-enhancing male power with a superficial recognition of female professional achievement. The postfeminist masquerade requires female professionals to compromise; that is, to retain a visible fragility and conventional feminine vulnerability to ensure their desirability to men (McRobbie, 2009). In other words, she is allowed to take up her position in the workplace and enjoy her status without going too far. The compromises of the policewomen in the selected crime films are mainly depicted by their submission or dependency to male heroes who help them to complete her investigations. The female professional's compromise is also represented through her retreatism from the workplace (e.g. spy, financial consultant) or her backtracking from the professional mistakes (e.g. lawyer). Consistent with McRobbie's (2009) articulation of the postfeminist masquerade as a strategy for re-affirming normative femininity, these social compromises emerge as processes of gender-stabilisation. However, instead of directly overthrowing the traditional restrictions imposed on women, they indicate shifting attitudes of abandoning the critique of patriarchy and normalising women's subjective compromise.

Next chapter provides a reflection on the key arguments of this thesis, and compares the findings with broader discourse of Chinese feminism. By addressing the connection and separation between Chinese feminism and Western feminism and postfeminism, it also further discusses women's oppression and gender norms in relation to the current Chinese political discourse, following by indicating some potential directions for future research in Chinese feminist and cinema studies.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

This study has bridged a gap in the field of Chinese cinema, by focusing on the representation of women in a hitherto understudied area – the genre of commercial crime films. The films, which are considered to represent a dynamic interplay between art and life, are assumed to reflect the filmmakers' ideas about social, economic and political issues, which, in turn, are assumed to have some influence over the ways in which audiences think about these issues (Rafter, 2000), including issues around gender and the status of women (Ezzedeen, 2013).

This thesis addressed questions around how women are represented in relation to violence in post-2000 award-winning Chinese crime films and considered the types of cultural insights that could be gained by applying a feminist and postfeminist theoretical framework to the analysis to consider how these representations reflect both traditional Chinese values and contemporary Chinese socio-cultural norms.

To answer these questions, the study examined 23 post-2000 Chinese crime films that featured females as central characters and which won awards in one or more of the three major film awards in the greater China - the Mainland-based *Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Awards* (GRHFA), the *Hong Kong Film Awards* (HKFA) and the Taipei-based *Golden Horse Awards* (GHA). This study has argued that the selected mainstream crime films consistently represented women as being oppressed and compliant in a patriarchal society.

Across the three major film awards, all the key crime films with females in protagonist roles were produced by Mainland and/or Hong Kong crews, or co-produced by Mainland and/or Hong Kong professionals with filmmakers from other regions (e.g., Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea), highlighting the central role that the Mainland and Hong Kong have played in the creation of the Chinese-language crime genre. Despite historical and socio-political differences between the Mainland and Hong Kong, the close collaboration amongst Mainland and Hong Kong filmmakers, particularly since the 1997 Handover of Hong Kong to the PRC and the 2003 CEPA agreement in the creation of Chinese language crime films allows some generalisations to be made about what these films reflect of contemporary Chinese values and culture more broadly. This includes generalisations about the status of women, as well as understandings about gender and violence.

This thesis evaluated representations of female characters in Chinese crime films by drawing on Western classic feminist film theories and postfeminist media theories as well as the traditional Chinese Confucian theory of the *nei-wai* (inner-outer) realms, which remains influential in contemporary Chinese society. It tested the application of a Western feminist theoretical framework to the Chinese crime film text and considered the ways in which traditional Confucian values have been re-negotiated in contemporary crime films with a focus on the status and position of women in what has long been a patriarchal society. The results showed that the stereotypical image of the female victim is the prominent representation in the majority of the twenty-three award-winning Chinese crime films, as shown in Chapter 4. Like classic Hollywood films, she is represented as an object for the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975). The female victim in the selected Chinese crime films tends to be placed in claustrophobic spaces and is deprived of her voice, while the woman's compliance in the face of male violence is often highlighted to show an impression that she is responsible for her own victimisation.

At one level, these Chinese crime films build up a kind of relationship between the spectator and the onscreen image, in which the male spectator can identify with his own likeness (see discussion of Mulvey, 1975 in Chapter 2). In this process, the idealised male protagonist, who has supreme power over the narrative, guides the male spectator to gaze at the female as an erotic and victimised object, who is completely compliant with him, thereby satisfying both the male protagonist and male spectator's sexual fantasy. If Mulvey's (1975) notion of narcissism primarily targets male spectators, the scenes appear to foster a dominant reading for female spectators to identify with the compliant woman who seems to take this position based on her own choice, though actual spectators may of course take a more critical attitude, seeing the erotic, submissive female stereotypes as masquerades of femininity and as exaggerations of feminine traits created by men. The dominant construction, though, nonetheless renders a sense that female victimisation should be considered as an attribute of women's own thoughts and actions rather than primarily as the result of male perpetration of violence. This construction is most obviously created in the commonly utilised *hero rescues beauty* narrative, particularly involving intimate relationships, in which the woman's victimisation or sacrifice is offered in exchange for securing the male hero's upright social status and eulogizing his greatness, just as women are produced as a sign available for exchange within exogamy in kinship exchanges more broadly (Lévi-Strauss, 1969; Cowie, 1978).

As discussed in Chapter 5, Chinese crime films, as selected for this study, tend to vividly depict the victimisation of female perpetrators of violence, while abbreviating representations of their own acts of violence, thus constructing the woman more as a passive perpetrator of violence who kills only out of desperation and for self-defence. Even though she resorts to violence to defend herself, if she dares to fight against the patriarchal authority, she is doomed to be punished, either by being imprisoned or by losing a loved one, which serves to discourage any further acts of female transgression. Since violence is presented as a problematic way for a woman to engage in the public sphere, female violence is rendered as the result of individual pathology rather than as a broader social problem involving gender relations that needs to be further explored ideologically. The over-emphasis on female victimisation and de-emphasis on female perpetration of violence, as well as various negative narrative constructions, including the women's tragic endings, and irrational and individualistic acts of violence, suggest an attitude of discouragement of female engagement in the public sphere (*wai* realm) and encouragement of a regression to familial spaces (*nei* realm). For the active perpetrator of violence, who uses violence to gain wealth rather than for self-protection, Chinese crime films still avoid direct depictions of her violent actions, but vividly present her death. These representations in effect symbolise the severe punishment to be dished out to the transgressive female perpetrator of violence who brings with her problematic desires. Through such representations, the active female perpetrator of violence can be seen as a postfeminist masquerade (drawing on McRobbie, 2009), in which a false impression of her empowerment is shown, while her final, inevitable death demonstrates punishment in a male-dominated arena.

Finally, as discussed in Chapter 6, Chinese crime films, as selected for this study, also offer an image of strong and expert female professionals who act in such roles as a detective, spy, financial consultant, thief, and lawyer. These women are neither violent victims nor perpetrators of violence. While law enforcement is shown to be male-dominated, the policewoman's outstanding work capacity in this profession is sometimes fully recognised and even highlighted. Yet, their final rescue from danger by male heroes reveals similar postfeminist masquerade parallels to the fate of the active female perpetrator of violence, whereby they are presented with an impression of empowerment, which is downgraded in the end. The merit for bringing criminals to justice and for maintaining the social order is still given to the male heroes, thus reinforcing the sense of male dominance in the workplace. Female spies, financial consultants, thieves and lawyers are represented as rule-breakers, who cross legal or moral boundaries and dare to break rules of the industries. While these women

seem more empowered, they still face constraints at all levels, which makes them eventually demonstrate retreatist (Negra, 2009) attitudes and behaviours which see them withdrawing from their current occupation at critical moments, downshifting their careers, and returning to their hometowns. While the narrative seems to express a postfeminist sense of free choice, their professional power in the workplace ends up being greatly reduced. All in all, the female professional is shown to be in an in-between place where she is allowed to be shown as strong and professional in the workforce to an extent, yet remains under the control of male power.

In light of Western (post)feminist theories and the Chinese cultural context, this study has identified how Chinese-style femininity has been constructed in Chinese crime films, in a way in which global modernity and a reaffirmation of traditional gender roles can be seen side-by-side. In the Mainland PRC context, modern Chinese women have been required to lose their masculine traits that they acquired during the Mao era and become "beautiful and well-dressed" like Western women and show their natural "female beauty" (Johansson, 2001, p.107-8). As discussed in Chapter 2, they are also required to present a "soft and gentle" femininity, which is regarded as a special Chinese quality in contrast to Western women. In the postfeminist era, the so-called strong, liberated and modern woman in contemporary Chinese discourse is also part of a trending return to femininity in which sexual difference is emphasised (Thornham & Feng, 2010; Tse, 2017). While award-winning Chinese crime films depict female characters' seeming empowerment through their demonstrated professionalism in their working lives as well as in their own use of violence, their feminine beauty is generally emphasised across the genre in a way that seems designed to attract the male character's attention. In the few cases where female figures are represented in a way that does not seem designed to attract the male-gaze, feminine beauty still seems to be stamped on the female protagonist as an indispensable criterion for generating affectional engagement with a male protagonist, which ultimately underscores the strength of the woman and highlights that of the man.

Chinese feminism is shown to be a complex phenomenon. As Chen (2011) has suggested, the reaction to feminism has possibly been a reaction to the Western kind of feminist orientalism because feminism has long been considered to be a bourgeois ideology that is not suitable for Chinese women (see Chapter 2, e.g., Edwards, 2010; Li & Zhang, 1994; Wang, 2006). As Zhaohui Liu and Robin Dahling (2016, p. 3) have noted, the anti-feminist sentiment in the PRC is "anti-West as much as anti-feminist". With this anti-West attitude that has been

supported by the PRC government, feminist discourse in Mainland China in particular, which had long been against chauvinism and misogyny, has been confronted with increasing resistance from men, traditional women and the government (Chun Lin, Bohong Liu & Yihong Jin, 1998). In this context, Liu and Dahling (2016) have suggested that Chinese feminism needs to proceed in a softer and quieter manner, because the more visceral the response of feminists in China, the greater the resistance it is likely to generate. The softer and quieter expression of feminism may be somewhat represented in the strategy of the postfeminist masquerade employed by the Chinese filmmakers. While the eager suppression of women may trigger more intense resistance from women and feminists, a softer and quieter voice, while allowing women a somewhat broader, though still restricted, space for freedom and transgression, might be a more effective way of persuading audiences to abandon any critiques of the patriarchy and accept the current state of affairs.

As a cultural phenomenon, postfeminism shares an ideological affinity with neoliberalism as an economic practice. A common feature of both postfeminist and neoliberal discourses is that they both foreground the primacy of individualism and repudiate notions of the social or political (Rosaline Gill & Christina Scharff, 2011). As McRobbie (2009) has suggested, showing females as sexually confident and financially assertive in postfeminist media helps to endorse the individualistic rhetoric of empowerment and choice in a consumerist culture (as seen in the films that feature professional women) and simultaneously keeps a distance from feminism as a social struggle (as in the films that highlight women's internal struggles in which women keep feeling trapped). As McRobbie (2009) has argued, in order for feminism to be "taken into account" in a postfeminist context, it has to be considered as "having already passed away" (p.12). Based on the assumption that feminism has passed and women's freedom has been achieved, a focus on female individualism separates individual women's problems from the social collective and positions them as a matter of individual pathology and choice (Chen, 2009). In other words, if women gain success, it is due to the free and friendly society. In contrast, if they make mistakes, it is their individual problem which has nothing to do with society. The woman's moral responsibility is also equated with her ability to make rational choices and take responsibility for her own actions. The individualistic strategy authorises them as subjects yet offers neither an explanation nor a solution for their collective problems (Thornham & Feng, 2010). By glossing over the de-politicised, consumerist rhetoric of independent individual choice, women are kept at a distance from feminist activists who call for socio-political change (Chen, 2009). The cultural strategy of postfeminist masquerade and the sexual contract presented in many Chinese crime

films similarly acts as an apparent expression of the new female subject of agency in the context of contemporary global consumer culture.

Confucianism has been revived as a key emblem of the 'unique' Chinese culture, the paramount symbol of Chinese civilisation, and China's 'brand' in the world in the service of PRC's soft power (Louie, 2015). The backlash against feminism in the PRC's socio-cultural discourse has been driven by a popular discourse that has considered Western feminism to be anti-socialist and as an attack on the national gender policies and the PRC's Marxist views on women (see more in Section 2.1.1 of Chapter 2). As discussed in the analytical chapters (Chapter 4 to 6), by drawing on Confucian values, which have the central ideas of women being obedient to the familial leader and men being obedient to the national leader in order to maintain both a harmonious family and harmonious state, these mainstream Chinese crime films present more than just a social and cultural advocacy of male dominance, but pander to the current political and ideological direction.

All in all, this analysis of Chinese-language crime films centred around Mainland China and Hong Kong has revealed that graphic images of female victimisation have been commonly presented, while female perpetrators of violence and professionals, who seem to be offered a semblance of autonomy, are nevertheless shown to be consistently under the control of male authorities. Female victims have been presented as weak and passive, while the female perpetrators of violence and professionals come across as less expert than men, thus reinforcing the sense of male dominance. These findings suggest that these Chinese crime films have been produced in a context that is underpinned by patriarchal power and an attitude of misogyny.

This study provides a baseline for future research to compare representations of women in Chinese crime films with other Chinese film genres, such as melodrama, horror and fantasy, as well as across other media contexts, including online films and TV drama, and across different time periods. Future research may also investigate differences in the representation of female characters in films produced more directly by Chinese film crews in other parts of Greater China, including in Taiwan, Singapore, and overseas. Ethnographic studies and in-depth interviews with professionals in the film industry as well as actors and actresses may shed further insights on what drives film productions, why certain narrative designs and filming techniques are used as well as marketing strategies behind the films that may be oriented towards a particular gender. While the sheer number of award-winning crime films

indicate the considerable audience appeal of these films, further research could also engage in ethnographies of audiences who watch crime films to examine more specifically how (and whether) such films influence audiences' opinions of gender issues, and indeed their own gender identities.

With the rapid development of technology and people's constantly changing habits in relation to watching films, it may be worth further examining how Chinese crime films have been adapting to the digital, online and mobile era and what this means in terms of the representation of women, violence and gender relations. The particular role that crime films have played in attracting China's tech-savvy domestic and overseas audiences may also be of interest and could help to examine whether traditional representations of the woman's role still garner substantial interest in the digital and mobile era, or whether Chinese people switch off from certain mainstream gender representations.

While this thesis has focused on the representation of females in Chinese crime films, future research may also tackle constructions of different types of gender identities, including men as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) identities. Considering that media censorship has long played a critical role in China and is likely to continue to do so, it would be important to take these other representations into account, whether in the form of 'official' or 'underground' films, to examine how censors and self-censorship in the PRC influence film production and marketing strategies and to what extent attitudes of the dominant ideology toward LGBTI groups could be drawn out from the films. The application of Western queer theories could also be used to further probe the queer identity in the Chinese crime film discourse.

Besides the directions above, there is also considerable scope for research with global comparative perspectives, and for research that could examine the role of Chinese films within a broader international context. Comparisons could be made between Chinese crime films and crime films in other national contexts to assess the extent to which the representations of females embedded in Mainland and Hong Kong films are unique to the PRC.

In brief, China's patriarchal authoritarianism has long reflected a critical attitude toward women (Fincher, 2018). Producers, filmmakers and performers have long been engaged in imaging what a woman should be like. They have done so through finding ways to represent

women in contrast to men and compare different types of women who play certain roles. It is through various forms of interactions between male and female characters that audiences generate a perception of them. Audiences draw boundaries around different genders, re-negotiate these boundaries, and attempt to define similarities and differences between women and men through stories, images and constructions. While audiences gain pleasure from watching commercial films, the gendered stereotypes represented in the selected Chinese crime films reflect the efforts of filmmakers to express their perceptions of women, who are in turn imbedded within a broader social context that comes with its own prevailing ideologies. The past decade has seen a dramatic expansion of the Chinese film market and its relations with the international film industries as a result of China's entering the WTO and signing of the CEPA. Moreover, the CCP has made significant efforts to maintain the stability of its power structure in which the majority key members of the ruling party have been men. Mirroring this structure, mainstream commercial films, and crime films in particular, have reflected a consistent tendency to uphold male superiority. While they have sought an alternative way to reveal women's capacity, such representations of women's agency are quickly suppressed through a narrative formula that seems designed to both please a male public and avoid any potential criticism of the status quo. The findings indicate a sense of an anxious patriarchal authoritarianism that is afraid of being challenged and persistent in exercising control.

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Glossary

Films	
2000 AD	*公元 2000*
A World Without Thieves	*天下无贼*
Accident	*意外*
Armed Reaction trilogy	*陀枪师姐*
Baober in Love	*恋爱中的宝贝*
Black Coal, Thin Ice	*白日焰火*
Breaking News	*大事件*
Cold War	*寒战*
Confession of Pain	*伤城*
Connected	*保持通话*
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	*卧虎藏龙*
Divergence	*三岔口*
Drug War	*毒战*
Eye in the Sky	*跟踪*
Flash Point	*导火线*
Forensic Heroes	*法证先锋*
Go Lala go/A Story of Lala's Promotion	*杜拉拉升职记*
Hero	*英雄*
Honey Bee Man	*我爱男闺蜜*
Human, Woman, Demon	*人，鬼，情*
Judou	*菊豆*
Letter from an Unknown Woman	*一封陌生女人的来信*
Life Without Principle	*夺命金*
Line Walker	*使徒行者*
Lives of Omission	*潜行狙击*
Lost in Beijing	*苹果*

Monga	*艋舺*
My Father and I	*我和爸爸*
Naked Killer	*赤裸羔羊*
Naked Weapon	*赤裸特工*
Night Fall	*大追捕*
On the First Beat	*学警出更*
One Night in Mongkok	*旺角黑夜*
Overheard	*窃听风云*
Overheard 3	*窃听风云 3*
Port of Call	*踏血寻梅*
Protégé	*门徒*
Red Sorghum	*红高粱*
Shadow	*影*
Silent Witness	*全民目击*
Song of Youth	*青春之歌*
Sparrow	*文雀*
Taste of Crime	*低压槽*
The Accidental Spy	*特务迷城*
The Beast Stalker	*证人*
The Bullet Vanishes	*消失的子弹*
The Inspector Wears Skirts tetralogy	*霸王花*
The Mysteries of Love	*谈情说案*
The Red Detachment of Women	*红色娘子军*
The Stool Pigeon	*线人*
The Story of Qiu Ju	*秋菊打官司*
The White Storm	*扫毒*
Wind Blast	*西风烈*
People	

Aaron Kwok	郭富城
Alan Mak	麦兆辉
Alex Fong	方中信
Andrew Lin	连凯
Barbie Hsu	徐熙媛
Benny Chan	陈木胜
Cai Yuanpei	蔡元培
Cecilia Cheung Pak-chi	张柏芝
Chen Duxiu	陈独秀
Chen Kun	陈坤
Cheung Siu-Fai	张兆辉
Chi-Leung Law	罗志良
Ching Siu-Tung	程小东
Chingmy Yau	邱淑贞
Chun Xia	春夏
Clarence Fok	霍耀良
Dai Jinhua	戴锦华
Daniel Wu	吴彦祖
Dante Lam Chiu-Yin	林超贤
Deng Xiaoping	邓小平
Derek Yee	尔冬升
Doze Niu	钮承泽
Elaine Jin	金燕玲
Fan Bingbing	范冰冰
Fei Xing	非行
Felix Chong	庄文强
Feng Xiaogang	冯小刚
Gao Qunshu	高群书
Gong Li	巩俐

Gordon Chan	陈嘉上
Gwei Lun-Mei	桂纶镁
Hong Zhaodi	洪招娣
Hu Shih	胡适
Hua Mulan	花木兰
Huang Jue	黄珏
Huang Lei	黄磊
Huang Shuqin	黄蜀芹
Jackie Chan	成龙
Janice Man	文咏珊
Jiang Wen	姜文
Jiang Yiyan	江一燕
Johnnie To	杜琪峰
Kara Wai	惠英红
Kate Tsui	徐子珊
Kelly Chen	陈慧琳
Kelly Lin	林熙蕾
Li Bingbing	李冰冰
Li Dazhao	李大钊
Li Ke	李可
Li Shaohong	李少红
Li Xiaojiang	李小江
Li Yu	李玉
Liao Fan	廖凡
Lo Hoi-pang	卢海鹏
Louis Koo	古天乐
Lu Xun	鲁迅
Lu Yi	陆毅
Lucy Liu	刘玉玲

Maggie Q	李美琪
Mao Zedong	毛泽东
Michael Ning	白只
Michael Wong	王敏德
Michelle Ye	叶璇
Michelle Yeoh	杨紫琼
Nai-Hoi Yau	游乃海
Nick Cheung	张家辉
Nicolas Tse	谢霆锋
Ning Jing	宁静
Ning Ying	宁瀛
Philip Yung	翁子光
Phyllis Quek	郭妃丽
Ray Lui	吕良伟
Rene Liu	刘若英
Richie Jen	任贤齐
Roy Chow	周显扬
Ruan Lingyu	阮玲玉
Sandra Ng	吴君如
Sean Lau Ching-wan	刘青云
Sibelle Hu	胡慧中
Simon Yam	任达华
Soi Cheang	郑保瑞
Takeshi Kaneshiro	金城武
Teddy Chan	陈德森
Tong Dawei	佟大为
Tony Leung Ka-fai	梁家辉
Tung-Shing Yee	尔冬升
Vivian Hsu	徐若瑄

Wang Anyi	王安忆
Wang Baoqiang	王宝强
Wang Xuebing	王学兵
Wilson Yip	叶伟信
Wu Hsing-kuo	吴兴国
Xiaogang Feng	冯小刚
Xu Jinglei	徐静蕾
Yang Mi	杨幂
Yinan Diao	刁亦男
Zhang Jingchu	张静初
Zhang Yimou	张艺谋
Zhou Xun	周迅
Zhou Zuoren	周作人
Organisations	
All China Women's Federation (ACWF, Fulian)	全国妇联
Association for the Advancement of Feminism	新妇女协进会
Association of Motion Picture Post Production Professionals	香港电影后期专业人员协会
Association of Women for Action and Research	妇女行动与研究协会
Beijing Film Academy	北京电影学院
China Federation of Literary and Art Circles	中国文学艺术界联合会
China Film Association (CFA)	中国电影协会
Chinese Communist Party (CCP)	中国共产党
Committee for Asian Women	亚洲妇女委员会
Hong Kong Chamber of Films	香港电影协会有限公司
Hong Kong Cinematography Lighting Association	香港电影灯光协会

Hong Kong Federation of Women	香港各界妇女联合协进会
Hong Kong Film Arts Association	香港电影美术学会
Hong Kong Film Directors' Guild	香港电影导演会
Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry Association Ltd (M.P.I.A.)	香港影业协会
Hong Kong Movie Production Executives Association	香港电影制作发行协会
Hong Kong Performing Artistes Guild	香港演艺人协会
Hong Kong Screen Writer's Guild	香港电影编剧家协会
Hong Kong Stuntman Association	香港动作特技演员公会
Hong Kong Theatres Association	香港戏院商会
Hong Kong Women Christian Council	香港妇女基督徒协会
Hong Kong Women Workers' Association	香港妇女劳工协会
Nationalist Party/Kuo Min Tang (KMT)	国民党
People's Republic of China (PRC)	中华人民共和国
Queer Sisters	姐妹同志
Society of Cinematographers (H.K.)	香港专业电影摄影师学会
Society of Film Editors (H.K.)	香港电影剪辑协会
United Nations (UN)	联合国
World Trade Organization (WTO)	世界贸易组织
Events	
China Women's Film Festival (CWFF)	中国国际女性影展
Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA)	内地与港澳关于建立更紧密经贸关系的安排
Cultural Revolution	文化大革命
Fourth World Conference on Women	第四届世界妇女大会
Golden Horse Awards (GHA)	金马奖
Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Awards (GRHFA)	金鸡百花奖

Great Leap Forward	大跃进
Hong Kong Film Awards (HKFA)	香港电影金像奖
Program of China's Women Development (zhongguo funü fazhan gangyao)	中国妇女发展纲要
Siege of Tsingtao	青岛战役
The May Fourth Movement	五四运动
Tiananmen Square Incident	天安门事件
Treaty of Versailles	凡尔赛条约
Chinese Journals	
Film Art	*电影艺术*
Popular Cinema	*大众电影*
World Cinema	*世界电影*
Other Terms	
funü	妇女
nanren	男人
nei	内
nüquan zhuyi	女权主义
nüren	女人
nüxing	女性
nüxing zhuyi	女性主义
The Song of Mulan (Mulan Ci)	木兰辞
Three Obediences and Four Virtues	三从四德
wai	外