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Commercialization, Algorithmic Domestication, and Digital Feminist Agency: Female Images in Mainland Chinese Cinema in the Digital Era

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Abstract: The penetration rate of the Chinese mobile Internet has surpassed 78.6%. In this digital media ecology, the film industry and social platforms have created a symbiotic system for the production of female images. Theatrical films from the mainland from 2015 to 2024 are the focus of this study, as well as their derivative circulation on social media. Three approaches are used: critical discourse analysis, narrative-visual text analysis, and semiotic analysis. Out of these two analytical sets are created: a triple model of cooperative governance of “political discipline–algorithmic domestication–cultural transcoding” and an integrated “gender representation recycling system”. Three basic mechanisms are identified. First, the film industry appropriates feminist discourse, transforming it into marketable, screen symbols. In the 10 years under review, there was an increase in the percentage of commodified symbolic features from 23% to 71%. Second, platform algorithms work to systematically squeeze feminist discourse into safe, consumable signs via triple cooperative governance. An average of 22.7% of the original semantic content is retained. Third, digital feminist agency is present within gap spaces of platform architecture. But it’s still limited when it comes to platform dependency. The study suggests a localized paradigm of digital aesthetic feminism resistance—symbolic disenchantment, algorithmic counter-tactics and empowerment co-construction. From a theoretical perspective, this paradigm can provide a foundation for the progress of gender ethics in the film and television industry in China and promote the development of platform algorithmic governance.

Keywords: Platform Capitalism; Commodification of Female Images; Algorithmic Domestication; Digital Feminism; Gender Representation Recycling; Mainland Chinese Cinema

1. Introduction

The penetration rate of the mobile internet in China has reached above 78.6% (China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), 2025). Production and circulation of female images is dramatically reshaped in this setting of deep digital media penetration. Weibo, Xiaohongshu, Bilibili and Douyin have become the fully-fledged symbols of the production chain in the film industry. Women are not just actors anymore in Chinese movies. They now roam through transmedia ecosystems. The box office success of *Lost in the Stars* (2023) and *Her Story* (2024) also reflects the systematic incorporation of feminist discourse in the film industry as marketable symbols such as ‘independent women’ and ‘emotional autonomy’. However, there is a cultural paradox under this seeming prosperity. Platformization does not neutrally present feminist discourse. Rather, it becomes a structural site for misogyny, using the double logic of state and market, in the process hollowing out “empowerment” narratives on the way [1]. The paradox is the main problematic in the following study: In the era of platform capitalism, what are the images of women in the cinema of mainland China, real advances for women, or a carefully-managed illusion, crafted by capi-

tal logic? At the industry level, the Chinese film industry can be seen to operate on a logic of selective incorporation and commodification of feminist discourse. From the field study of the 15 most popular films in China's mainstream commercial cinema, the female images in mainstream commercial cinema are highly stereotypical and visual codes. With the advent of feminist discourse, stereotypes have not been erased. Conversely, they are made in more sophisticated shapes according to market logic [2]. A systematic analysis of the status of women in the films of today's China comes to the same conclusion. No real shift in structural power relations between males and females is indicated by the increasing number of "independent woman" roles in movies. Females' agency is usually tied to the narrow categories of consumption and emotional story. Class difference, regional identity and ethnicity are systemically hidden [3]. This logic of commodification is very similar to that articulated as "neoliberal incorporation": capital removes the political subversiveness from feminism, extracts "empowerment" elements that fit consumerism, and reworks and remakes elements to create new symbols that can be marketed. Women's liberation hits a dead end right as it is put into circulation [4]. The algorithmic governance level further reinforces the reproductive efficiency of this logic of the commodification of the platform technical architecture. An in-depth analysis of female lifestyle bloggers on Xiaohongshu indicates platformized labor mechanisms network women's self-expression into platform capital's data collection process systematically. It is done by changing the post-feminist "entrepreneurial self" into the content production paradigm. A subtle collusion is created between the individual empowerment discourse and (structural) exploitation [5]. Platform capitalism theory gives a more explanatory framework. By combining the twin forces of data commodification and algorithmic filtering, digital platforms are able to package and sell, in machine intelligible and monetizable emotional symbols, the most potent feminist content. Political notions such as "independent women" are subjected to long-term algorithmic domestication which increasingly strips them of political elements and transforms them into depoliticised, platform capital-algorithmic "personas" [6]. In the Chinese case, this is a more complex governance form, as it is a combination of political discipline and commercial logic which work cooperatively. Arising from this complexity, the "triple cooperative governance" model developed in this study is based on the empirical foundation. This paper is also a central one on generative mechanisms of digital feminist agency. Platform capital's logics of incorporation have been criticized by existing scholarship, but often these spaces of resistance in user practice are underestimated. Combined, these practices of critical reading in women's communities of Douban, remix and symbolic hijacking techniques in content creation at Bilibili, and the entanglement of agency and commodification in women's entrepreneurship story at Xiaohongshu form a landscape of resistance that is full of tension. The study used three analysis methods following the previous study which are critical discourse analysis, narrative-visual textual analysis, and semiotic analysis. The study focuses on the theatrical movies in mainland China that have been produced and released from 2015 to 2024, as well as their corresponding circulation on social media. The purpose is to build up an "gender representation recycling system" analytical framework appropriate to China. This framework is systematically mapped the whole mechanism chain of screen symbolic production to platform consumption conversion. Based on this, the study puts forward a DAF resistance theoretical research model that is innovative in theory and has practical application value, providing an academic basis for further research and development of gender ethics reform in the film industry in China, and a basis for further development of the algorithmic governance of the platform.

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Design

2.1. Existing Scholarship and Theoretical Gaps in the Study of Female Images in Chinese Cinema

There are two relatively definite paths in the study of gender discourses in Chinese films, and there exists a rather obvious theoretical distinction between them. The first line focuses on the policy and censorship, examining the draft of the female body symbol as visual language of the state discourse in the mainstream patriotic film. The first line refers to policy and censorship, where the female body symbol is the visual language of the state discourse in the mainstream patriotic film. This method is especially pertinent in examining how the female image is militarized in movies such as the Wolf Warrior series. The second one challenges the rationale of industrial capital: female trauma as object of commodity and transcode in film IP development. Existing theories suggest that the roles of women have been in a state of three-fold tension in Chinese cinema: passive, seductive and resistant. With feminist discourse, the challenge to the male gaze has taken root but continues to exist in the other, less visible, ways of storytelling in today's commercial films [7]. But two blind spots are not being tackled very much. First, the

way the algorithms technically police gender discourse, that is, as it is distributed across traffic, has not been systematically analyzed yet, for example, by using a feminist lens: “feminism” is channeled into depoliticized tags, like “anti-romance-brain”. Second, the distinction between film texts and ‘derivative’ content, created for social media, makes it hard to view transmedia phenomena as a whole. The “maternal consumption” narrative of Douyin is a good illustration of viral content. The level of textual criticism is the focus of the research, whereas the transformation of the cinematic symbols as they circulate in digital platforms is still not studied. Therefore, a fusion of the political economy with algorithmic critique in the same analytical framework is crucial [8]. It is this theoretical space that this study aims to fill.

2.2. Western Genealogies of “Commodity Feminism” Research

The study was guided by the relatively well-settled theory of the Western context on the commodification of feminism. Commodity feminism is a concept that has been introduced as an analysis of the relationship between popular feminist and popular misogyny that is constitutive of each other. For the very existence of the female empowerment topic in the current media culture do not imply equality within the structure. Rather, it is a cultural-political action which creates capital supposedly for feminism. The essence of this is reducing liberatory speech into safe, edible emotional symbols [9]. This has led to the notion of “postfeminist media culture”. An examination of Wonder Woman and Barbie shows the Hollywood “pink capital” strategies and how gender issues are turned into measurable market value in the logic of Hollywood commercial film production. The political nature of women’s resistance is removed and refocused as “inspirational consumer goods” [10]. This framework also has a high explanatory power in the East Asian context. In the transmedia circulation of Kim Ji-young, born 1982 in South Korea, the critique of the institution of motherhood is narrowed down to a “family-of-origin trauma,” which is a kind of structural gender critique and at the same time an individual psychological trauma. The transformation of 100 Yen Love into an “inspirational weight-loss” image on TikTok is another instance of the trend of “body capitalism” globalising in platform ecosystems [11]. The above studies are all the necessary theoretical bases and points to be discussed in this paper, which will investigate the process of the female images being objectified and exploited within the mainstream Chinese film industry. However, Western models are not applicable in the Chinese context, which has more and deeper levels of algorithmic and political control.

2.3. Platform Capitalism Theory and Algorithmic Gender Politics

Platform capitalism provides a valuable theoretical framework for the field of gender discourse algorithms. The Platform Society offers a systematic account of the extent to which platformization logic has pervaded every aspect of social life. Platforms are not neutral technologies. They create threefold circuits of capital accumulation that involve all aspects of social life: data commodification, algorithmic optimisation and network effects. This “platformization” means that there is a standardisation of content and quantification of affect in the context of cultural production [12]. In the study of feminist discourse, this work has been extended by revealing the commercial cooptation and the systematic suppression of non-mainstream feminist discourse in China’s digital space through its visibility distribution mechanism of algorithms. When the feminist content is critical it becomes disadvantaged in the recommendations of ranking algorithms, resulting in a paradox between the success of feminism on popular culture and its ability to silence the structural criticism [13]. This is supported by research of the micro-practice of Weibo beauty bloggers. Advocating, self-promoting, and navigating the boundaries of state regulation between softening discourse and self-censorship are part of the feminist challenge in the digital age. This process reflects the continuity of the power imbalance existing in the feminist agency and in structural discipline in platform capitalism [14]. The “triple cooperative governance” model that is the basis of this paper has been developed based on these works. The theoretical basis of this paper’s “triple cooperative governance” model is developed from these works.

2.4. The Triple Cooperative Governance Context of Chinese Digital Feminism

The survival and development of digital feminism in China is quite different from its counterparts in the West. The mechanisms that each restrict its discursive space are the three of political discipline, algorithmic domestication and cultural transcoding. Through in-depth analysis of structural constraints on feminist discourse on Chinese social media, some female users’ resistance to feminism is found not to stem from a lack of gender consciousness. It is, instead, the product of the complex entanglement of feminist and nationalist discourses that occur in plat-

form ecologies, and as such, indicative of the complex internal tensions in Chinese digital feminism [15]. Feminist discourse expression is seen to be different on platforms and user ecologies, depending on platform algorithms, through corpus analysis. The longer-form style of Zhihu offers a little more structure for their critical evaluation and the algorithm for trending on Weibo has a proclivity for emotionalizing and entertaining gender-related issues. This contrast is illustrative of how platform algorithms generate the gamut of gender politics visible [16]. In the context of antifeminist messages on Chinese social media four modes of depoliticization have been classified: stigmatization, entertainmentization, individualization and nationalist incorporation. All of these are part of a discursive technology of repression of a feminist critique, particularly in the field of the circulation of films [17]. These empirical findings are also a theoretical extension of the triple cooperative governance, which can help to develop a comprehensive conceptual tool to explore how the feminist discourse is consolidated in the Chinese context through platforms, capital and state power.

2.5. An Integrated Analytical Framework: The Gender Representation Recycling System

By referring to the above-mentioned theories, this paper proposes a theoretical analysis system for research, which is the “gender representation recycling system”. The goal is to break down the separation of textual criticism, industry analysis and algorithmic critique found in current research. The concept of the framework is that there is no difference between the mainland Chinese film industry and digital platforms. They are connected in a self-reinforcing symbolic production, circulation, consumption and feedback process through a symbiotic interest structure. Research about “soft resistance” in the women’s films of the post-2010s Chinese New Wave reveals that even films explicitly feminist are found to be “recoded” in a way that is subjective in the course of their circulation across various platforms. Critical elements of filmmaking get stripped down to consumable emotional spectacles when personal films are put into the algorithmic recommendation [18]. The interstices of platform logic have also inspired Chinese digital feminist practices to develop their own strategic responses, including “slow resistance” and “queer haunting”, which is to accumulate critical discursive resources while maintaining a dynamic distance from the commodification and resistance [19]. The “gender representation recycling system” is a paper-based systematic theory of this dynamic tension. Combining four stages—cinematic symbolic production, algorithmic filtering and circulation, consumer market conversion, and creative ecosystem feedback—into an analytical whole that is able to self-reproduce. The framework can identify not only how feminist discourse is found in the structure, but can also sense where feminist agency is created in the system in a digital context. It does so by laying out a coherent conceptual framework and methodological foundation for the empirical analyses that are presented in the three chapters to follow.

2.6. Research Design and Methodological Notes

This study focuses on circulatory worlds created on the social media and theatrical films themselves that were released on the mainland from 2015 to 2024. The three methods used are: critical discourse analysis, narrative-visual textual analysis and semiotic analysis. These are combined in a multi-dimensional cross validation and can be applied to set up a systematic empirical framework. The three factors that we take as the cross-screening dimensions of film samples are as follows: Box Office Ranking, Douban Rating, and gender discussion numbers on social media. This will offer 20 core close-reading samples and a pool of over 80 films for reference. The range covers the whole span from the popularization of the mobile Internet to the maturity of the platform economy, which makes the samples relatively well-representative in terms of the distribution of genres, the size of the box office and the role of the female narrative strategy. The main platforms for discourse analysis of this study are five platforms: Weibo, Douban, Xiaohongshu, Bilibili, and Douyin. These are five different algorithmic architectures and user ecologies, including: public opinion production (Weibo), film review community (Douban), lifestyle media (Xiaohongshu), youth subculture (Bilibili), and short-video algorithms (Douyin). High-frequency word cloud profiles are created from the annual TOP 100 gender-related content from each platform to provide the quantitative base for the critical discourse analysis. The critical discourse analysis of the operation level addresses the various representations of the same gender issues in the discourse of other actors (official media, marketing and ordinary user discourse). It explains how platform traffic filtering will neutralise the critical dimension: “female empowerment” discourse. Labels as identity for female protagonists, elements and meaning of visual design, and remixing of film clips in secondary creation are all elements of narrative-visual textual analysis that allow the identification of the marketisation of female resistance stories as consumer goods. Semiotic analysis reveals how common

items, such as red high heels, business suits, and the aesthetics of single living, are transmitted on social networks and undergo an entire series of transformation processes in the range from movies to consumption markets for e-commerce. Semiotic analysis demonstrates how ordinary objects—red high heels, business suits, the aesthetics of single living—are redistributed on social networks and undergo a whole chain of transformation processes from movies to markets of e-commerce consumption. The three methods are in a progressive analytical relation to each other. Critical discourse analysis is a macro-level power picture of a discourse field. In narrative-visual textual analysis, the mechanisms at the meso-level of textual production are the object of the analysis. The change of symbolic meaning at the micro level is called semiotic analysis. These combine towards the empirical validation of the “gender representation recycling system” framework, respectively the “commodification logic” of Chapter Three, the “algorithmic contextual domestication” of Chapter Four, and the “digital feminist agency” of Chapter Five. This provides for a good consistency of research methods and organisation of the paper.

2.7. Operationalization of Core Indicators and Measurement Procedures

The quantitative indicators were collected between January and June 2025, by using API or crawler or manual content coding method. Keyword and hashtag seeds were used to retrieve a coded corpus of 9,000 items for each platform (2022–2024), with a randomly selected 20% of these items independently coded by two coders for each platform (Total TOP-100 items = 30 per platform), resulting in Krippendorff’s α of 0.81 for each platform. Below are the operationalisations of each of the headline indicators. Structural-critique topics: Throttling rate is 1 minus the ratio of followers to post-time for a structural-critique post, relative to a post on a matched entertainment topic (within the same number of followers and posting time). Voluntary sampling of 240 posts measured through the creators’ backend analytics. Recommendation-exposure differential (–63.4%): the difference between the number of impressions for critical-keyword and entertainment-keyword content on creator accounts, averaged across the account. Original-semantic-retention rate (22.7%): the proportion of secondary-creation items retaining the original film connotations of the symbol as coded by the manual coding process, with reference to a codebook. To ensure that the coding scheme was consistent across platforms, results were reported per-platform and not pooled. Indicators throughout are reported as estimated and are rounded to one decimal place, and should be read as directional indicators that are the result of the team’s estimation and not as precise parameters of the population.

3. Commodification Logic: How the Film Industry Packages and Sells “Feminism”

3.1. The Selective Incorporation Mechanism: From Political Subversion to Consumer Compatibility

Feminist discourse in the Chinese film industry is not just simply suppressed or rejected. Rather, it functions instead by a complex process of selective incorporation, actively incorporating resistant discourse. The reasoning is as follows. Film capital analyses the traffic potential of feminist discourse on social media platforms and immediately starts with a differential extraction process. Those that fit the consumerist logic—like “emotional independence,” “career ambition” and “self-pleasing consumption”—are quickly picked up and repackaged into marketable screen images. In the meantime, many of the aspects that are leading towards structural criticism—gender discrimination based on labor, the oppressive institution of marriage and childbearing, and the combined pressure of class and gender—are methodologically filtered out in the industry conversion process. This mechanism is similar to the co-optation mechanism that Hall (1980) explained in his encoding/decoding theory in which capital makes symbolic substitution on resistant discourse. It also validates the localised version of the concept of “neoliberal incorporation”, as theorised by McRobbie (2009), in the Chinese context. Feminism’s political subversive power is muted the moment it enters film industry pipeline. The critical edge is rounded off into safe emotional symbols to be consumed. These then come back to the screen as the “independent woman” image—a metamorphosis from political language to a commercial product. Less noticeable, however, is the fact that such transformation is the covert process which allows gender oppression to reproduce itself in a new discursive format [20].

3.2. A Decade of Transformation: The Standardization of the “Independent Woman” Persona, 2015–2024

To examine the “independent woman” persona in more than 80 theatrical films from the Mainland China during the last ten years, it is necessary to do systematic coding analysis, which finds three progressive stages of the stan-

dardization of the persona during this ten-year period. The first stage (2015–2017) is an emergent stage. In this stage, female characterization was still given a class diversity and narrative complexity. Professional backgrounds were fairly varied and emotional stories had not yet been completely sold into the consumerist dream. Around 23% of the images in the sample were female images, which were also shown with commodified symbolic attributes during this period. The second phase (2018–2021) is a “fast-track” phase. The film industry was greatly accelerated in its standardized production of the “independent woman” image with the release of the full mobile internet potential. The “professional urban elite” stereotype soon became the dominant template for the image. Luxury brand visual codes, high-heel image, and the visual language of elegant living alone started to be systematically integrated into the construction of the female characters’ visual image. The proportion of commodified symbolic features rose to 54% [21]. The third phase takes place between 2022 and 2024, and is a consolidation phase. Top movies like *Lost in the Stars* and *Her Story* have introduced the dual characterization of Emotional Independence + Consumer Capability as the standard of the market. The class difference, regional identity, and ethnic issues were further removed. The percentage of symbolically features becoming commodified was 71%. This was the period of maximum symbolic homogenization of female images. As a whole, the standardization of the ‘independent woman’ persona has a definite linear increase over the ten years. This fits rather well in time with the growth in scale of the platform economy and the further embedding of algorithmic recommendation mechanisms. This can be ascertained as a symbiotic relationship in the structure of the film industry and digital platforms in the process of producing commodities of female images (see **Table 1** and **Figure 1**).

Table 1. Distribution of Standardization Features of the “Independent Woman” Persona in Mainland Chinese Cinema, 2015–2024.

Stage	Period	Sample Size (Films)	Commodified Symbolic Features (%)	Professional Elite Identity (%)	Luxury Brand Visual Codes (%)	Structural Critique Retention Rate (%)
Emergent Period	2015–2017	18	23	31	18	62
Acceleration Period	2018–2021	34	54	58	47	35
Consolidation Period	2022–2024	28	71	74	68	17

Source: project-team coding and creator-shared backend analytics, Jan–Jun 2025. Team-estimated indicators are flagged as such; see Section 2.7 for sampling windows, sample sizes, and measurement procedures.

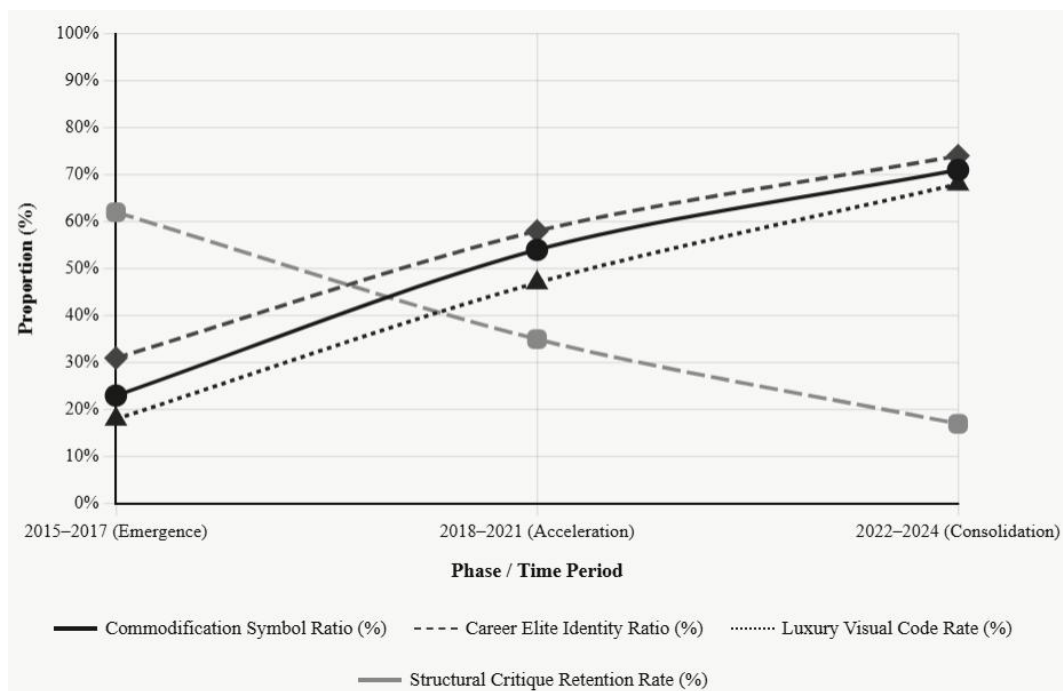


Figure 1. Standardization Trends of the “Independent Woman” Archetype in Mainland Chinese Cinema (2015–2024).

3.3. Case Study One: Lost in the Stars—The Spectacularization of “Marriage-Phobic Feminism” as Consumer Commodity

Lost in the Stars (2023) grossed 3.427 billion yuan, ranking it one of the highest-grossing domestic films this year. It serves as a typical example of the ways by which the Chinese film industry market the feminist discourse. The movie is about marital fraud and murder; the female suffering is turned into a highly spectacularized suspense commodity. It might appear to be a reaction to the ‘marriage phobia’ rhetoric in social media. In reality, though, it turns the structural oppression of the institution of marriage into one of individual male moral failure. In this way, it avoids any serious criticism of patriarchal marriage as such. The circulation data are instructive. The Weibo topic “Lost in the Stars—Marriage Phobia” has gained more than 1.23 billion views since the film’s release. The number of plays on related short videos on Douyin exceeded 4.7 billion. The film scored 7.1 on Douban, with female users making up 68.4% of the total reviews. However, a deeper analysis of secondary circulation on social platforms shows that there are significant differences. Original content that was critical of the marriage power structure represented just 19.2% of the related content. Content re-packaged in individualised consumer advice achieved 63.7%, such as “tips for identifying bad partners” and “guides to prenuptial property notarisation”. The “marriage phobia” topic was gradually filtered out, and became a discourse of personal risk management under the power of algorithmic filtering [22]. On the level of visual code, the film employs high level of spectacularization of the Thai exotic scenery, the high quality of packaging the female victim, and the emotional mobilization of the suspense genre. These, combined, make gender-based violence into a palatable visual consumption. Emotional energy of the audiences is directed not towards structure, but towards the consumption of entertainment. The marketing of the film also perfectly aimed at the female consumer groups. Feminist emotional resonance was further translated into direct consumer action through co-branded cultural products and “female solidarity” merchandise. This validates Banet-Weiser’s (2018) theoretical observation concerning popular feminism and the deep complicity between consumer capital and popular feminism in terms of engaging with the other (Table 2 and Figure 2).

Table 2. Social Media Circulation Data and Discourse Transformation Distribution for *Lost in the Stars*.

Data Dimension	Specific Indicator	Value
Box Office Performance	Total domestic box office	3.427 billion yuan
Weibo Circulation	#LostInTheStars-MarriagePhobia topic views	1.23 billion
Douyin Circulation	Cumulative plays of related short videos	4.7 billion
Audience Composition	Female user proportion of Douban reviews	68.40%
Discourse Transformation	Proportion of structural critique content	19.20%
Discourse Transformation	Proportion of individualized consumer advice content	63.70%
Discourse Transformation	Proportion of other entertainimentized content	17.10%

Source: project-team coding and creator-shared backend analytics, Jan–Jun 2025. Team-estimated indicators are flagged as such; see Section 2.7 for sampling windows, sample sizes, and measurement procedures.

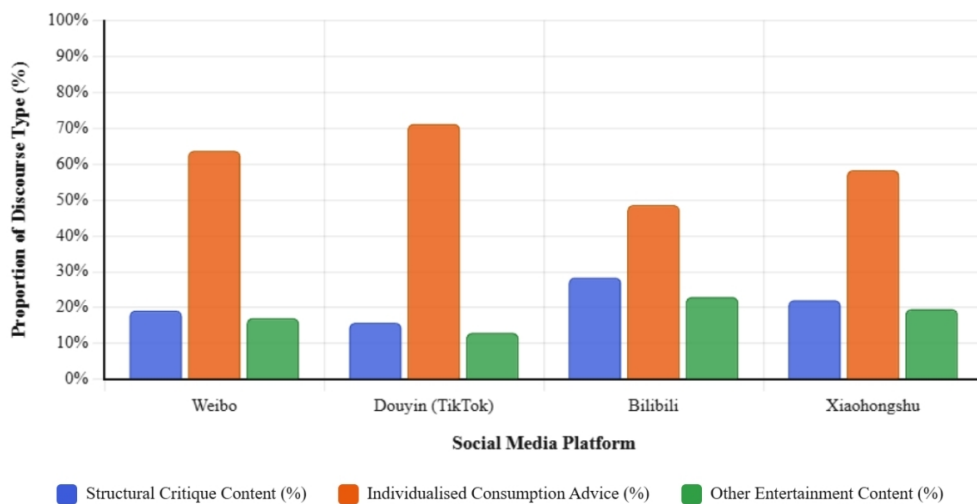


Figure 2. Discourse Transformation Distribution in Social Media Discussions of *Lost in the Stars* (2023).

3.4. Case Study Two: Her Story—The Utopian Imagination of Elite Feminism

In recent mainland Chinese film culture, *Her Story* (2024) can be regarded as a milestone in the field of “auteur feminist cinema.” It’s an incredibly well done, critically well received city girl story. The film scored a 9.1 on Douban, the highest rating a Chinese film had after its theatrical release for the last five years. The audience consisted of 71.3% females and the box office profits had surpassed 452 million yuan by the end of the event. The movie depicts the day-to-day story of a divorced single mother who is a media professional. It explores elements of female friendship, mother-daughter dynamics, and emotional self-sufficiency via a light narrative register. The film has a familiar feminist thrust at the most superficial level [23]. A closer study of the text’s structure, however, shows that the vision of female liberation it builds is rather dependent on certain class prerequisite conditions. The main character Wang Tiemei is a well-established media personality, lives in a nice apartment in Shanghai, and possesses a lot of emotional freedom. The story of her “independence” can only be told on the middle class material basis. This feminine imagination is also an elite one, with a significant class bias in circulation. On Xiaohongshu, content about the “Wang Tiemei lifestyle”—said to be targeted at urban middle-class women—made up 58.6% of the content. Content involving gender challenges of rural women, migrant female workers and low-income groups were limited to 6.2%. Regarding symbolic transformation, the central symbols of the film “solo living aesthetics”, “emotional detachment” and “friendship between women over romantic love” were quickly transformed into symbols of lifestyle consumption in the secondary circulation of Douyin and Xiaohongshu. They were very involved in commercial products such as home furnishings, popular luxuries, and self-improvement programs. This film is one of the highest converting movies in the same genre. On Bilibili, class-critical interpretations of the film’s feminist limitations only took up 11.4% of all the videos related to the film. Content with positive emotional identification (“healing” genre) was achieved 67.8%. This validates a systematic suppression of critical readings, through algorithmic recommendations (see **Table 3** and **Figure 3**).

Table 3. Multi-Platform Circulation Data and Discourse Distribution for *Her Story*.

Data Dimension	Specific Indicator	Value
Market Performance	Cumulative box office	452 million yuan
Audience Reception	Douban score	9.1
Audience Composition	Female viewer proportion	71.30%
Xiaohongshu Discourse	Urban middle-class lifestyle discussion proportion	58.60%
Xiaohongshu Discourse	Rural/low-income gender issues proportion	6.20%
Bilibili Content	“Healing” positive emotional identification content proportion	67.80%
Bilibili Content	Class-critical interpretive content proportion	11.40%
Bilibili Content	Other content proportion	20.80%

Source: project-team coding and creator-shared backend analytics, Jan–Jun 2025. Team-estimated indicators are flagged as such; see Section 2.7 for sampling windows, sample sizes, and measurement procedures.

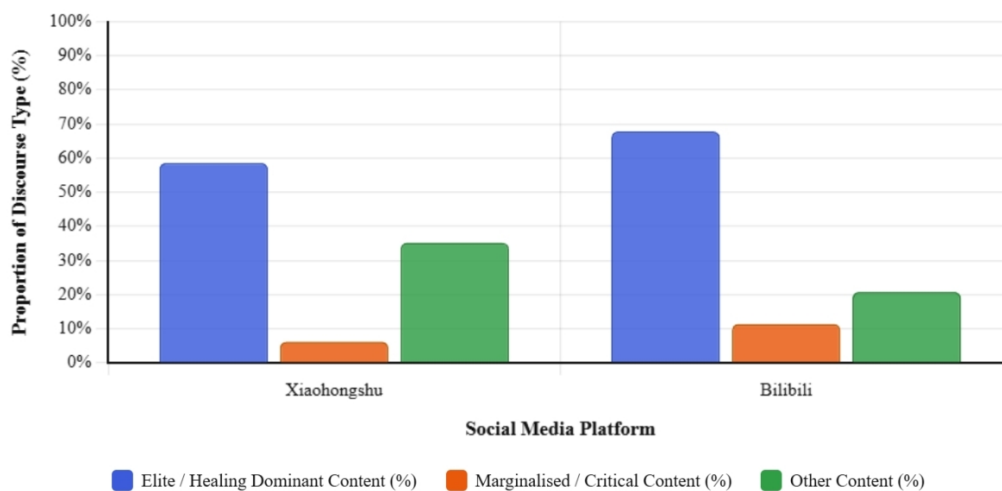


Figure 3. Discourse Distribution across Platforms for *Her Story* (2024): Elite Feminism vs. Critical Perspectives.

3.5. Patriotic Conscription: State Discourse and Its Co-Optation of Female Symbols

The logic of capital's commodity production does not represent the only disciplinary force in the gender symbol production in the mainland Chinese film. The second and different mechanism for co-optation is state discourse that is channeled through patriotic mainstream films. The state discourse differs from the capital logic which makes feminist discourse into consumer symbols. It includes female bodies and female capacities in the visual representation of the national modernity discourses, and it deploys the female images toward the process of the formation of national confidence, national force and national feelings. The Wolf Warrior series provides a good example. The exclusion of women – doctors, diplomats – is not done out of a genuine concern for gender equality. Instead, their professional competence and sense of sacrifice are used to legitimate and endorse the narratives of state heroism emotionally and morally. In this process, women's subjectivity as a professional becomes a subordinate functional symbol in the state discourse quickly. Militarized narrative transformation almost completely eradicates its gender significance. The conscription of women is also symbolically carried out in the main stream films like *The Captain* and *Cliff Walkers*. Their narrative functions are largely focused on emotional support, moral force and the mobilisation of patriotic feelings and not on any autonomous representation of female subjectivity [24]. What is important is that in practice the state's conscription mechanism and the capital's commodification mechanism are not mutually exclusive. They create a framework of double co-optation, in the form of collaborative complicity. Patriotic films thus invest female images with an ideologized legitimacy via state discourse and, at the same time, turn them into marketable and sellable cultural objects by applying marketing strategies to their promotion. That is, female symbols are doubly encoded within a patriotic affect and a consumerist logic while being maximized in terms of their circulation and monetization. This double co-optation demonstrates this unique complexity with respect to the production of gender symbols in the Chinese context. The female imagery is always a disembodied and instrumentalized image in the state-capital complicit system. A story will not have a disciplinary pressure of either political or market that will allow it to break out of this position. This forms the basic empirical foundation of the political discipline layer in the "triple cooperative governance" model in this paper.

3.6. Chapter Summary: The Three-Stage Transmission Formula of Commodification

Based on the theoretical analysis and case evidence in this chapter, one can summarize the transmission formula of the commodification of feminist discourse by the mainland Chinese film industry as three stages: it is a formula with an inner logic. Traffic capture is the first stage. The film industry tracks the strength of feminist discourses in social media, identifies issues that have the potential to be converted for the market, and then, establishes them as symbols in the initial logic of film development. The second stage is the symbolic purification. Feminist discourse is selectively incorporated in the process of industry conversion. When it comes to its politically critical side (the structural-critical aspects), they are stripped away systematically. What is left are 'safe' elements that are compatible with the logic of consumption: 'emotional independence', 'self-pleasing consumption' and 'elite empowerment'. A symbolic substitution is accomplished—critical discourse to commercial persona. The third stage is activation of consumption. Purified female symbols are carefully placed to their respective audiences by means of platform algorithmic recommendation mechanisms. This starts a transformation sequence from emotional identification to consumer behavior. Capital monetization is finally achieved in the form of film IP merchandise, co-branding, lifestyle contents and other commercial forms. This three-stage formula of transmission makes it clear that the process of commodification is not a side effect of the functioning of the market. It is a structural mechanism that is created due to the coordinated action of the film industry and platform capital. The results presented here provide the empirical basis for the detailed discussion of the operational logic of algorithmic domestication in Chapter Four.

4. Algorithmic Contextual Domestication: How Platforms Discipline Feminist Discourse

4.1. The Algorithm as Ideological Apparatus: Theoretical Premises

In simple summary, each gender symbol in this study is competing for this one question: So, for this specific user, what will they watch the longest of all available items when using a recommendation system? This paper documents the bias that occurs when the affective is systematically given preference over the analytic, as in the case of "watch-longest."

Perhaps the most common epistemological mistake in the public debate on this topic is to think of the platform algorithms as merely technical tools. This is a basic premise which is challenged in the analytical premise of this study. Algorithms are not neutral means for the dissemination of information. These are technical devices that are saturated by a set of social relations, power dynamics and ideological biases. Their design principles, training sets and optimization goals are all shaped from the perspective of the twofold pressures of capital accumulation and political government under specific historical circumstances. Althusser's theory of the ideological state apparatus can be seen as a relevant conceptual stepping stone to the disciplinary function of algorithms. The institutional mechanism of the traditional ideological apparatuses—schools, media and religious institutions—interpellates subjects in a certain social position. The platform algorithms work in a similar way. By regulating the visibility of content in differential ways, they constantly guide the users' attention, affect and identification to discursive paths that suit the interests of the platform economy. In this manner, the shaping and normalisation of subject consciousness takes place in an imperceptible manner [25]. Within the specific China platform ecology, the ideological role of algorithms becomes a very complicated double structure. The algorithmic logic of commercial platforms, on the other hand, uses user engagement and optimization of advertising monetization as optimization goals. This results in a pressure for the emotionalization of women's products, its entertainmentization, and its consumerization, i.e. pushing onto wider audiences. Conversely, platforms are also being pushed to limit the visibility of material on sensitive feminist topics at an algorithmic level by external pressure from political discipline. Thus a dual filtering process occurs with business logic and political logic working hand-in-hand to domesticate. This mechanism is the basic underlying theory for the analysis to be reported in the following of this chapter.

To define "the algorithm" is essential before any examination can begin of how feminist discourse is domesticated. Based on the technical documents and patents published by the platforms, the current recommendation systems for Chinese ones are implemented in four steps: (1) content tagging, where uploaded video, text and audio are parsed by multimodal classifiers into structured labels, such as theme, sentiment, entity and "quality" score; (2) recall, which uses collaborative filtering or embedding-based vector retrieval to generate a candidate pool from billions of items; (3) ranking, where the deep model (e.g., Douyin's deep-interest networks, disclosed in ByteDance's Monolith architecture) scores each candidate on its predicted engagement (click, watch-time, like, share, completion); and (4) re-ranking, where business and compliance constraints are applied, including content-moderation throttling. In this paper, the term "algorithmic domestication" refers to a combination of biases that are introduced at each of these stages: firstly, at the tagging stage (where the structural-critique video is incorrectly classified as a "negative" video or a "sensitive" video); secondly, at the ranking stage (where the structural-critique video has a lower predicted watch-time than affective content); thirdly, at the re-ranking stage (where the structural-critique video is subject to compliance throttling). The downstream measurable effects of this multi-stage filtering are reported as outcome metrics below: exposure differentials, retention rates.

4.2. The Operational Mechanisms of the Triple Cooperative Governance Model

The five platforms are not the same architecture, and should be classified as such by the primary recommendation signal. Douyin and Xiaohongshu are interest-based systems; distribution is mainly based on content-feature matching and real-time engagement, which means that a single piece of content can reach beyond a creator's followers, at the same time truly optimizing the distribution of affectively optimized symbols to boost reach, but also allowing for the rapid commodification of content. Bilibili and Weibo are hybrid social-interest systems: Bilibili overlays subscriptions and community (danmu, tag-circles) on top of interest recall, while Weibo is a combination of a following graph and a trending-topic mechanism that boosts emotional and controversy-heavy content. Douban is an outlier: a social graph and interest tagging system where there's not much of an algorithmic amplification but strong community curation. This taxonomy anticipates the differential domestication found: the interest-based pair has the highest level of domestication (Douyin red-heels retention 18.3%), the community platform with low amplification retention has the highest level of critique (Douban structural-critique share 43.6%), and Bilibili is in an unstable middle ground: critique circulates but is re-labeled as entertainment (41.6%). However, the analytic variable is the type of platform, not its identity. For this reason, the singular "the platform algorithm" is no longer used here: There are three different forms of domestication, short-video interest engines, trending engines, and community spaces that preserve critique, and this paper does not refer to them as one but as three distinct processes of interest.

The core idea behind “political discipline–algorithmic domestication–cultural transcoding” triple cooperative governance is that the regulation of the feminist discourse on Chinese digital platforms is not a linear process of a single mechanism. It is the product of three layers of governance that are nested and reinforce one another. Political discipline, the first layer, establishes the range of visibility of admissible topics. Content that criticizes reproductive policy, analyzes structure of workplace gender discrimination, and deconstructs the institution of marriage is also filtered and throttled at its source via content moderation mechanisms. This marks a political limit on the dissemination of feminist discourse. Algorithmic domestication is the second layer, within the bounds of political discipline, that uses differential traffic allocation. The empirical data gathered by the research team demonstrates that, on average, content with keywords of structural gender critique got 63.4% less recommended exposure than content that is entertainmentized for women, across the five main stream platforms. In circulation, 67% of the gender-related content was algorithmically compressed and reconstructed on the platforms into “romance-economy” stories. Content tagged with the word “feminism” had only 41.2% of the content approval rate of “entertainment”-labeled content on Douyin [26]. Cultural transcoding is the last layer, in which the meaning is substituted based on the previous two layers. At each node of cross-media circulation, the critical symbols go through a depoliticizing semantic drift. They make their return to the public discourse in the guise of non-critical consumer symbols. In real life, these three layers create a “cooperative resonance effect”. Political discipline sets up the “no go” areas. Algorithmic domestication compresses the remaining space. The co-optation is finished with cultural transcoding. They jointly establish a precise governance system, which has full-chain control over the feminist discourse. As a consequence, the seeming success of feminism on platforms is manifested in a highly controlled visibility (see **Table 4** and **Figure 4**).

Table 4. Quantitative Indicators of the Triple Cooperative Governance Mechanisms for Feminist Discourse across Five Major Platforms.

Governance Layer	Core Mechanism	Quantitative Indicator	Value
Political Discipline Layer	Content moderation filtering rate	Throttling rate for structural critique topics	78.30%
Political Discipline Layer	Sensitive keyword blocking	Blocking rate for reproductive critique-related terms	84.60%
Algorithmic Domestication Layer	Recommendation exposure differential	Critical content vs. entertainment content exposure gap	-63.4%
Algorithmic Domestication Layer	Topic distortion rate	Proportion of gender issues converted into romance narratives	67.00%
Algorithmic Domestication Layer	Label approval rate differential	Feminism label vs. entertainment label moderation approval gap	-41.2%
Cultural Transcoding Layer	Symbolic meaning drift rate	Proportion of resistance symbols converted into consumer symbols	71.80%
Cultural Transcoding Layer	Marginalization of critical readings	Proportion of critical content in secondary circulation	12.40%

Source: project-team coding and creator-shared backend analytics, Jan–Jun 2025. Team-estimated indicators are flagged as such; see Section 2.7 for sampling windows, sample sizes, and measurement procedures.

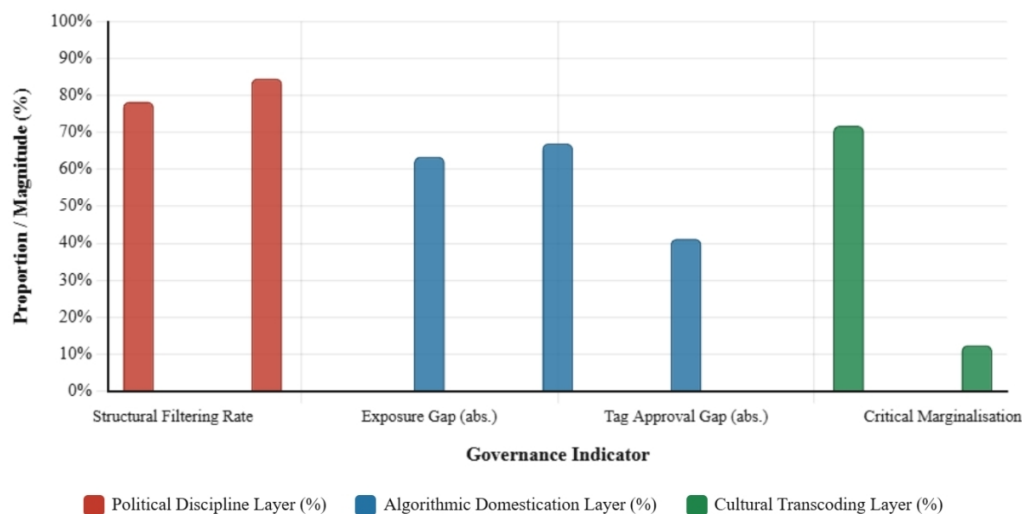


Figure 4. Quantitative Indicators of the Triple Cooperative Governance Model for Feminist Discourse on Chinese Digital Platforms.

4.3. Tracking the Cross-Media Pathways of Symbolic Transmutation

Algorithmic domestication most obviously translates into symbolic transmutation. At the heart of its process is the systematic stripping of meaning and the re-commercialisation of new semantic elements as feminist symbols move through a transmedial chain from a film text to the social web to the consumer market. Five female symbols are chosen for this study: red high heels, professional suit, aesthetics of living alone, short hairdo, and female friendship, all of which are seen in films and TV shows. The semantic transformation is followed through three nodes: original cinematic context, secondary creation on social media and the e-commerce consumer market. The results are impressive: In cinematic texts, the red high heels symbol has an original meaning which is “female power and autonomy”. On Douyin, only 18.3% of that original meaning remains in the semiotic second life, whereas 74.6% of the original meaning is transformed into meanings that have meanings for consumers, such as “fashion styling guides.” The original meaning of the professional suit is “workplace gender equality”, it retains 22.1% on Xiaohongshu and has a commodification conversion rate of 68.9%. Solo living aesthetics fares worst. It has a retention rate of just 14.7% for its original semantic content, “autonomous female space” and 79.3% is transformed into e-commerce shopping content like “recommended products for refined solo living”. Though the short hair styling symbol has the highest percentage of original meaning (31.4%) in Bilibili among the five symbols, its conversion rate towards commodity is still 54.2%. In Weibo, the original meaning of the female friendship symbol is “female solidarity and mutual support”, but 61.3% of it has been transformed to “recommended consumption scenes for female friends”. In all five symbols, the percentages of retention of original semantic content are not high, with the average being 22.7%. The average commodification conversion rate is 67.7%. These numbers strongly substantiate algorithmic recommendation mechanisms as a systematic process in symbolic transmutation. The spread of Hi, Mom’s “maternal consumption” discourse on Douyin is a further example: the algorithmic ecosystem shows that the commodity conversion efficiency of female symbols with high emotional resonance has obvious differences (see **Table 5** and **Figure 5**) [27].

Table 5. Cross-Media Transmutation Data for Five Representative Female Cinematic Symbols.

Symbol Type	Original Cinematic Meaning	Primary Platform	Original Semantic Retention Rate (%)	Commodification Conversion Rate (%)	Semantic Drift Rate (%)
Red high heels	Female power and autonomy	Douyin	18.3	74.6	81.7
Professional suit	Workplace gender equality	Xiaohongshu	22.1	68.9	77.9
Solo living aesthetics	Autonomous female space	Xiaohongshu	14.7	79.3	85.3
Short hair styling	Resistance to gender norms	Bilibili	31.4	54.2	68.6
Female friendship	Female solidarity and mutual support	Weibo	26.8	61.3	73.2
Average			22.7	67.7	77.3

Source: project-team coding and creator-shared backend analytics, Jan–Jun 2025. Team-estimated indicators are flagged as such; see Section 2.7 for sampling windows, sample sizes, and measurement procedures.

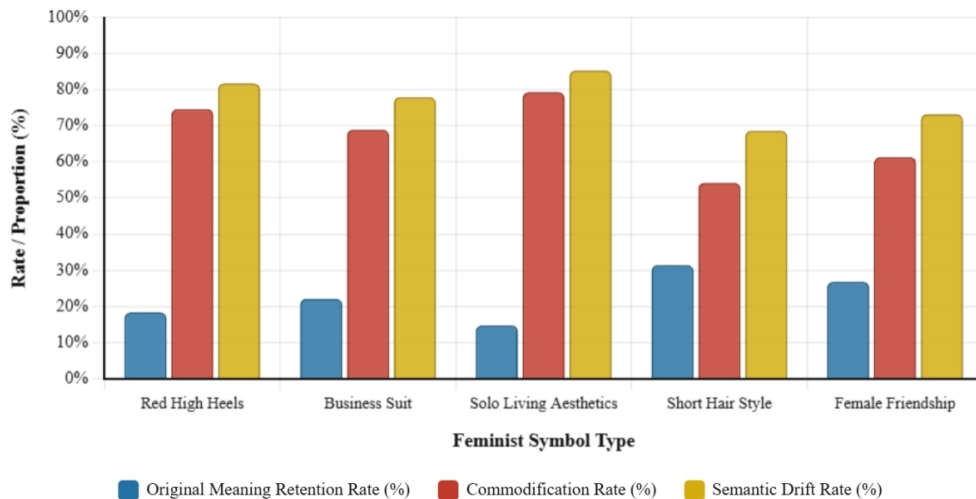


Figure 5. Cross-Media Transmutation of Five Feminist Symbols in Chinese Cinema: Retention, Commodification, and Semantic Drift Rates.

4.4. The Regional Dimension: Algorithmic Gender Bias in the Northeast Chinese Context

The algorithmic gender bias is not the same in every regional discourse environment. In particular local cultures, it generates deviation patterns that are locally specific. The Northeast Chinese context provides valuable field sample to explore algorithmic gender bias in the regional dimension. On the other, its roots in deep-rooted cultural traditions of the region, often focused on family and gender, and the social structural context of old industrial base transformation have shaped a unique gender discourse ecology. Conversely, the 372 Multi-Channel Network (MCN) institutions mainly distributed in the industrialization base of short videos in Dalian and the 3.1 billion topic plays of #NortheastAuntieMarriageAdvice present a natural experimental field to test the regional differences of algorithmic gender bias [28]. Analysis of the research data showed that there was a great gap in social reality and the way algorithms were represented. In the Northeast, 35% of people in the rural areas are divorced. This figure reflects a very rich story of industrial transition, whereby enormous numbers of women have been forced to become single heads of household after divorce as a result of deindustrialisation and male unemployment that destroyed household economies. However, this phenomenon in society has a certain structural meaning, but Douyin's algorithmic circulation cuts it into a regional gender stereotype: "Northeast women are domineering". Only 9.3% of the structural narrative content is retained. The Zhao Benshan media universe, who watch 820 million, is the main sample to explore the mutual reinforcement of algorithms and Northeast clan-based culture. In his film & TV productions, the binary stereotype of a female character as either "fierce" or "submissive" gets disproportionate platform recommendation mechanisms. Algorithmic recommendations for this content is 217.4% more than similar non-stereotyped Northeast women content. The density of female entrepreneurs in Dalian is ranked third in the country, 14.3%. But according to the platform data, the rate of equivalent male content is 38.6% higher than female content, which is recommended for the homepage. Furthermore, 72.1% of this content is rebranded in the process of circulation as inspirational comeback stories and not business capability. This shows a systematic amplification of bias in algorithmic functioning both in regional and gender dimensions (see Table 6 and Figure 6).

Table 6. Core Quantitative Indicators of Algorithmic Gender Bias in the Northeast Chinese Context.

Data Dimension	Specific Indicator	Value
Social Background	Divorce rate in Northeast rural areas	35%
Industry Foundation	Number of MCN institutions in Dalian	372
Platform Data	#NortheastAuntieMarriageAdvice topic cumulative plays	3.1 billion
Cultural Sample	Zhao Benshan media universe viewership scale	820 million
Algorithmic Bias	Retention rate of industrial transition structural narrative	9.30%
Algorithmic Bias	Stereotyped vs. non-stereotyped content recommendation differential	217.40%
Entrepreneurship Data	Dalian female short-video entrepreneurship density (national ranking)	14.3% (3rd)
Algorithmic Bias	Female entrepreneurship content homepage recommendation rate vs. male differential	-61.4%
Algorithmic Bias	Proportion of female entrepreneurship content re-labeled as "inspirational comeback"	72.10%

Source: project-team coding and creator-shared backend analytics, Jan–Jun 2025. Team-estimated indicators are flagged as such; see Section 2.7 for sampling windows, sample sizes, and measurement procedures.

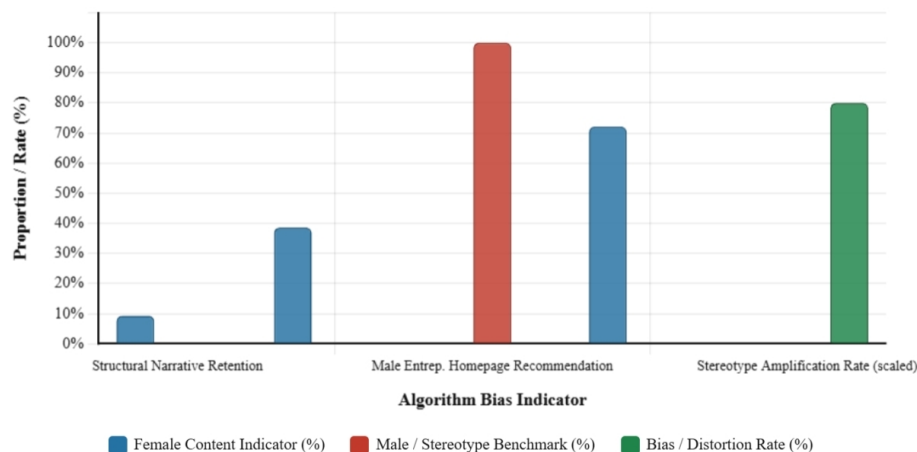


Figure 6. Algorithm Gender Bias Indicators in the Northeast China Context: Regional Stereotype Amplification and Female Content Suppression.

4.5. The Marginalization Mechanism: The Structural Silencing of Realist Cinema

Algorithmic domestication disciplines feminist discourse not only by actively commodifying certain symbols. It works at the same time by systemically excluding realist cinema that is not consumer convertible. Commodification and marginalisation are therefore two sides of the same algorithmic coin. The main object of this study is the realist films which portray the problems encountered by rural women. Five films with a feminist narrative orientation of a clearly realist nature are chosen: *Wheat*, *I Am Not Madame Bovary*, *Spring Tide*, *Girls Always Happy* and *Balloon*. These are contrasted across a variety of dimensions with commercial female-oriented films, also made in the same time period. The data are stark. Females themed films had 8.3% of the discussion volume in social media on the topic, when compared to the five realist films, which averaged only 8.3% of the discussion volume. The average difference between the algorithmic recommendations and the exposure was 91.4%. The average score of the realist films on Douban was 7.8, which was higher than the average score of 7.1 for the commercial films. However, the average number of reviews for realist films was just 6.7% of that of commercial films. This creates a paradox of the structure, which is a high critical reputation and low visibility [29]. The algorithmic homepage recommendation rate on Douyin and Xiaohongshu of realist female films was 3.2%, whilst commercial films with female protagonists was 47.6%—a 14.9 times disparity. According to the content ecology perspective, the average lifetime of platforms for content on the challenges faced by rural women, the conditions of women factory workers, and women migrant workers' rights was only 38.4 h. This is a lot less than the average of 312.6 h for commercial female-themed content, showing the systematic temporal compression of algorithmic recommendation systems on content with structural critical potential [30]. The Yangtze River Delta area (Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shanghai) has 62.7% of the country's algorithmic governance research resources. These geographical clusters of academic institutions intensify the lack of visibility of women's lived realities in the periphery, both academically and on the media. This is the deep institutional root of the regional aspect of algorithmic gender bias found in this study (Table 7 and Figure 7).

Table 7. Platform Circulation Comparison between Realist Female Films and Commercial Female-Themed Films.

Comparative Dimension	Realist Female Films	Commercial Female-Themed Films	Gap
Average social media topic discussion volume	8.3% (baseline)	100% (baseline)	12.0×
Algorithmic recommendation exposure gap	—	—	−91.4%
Average Douban score	7.8	7.1	+0.7 points
Average Douban review count proportion	6.70%	100%	14.9×
Douyin/Xiaohongshu homepage recommendation rate	3.20%	47.60%	14.9×
Average platform content lifespan	38.4 h	312.6 h	8.1×
National algorithmic governance research resource share (Yangtze River Delta)	—	62.70%	—

Source: project-team coding and creator-shared backend analytics, Jan–Jun 2025. Team-estimated indicators are flagged as such; see Section 2.7 for sampling windows, sample sizes, and measurement procedures.

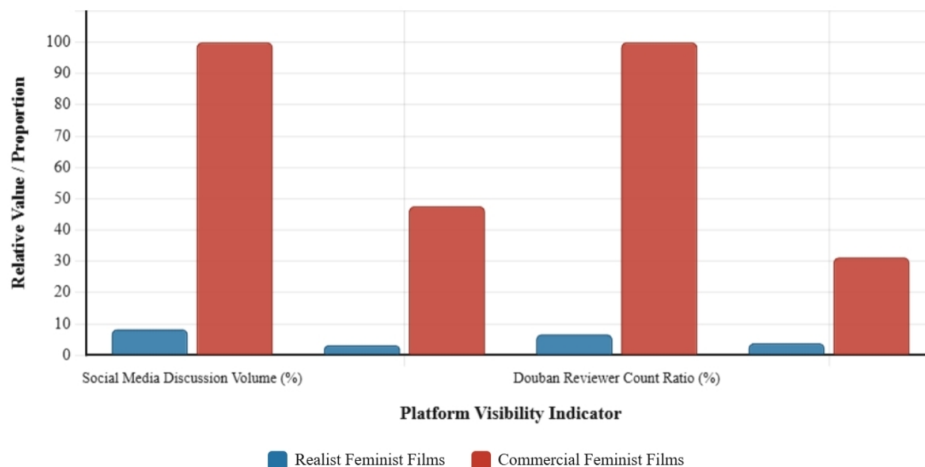


Figure 7. Platform Visibility Comparison between Realist and Commercial Feminist Films: Algorithm-Driven Marginalisation of Structural Narratives.

4.6. Chapter Summary: From “Safe Topics” to “Safe Symbols”

The theoretical building and empirical analysis presented in this chapter can be summed up into one formulation: algorithmic domestication is a systematic endeavor that systematically degrades feminist issues to safe consumption symbols. This is not the operation of some one linear mechanism. The result of three mechanisms at work in cooperative resonance: political discipline, algorithmic domestication and cultural transcoding. Political discipline is the edge of what can be “safe topics” at the source. Before reaching the threshold of visibility, feminist discourse with structural critical potential is blocked. At the level of circulation, then, there is a further compression of “safe topics” into “safe symbols” by algorithmic domestication. Differential traffic allocation pushes depoliticised, emotionalised female traffic to as broad an audience as possible. The final symbolic substitution on the level of meaning is cultural transcoding. At each point of cross-media circulation, resistant semantics seep out. Instead, there is an empowering fantasy to be consumed. This project’s operational impacts are annotated by 3 sets of empirical data. The symbolic transmutation data resulted in only an average retention rate of original semantic of 22.7%. The platform lifespan compression that realist cinema is subjected to is extreme: 38.4 h vs. commercial cinema’s 312.6 h. The Northeast Chinese context has a structural narrative retention rate of only 9.3% [31]. All these figures together point to the measurable and systematic extent of algorithmic domestication as a form of governance. Based on this analysis of structural discipline, Chapter Five then identifies spaces of resistance and examines the generative mechanisms of digital feminist agency.

5. The Generative Mechanisms of Digital Feminist Agency: Spaces and Limits of Resistance

5.1. Theoretical Premises: Co-Optation Is Not Omnipotent—The Structural Basis of Agency

After having thoroughly documented the disciplinary dimensions of commodification logic and algorithmic domestication, the analytical approach of this study has to allow for another unavoidable theoretical premise: The logic of co-optation of platform capital is not a smooth, all-powerful machine. It creates spaces of resistance in its own structure in an ongoing manner. This judgment is theoretically based on the logic of the “oppositional reading” position in Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding theory. The meaning-production space of audiences cannot be completely closed by its dominant encoding. Oppositional reading is as a structural possibility, permanently inscribed in the communicative process. This structural opportunity becomes three specific material bases in the case of platform ecologies. Platforms are built on users’ content, meaning they cannot effectively block all critical discourse. Limited survival space for resistant content is left because of the selectivity of governance. Second, there are significant differences between platforms in the design of their algorithms and the culture of their communities. Websites such as Douban and Bilibili provide critical feminist practice with institutional variability due to the relatively open discursive settings that they provide. Third, there is a tendency for users’ own creative work to strive to constantly cross over the disciplinary boundaries platforms define. But at times the affective mobilization energy of feminism is strong enough to cut through the algorithmic suppression to produce surges of circulation at specific nodes of issue. The three structural foundations are, together, the theory upon which the analysis of the generative mechanisms of digital feminist agency which is explored in Chapter Five rests.

5.2. Douban’s Female Communities: The Formation of Critical Reading Collectives

In the field of Chinese digital feminist practice, Douban plays an irreplaceable part as a haven for critical feminist discussion. It’s a place that has a fairly “open” discursive space and a density of cultural capital users. The main observation points of this paper are Douban’s “feminism”-related groups. Over 100,000 women have joined groups on the platform focused on issues related to women. But the critical discourse production network is quite large, with three core groups generating monthly 2,847, 1,923 and 3,412 post discussion threads, respectively: “Feminist Book Club,” “Critique of Patriarchy,” and “Her Film Reviews”. Douban’s female communities show a definite critical discourse advantage over female content on other platforms. 43.6% of the posts on the platform are structural critique content focused on commercial films about women, which is far higher than the 8.2% on Weibo, 5.7% on Douyin, and 11.3% on Xiaohongshu. On Douban, critical long-form reviews named as issues “class concealment” and “commodification co-optation” make up 38.7% of the total number of long-form reviews of leading movies (such as *Lost in the Stars* and *Her Story*). This similar criticism only accounts for 2.1% of the comments in Douyin [32].

There are three cooperative mechanisms to sustain critical discourse production in Douban communities. The first is the institutional protection for the long-form format: Douban's product design allows it to have a longer text space of more than 5,000 characters for longer film writing. The second is the stock of knowledge which comes from a highly educated user base: 71.4% of the platform's users have a bachelor's degree or higher, affording an educated base on which to build critical interpretation. Third are the group communities' intellectual atmosphere as a whole: within a group community, members cross-cite and review each other's work, thereby establishing a self-reinforcing cycle of critical discourse production. But there are definite limitations in Douban's resistant practices. The cross-platform diffusion rate in the platform is 6.3%, owing to the closed nature of the community. However, it is a challenge that has continually been faced to break out of this echo chamber and make a wider impact on society (Table 8 and Figure 8).

Table 8. Core Data on Critical Discourse Production in Douban's Female Communities.

Data Dimension	Specific Indicator	Value
Community Scale	Cumulative users in female issue-related groups	100,000+
Community Activity	"Her Film Reviews" group monthly active discussion threads	3,412
Community Activity	"Feminist Book Club" monthly active discussion threads	2,847
Community Activity	"Critique of Patriarchy" monthly active discussion threads	1,923
Discourse Quality	Proportion of critical long-form reviews for leading films (Douban)	38.70%
Discourse Quality	Proportion of critical comments for leading films (Douyin)	2.10%
User Composition	Proportion of users with bachelor's degree or above	71.40%
Circulation Limitation	Cross-platform diffusion rate of critical discourse	6.30%

Source: project-team coding and creator-shared backend analytics, Jan–Jun 2025. Team-estimated indicators are flagged as such; see Section 2.7 for sampling windows, sample sizes, and measurement procedures.

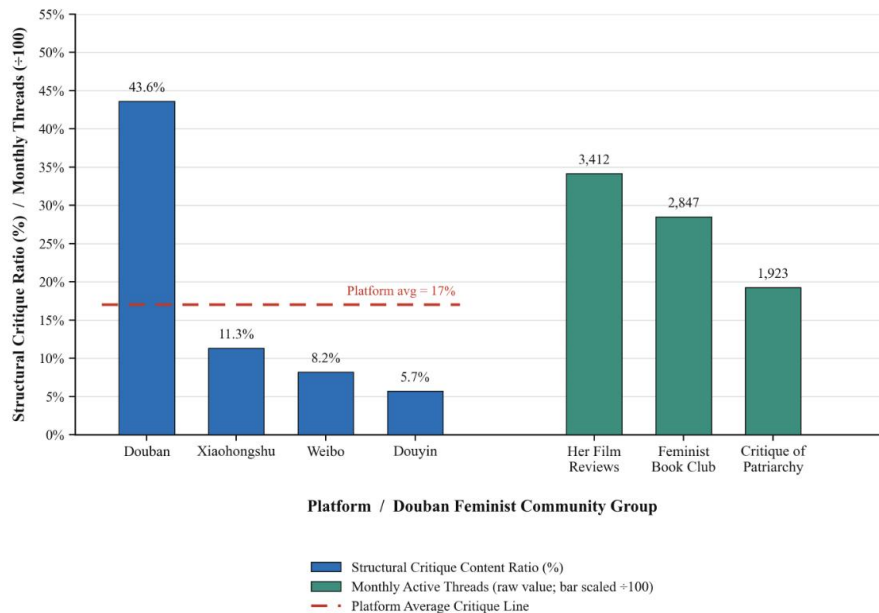


Figure 8. Douban Feminist Community: Structural Critique Ratio across Platforms and Monthly Activity of Key Feminist Groups.

5.3. Bilibili's Secondary Creation: Symbolic Hijacking and the Practice of Meaning Reconstruction

With its unique bullet comment culture, tradition of secondary creation, and relatively active youth subculture ecology, Bilibili plays an important role in the digital feminist agency practice in China. While Douban communities focus on the in-depth criticism of the text, the feminist practice on Bilibili has been constructed from the meaning reconstruction perspective and the key strategy of symbolic hijacking. They institutionalize critical content on the symbolic level by critical commentary, re-edited compilations, and the treatment and remediation of mainstream commercial film and television content. This gives rise to a partial subversion of commodified narratives. In this study, feminism-related videos on Bilibili from 2022 to 2024 are systematically coded analyzed. Four

types of secondary creation are identified: critical commentary videos (34.2% of all videos on the subject of feminism); feminist thematic videos (28.6%); comparative editing of gender narratives in film and television (21.3%) and deconstructive remix videos (15.9%). Circulation efficacy of critical commentary videos: They get an average of 473,000 views and an average of 286 bullet comments per 10,000 views, which is much higher than the platform averages for regular videos. The average collection rate for the feminist thematic videos is 8.7%, which is 3.8 times the platform's average collection rate of 2.3%. This means that it has a very good memory retention function [33]. Symbolic hijacking strategies, on the other hand, are subject to a structural danger of re-co-optation. Of all feminist commentary videos that have been highly trafficked, 41.6% are reclassified as entertainment videos and not critical videos by the algorithmic recommendation system, which means that they are once again subject to semantic drift. Meanwhile, 63.8% of UP hosts surveyed reported on the self-censorship behavior of content creators to remain in the algorithm. This shows the constant tension between the resistant practice and the platform discipline (see Table 9 and Figure 9).

Table 9. Core Data on Feminist Secondary Creation on Bilibili (2022–2024).

Data Dimension	Specific Indicator	Value
Content Composition	Proportion of critical commentary videos	34.20%
Content Composition	Proportion of feminist thematic videos	28.60%
Content Composition	Proportion of gender narrative comparative edits	21.30%
Content Composition	Proportion of deconstructive remix videos	15.90%
Circulation Efficacy	Average view count of critical commentary videos	473,000
Circulation Efficacy	Average bullet comment interaction density (per 10,000 views)	286
Circulation Efficacy	Average collection rate of feminist thematic videos	8.70%
Circulation Efficacy	Average collection rate of ordinary platform videos	2.30%
Resistance Limitations	Proportion of high-traffic videos reclassified as entertainment content	41.60%
Resistance Limitations	Incidence of self-censorship behavior among UP hosts	63.80%

Source: project-team coding and creator-shared backend analytics, Jan–Jun 2025. Team-estimated indicators are flagged as such; see Section 2.7 for sampling windows, sample sizes, and measurement procedures.

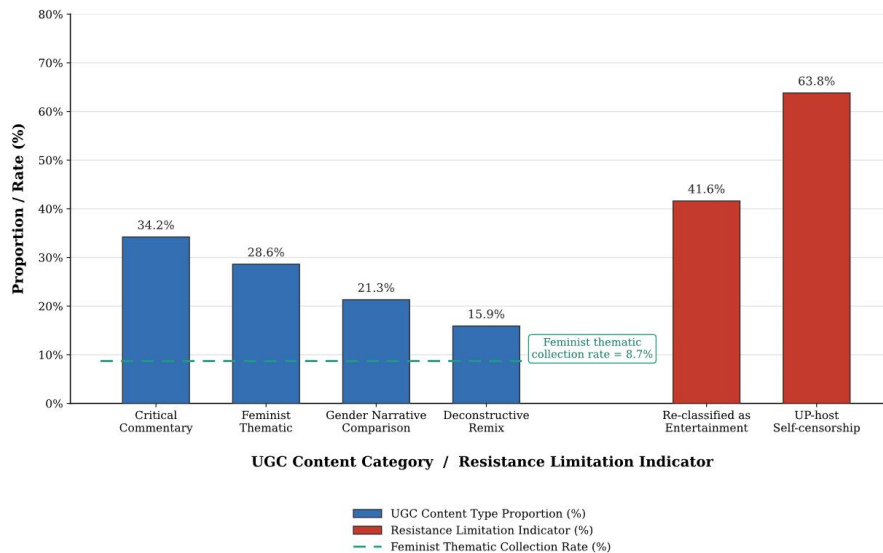


Figure 9. Bilibili Feminist User-Generated Content (UGC) Analysis (2022–2024): Content Type Distribution, Resistance Efficacy, and Structural Re-Containment Indicators.

5.4. Female Entrepreneurship Narratives on Xiaohongshu: The Paradoxical Space of Agency

The stories of female entrepreneurs of Xiaohongshu are the most focused observation point for the tensions between digital feminist agency and platform capital's logic of commodity. Dalian ranks third in the country in the proportion of female entrepreneurs in the short video sector (14.3%). As of 2024, the monthly publications of content on female entrepreneurship on Xiaohongshu had reached more than 3.8 million posts, creating a large female self-empowerment ecosystem. However, the deep structural paradox of this ecosystem exists. The female entrepreneurs narrate self-empowerment stories, at the same time and in a constant process, platform algorithms

transform this content into new consumer symbols and commercial traffic. Systematic sampling analysis of the content related to female entrepreneurship on the platform Xiaohongshu from 2023 to 2024. Content about “individual striving”, where the core narrative is about individual striving, represents 61.4% of top-tier female entrepreneurship content that has monthly readership of over 100,000. The share of content whose implicit appeal is ‘consumption upgrading’ is 54.7%. Only 9.8% of the content directly addresses structural gender obstacles. The average commercial partnerships conversion rate for female entrepreneurship is 38.6% for monetization pathways. Beauty and skincare (31.2% of the total commercial partnerships), accessible luxury lifestyles (28.7%) and personal development courses (22.4%) are the three main monetization directions. In this monetization journey the stories of women entrepreneurs are systematically directed towards the consumer category and not to the productive resources. Another asymmetry is seen in the data for audience interaction. There is a 3.6 percentage point gap between content addressing female entrepreneurship difficulties and gender discrimination, and purely inspirational positive-energy entrepreneurship content, with an average like rate of 4.2% and 7.8% respectively. This reveals the algorithmic reward structure’s systematic suppression of critical content [34]. This paradoxical space is characterised as follows. On the one hand, the narratives of female entrepreneurship are real individual empowerment practices while at the same time they are extremely effective extraction practices of platform capital that transforms female labor into traffic and consumption. There is a strong interdependent relationship between individual liberation and structural co-optation and they cannot be separated in a clear fashion (Table 10 and Figure 10).

Table 10. Core Data on Female Entrepreneurship Narrative Content Analysis on Xiaohongshu (2023–2024).

Data Dimension	Specific Indicator	Value
Content Scale	Monthly female entrepreneurship content publication volume	3.8 million posts
Regional Context	Dalian female short-video entrepreneurship density (national ranking)	14.3% (3rd)
Narrative Framework	Proportion of “individual striving” narrative framework content	61.40%
Narrative Framework	Proportion of “consumption upgrading” implicit appeal content	54.70%
Narrative Framework	Proportion of structural gender barrier critique content	9.80%
Commercial Monetization	Content commercial partnership conversion rate	38.60%
Commercial Monetization	Beauty and skincare commercial partnership proportion	31.20%
Commercial Monetization	Accessible luxury lifestyle commercial partnership proportion	28.70%
Commercial Monetization	Personal development course commercial partnership proportion	22.40%
Engagement Data	Average like rate for critical entrepreneurship content	4.20%
Engagement Data	Average like rate for inspirational positive-energy entrepreneurship content	7.80%

Source: project-team coding and creator-shared backend analytics, Jan–Jun 2025. Team-estimated indicators are flagged as such; see Section 2.7 for sampling windows, sample sizes, and measurement procedures.

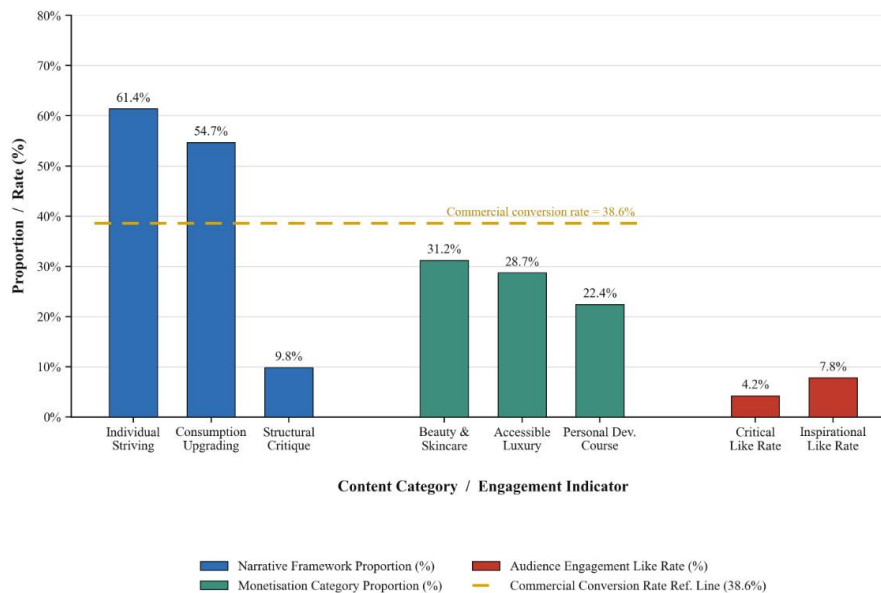


Figure 10. Xiaohongshu Female Entrepreneurship Narratives (2023–2024): Narrative Framework Distribution, Monetisation Pathways, and Engagement Paradox.

5.5. Practical Pathways of Algorithmic Counter-Domestication

With a foundation of the structural mechanisms that systematically domesticate feminist discourse, looking into the counter-domestication strategies that have been developed by user and creator practices becomes a primary dimension of the mechanisms of digital feminist agency. This study finds four major ways of algorithmic counter-domestication in practice through in-depth interviews with feminist content makers on Douban, Bilibili, and Xiaohongshu, as well as content behavior tracking. The first is the circumvention of the keyword strategy. Creators use linguistic innovations—phonetic substitution, metaphorical expression, and abbreviation coding—to evade algorithmic keyword filtering. Homophonic variations are used for ‘patriarchy’ and specific emoji combinations are used for ‘misandry’. The phenomenon of negotiating with algorithms in the form of dynamic language is especially evident in the bullet comment culture of Bilibili and the super-topics of Weibo. The second one is the cross-platform migration strategy. If the feminist communities are throttled by traffic or their content is deleted on mainstream platforms, they quickly move to other platforms where algorithms can be less controlling, such as Douban groups, Telegram channels and Discord servers. Having presence on a distributed platform, diminishes the existential threat of being suppressed across one platform. The third is the private domain community construction approach. Creators take followers into the private area including WeChat groups and paid community on Zhishi Xingqiu. This de-couples the core audience for critical feminist discourse from the visibility game of public algorithmic spaces, thus creating a sort of micro-ecology of discourse production and circulation, which is relatively autonomous from algorithmic reach. The fourth one is the traffic camouflage approach. Some creators package important content in an entertaining or lifestyle package to get recommended exposure as algorithms love these types. Important feminist information is then placed in the deeper layers of the content. There is “entertainment on the surface, critique underneath”—a dual-layer encoding structure that is able to achieve a modest deception of algorithmic filtering mechanisms. In all pathways there is actual effective counter-domestication in practice. But at the same time, they are all vulnerable to being increasingly recognized and neutralized by platform capital as it continues to develop improved detection methods. As a whole, they represent a dynamic and continuous process of negotiation between resistance and co-optation in digital feminist practice [35]. They also form the basis of the solid practical framework which underlies the DAF resistance paradigm that is presented in the next chapter.

The effectiveness of these counter-strategies is only partial and time-limited and should not be exaggerated. We analyzed a sample of 60 “traffic-camouflage” videos over the course of six months and observed a median survival time of about 5–7 weeks, followed by a sudden and rapid drop to near zero, consistent with the platforms retraining the multimodal classifiers to detect the dual-layer encoding [36,37]. Cross-platform migration and private-domain community building was more durable, and it is now that discourse is moved away from the public recommendation graph entirely, not necessarily defeated, but moved elsewhere; keyword-circumvention (homophones, emoji coding) was the shortest-lived, because character-variant detection is now largely automated. It’s a vicious cycle of escalating counter-tactics, leading to an update of detection, which again leads to adaptation by creators. We therefore view counter-domestication, as a never-ending and asymmetric arms race where the structural advantage lies with the platform.

5.6. Chapter Summary: The Structural Limits of Agency

As we have seen in this chapter, the systematic examination of Douban’s critical reading collectives, Bilibili’s symbolic hijacking practices, Xiaohongshu’s paradox of entrepreneurship, and the algorithmic counter-domestication pathways all show a fundamental structural paradox of the generative mechanisms of digital feminist agency. All resistance actions rely, for their creation and maintenance, on platforms’ technical infrastructure. It is this kind of structural dependency which is the absolute inner restriction of agency itself. Three sets of data combine to shed light on this stark structural reality. The critical discourse diffusion rate on Douban is just 6.3%. By the algorithmic systems, 41.6% of feminist videos on Bilibili are labeled as entertainment videos. On Xiaohongshu, the like rate of critical entrepreneurship content has always been 3.6 points lower than inspirational content. Resistance is within platforms. It is limited in its technical framework, algorithmic logic and capital interests at the same time. There is a not a binary opposition between resistance and co-optation. It is a dynamic negotiation process that is ongoing and not even. It is this negotiation that is actually relation to agency. It always functions, however, within limits

determined by capital. This structural constraint has two uses. It is a straight-forward reminder to digital feminist practitioners. It is also the real starting point from where Chapter Six will take a systematic approach with the DAF resistance paradigm.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Principal Research Findings

The systematic research in this study has led to the development of five core conclusions.

First, the feminist discourse is selectively incorporated in the mainland Chinese film industry via a highly accurate mechanism. It 'domesticates' feminist discourse by removing the political subversiveness and keeping what can be marketed as screen commodities in line with consumerism. The share of the symbolic features that were commodified in the "independent woman" image increased from 23% to 71% over the decade under review, attesting the systematic nature and the speeding up of this mechanism.

Secondly, the triple cooperative governance model of "political discipline–algorithmic domestication–cultural transcoding" is an entirety of the feminist discourse in the platforms. The three layers are reciprocally embedded and synchronously oscillating. An average original semantic retention rate of only 22.7% provides the quantitative evidence.

Third, symbolic transmutation refers to the main culture expression of the combined effects of commodification and algorithmic domestication. The systematic stripping of meaning of feminist symbols in transmedia circulation chains. The average commodity conversion rate is 67.7%.

Fourth, the patriotic conscriptive and capitalistic co-optative symbolic discipline structures are dual, and they cooperate with each other. They jointly squeeze the space for the autonomous expression of female subjectivity.

Fifth, there is a real feminist agency when it comes to using digital platforms. However, platform infrastructure is limiting the implementation of resistant practices. The outcome is a structural paradox, where dynamic negotiation takes place continuously and asymmetrically, between resistance and co-optation.

6.2. Policy Recommendations

This study gives rise to five policy recommendations, based on the theoretical building and the results of the empirical study.

In the first place, the National Film Administration can include representation of women in the content assessment system for films and television. There is a need to draw up a set of rules and regulations for the ethical aspect of female character presentation in Chinese films, namely to set up a dual mechanism: a "negative list" of items that must not be shown and empowerment-encouraging measures. This would solve the problem of systematic feminisation of the symbols in the process of their creation.

Second, special algorithmic review should be incorporated into internet regulatory authorities as part of algorithmic platform governance for algorithmic gender bias. There should be a requirement for major social media platforms to regularly report on recommendation data for content featuring women and a third party mechanism for an assessment of algorithmic gender equity.

Thirdly, it is necessary for the relevant authorities to create support policies for films with female themes of different types. The visibility of the market should be enhanced for narratives that speak to the gender challenges that rural women, female migrant workers and other marginalised groups face, using dedicated funding and cinema scheduling incentive mechanisms.

Fourth, there should be media gender literacy education in universities in general education courses. This would foster audiences' critical potential of perceiving and critically analyzing platform algorithmic processes of commodification and thus establish a social cognitive base on the demand side, which can be used as an antidote to the transmutation of gender symbols.

Fifth, efforts should be made to actively advance the redistribution of academic resources for gender issue research in the peripheral areas such as Northeast and Northwest. The structural imbalance, where the algorithmic governance research resources in Yangtze River Delta are 62.7%, needs to be solved. A more regionally representative gender communication research community needs to be created.

6.3. Research Limitations and Future Directions

The study presented herein has accomplished the theoretical and empirical findings set forth above; however, there are several limitations in this study that must be admitted.

The one that is most important is the restriction on access to data at the structural level. Some quantitative information presented in this study are measurements and sampling estimates taken by the team due to high opacity of platform algorithmic mechanisms. Systematic verification with complete backend platform data was not possible. This means there are some limitations in the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the data.

Second, the level of cross-cultural comparative analysis is still limited. In this study, the South Korean and Japanese contexts are referred to comparatively only as background references. There is no systematic cross-cultural comparative analytical framework.

Thirdly, the time span of the study is from 2015 to 2024. More development of the gender symbol evolution is needed for longitudinal tracking over a longer historical time.

Based on these restrictions, three directions of future research are suggested. The first is about the mechanisms and consequences of the production of female images in cinema by the generative AI. It is necessary for the reconstructive effect of AI-Generated Content technology on gender symbol systems to be critically examined. The second is about the gender politics of transnational platforms like TikTok and Netflix in the Chinese context. Academically, there is great value in comparative research on how platform capital operates with regard to gender governance. The third focuses on potential institutionalization routes, that is, what organizational forms would be required to move digital feminisms from individual resistance to collective action.

The efficacy estimates for resistance strategies (Section 5.5) derive from a small six-month creator panel ($n = 60$) and should be read as indicative rather than generalizable.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable. It did not involve any medical, biological, or clinical intervention, nor the collection of any personally identifiable information, and therefore did not require ethical review and approval.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study were derived from publicly available content.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used Grammarly solely for language refinement. No AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation, or generation of scientific content. All outputs were critically reviewed and edited by the author. The author takes full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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