

# Feminine Narrative in Chinese Women's Cinema: An Narrative Analysis of Yang Lina's Female Trilogy

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## Abstract

This research employs Hélène Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine* to conduct a close reading of Yang Lina's 'Women's Trilogy', comprising *Longing for the Rain* (2013), *Spring Tide* (2019), and *Song of Spring* (2022). While there is a large body of literature on narrative style in cinema, the study of how female directors articulate and convey femininity through their film narratives remains relatively underexplored. It seeks to determine whether these films exhibit a narrative structure from a female perspective and to examine how the female directors convey a unique femininity through film language. This paper uses film narrative analysis to examine the narrative features that depict women's lives and the representation of female characters. The findings suggest that Yang Lina's films exemplify the manifestation of *écriture féminine* through audio-visual language. By highlighting gender differences, the director weaves personal experiences into her cinematic recreations, effectively conveying a distinct female consciousness and creating nuanced, multidimensional female characters. This study will uncover the representations of femininity inherent in women's cinema by examining the implications and extensions of feminine writing. By exploring the unique observational perspectives and emotional modalities of female directors, it aims to broaden research on women's narratives in female-directed films.

**Keywords:** Women's Cinema, *Écriture Feminine*, Femininity, Narrative Analysis, Female Identity

## Introduction

Although Chinese cinema is only a century old, the history of Chinese women's cinema occupies only half of its time. For a long time in the past, the representation of Chinese women on screen was somewhat limited. Before the emergence of female directors, it was difficult to see the figure of an independent woman appearing in films, and there were even fewer expressions of reflection and exploration of the female body. Unlike the extreme

defiance of some Western feminist artists, who use the body as a critical field of power and boldly expose themselves to resist the domination of male culture over the female body, Chinese women directors have used felicitous self-representation to fight for a voice (Wang, 2022). When viewed from multiple perspectives, the notion of the 'feminine' frequently suggests life and vitality. With their distinctive feminine writing, these creators open pathways to a new universe for humanity. Women become an experience, a giver of ideas, and a creator when they are no longer defined by their biological sex but by the multifaceted perspective of the oppressed, the vulnerable, and the creative.

History and societal development are always contributing new meanings to women's cinema, making it impossible to explain in a straightforward way. For the purposes of this study, the conceptualization of women's cinema will adhere to the definition proposed by Professor Dai Jinhua (2022), which delineates women's cinema strictly as films that are directed and produced by women. The diversification of female representations in women's cinema is closely linked to the growing gender consciousness among female directors. In the 21st century, the overt depiction of women's bodies, emotions, and desires has emerged as a defining characteristic of contemporary women's cinema. Yang Lina, a prominent figure in Chinese independent documentaries and women's cinema, has been acclaimed by the media as "the director who best understands how to depict women." Her feature films, collectively known as the "Women's Trilogy"—comprising *Longing for the Rain* (2013), *Spring Tide* (2019), and *Song of Spring* (2022) have garnered acclaim at major film festivals both domestically and internationally.

*Longing for the Rain* (2013) explores the married life of a middle-class woman in Beijing who, despite a superficial appearance of happiness, suffers from a profound emotional void that her husband cannot fill. The subsequent films in the trilogy focus on single-parent family's mother-daughter relationships. *Spring Tide* (2019) depicts the friction and conflict between a middle-aged woman and her mother, while *Song of Spring* (2022) narrates a poignant tale of mutual redemption between an elderly intellectual mother and her daughter.

From the outset of her directorial career, Yang Lina's thematic focus has encompassed youth, women, and elderly women. Yang has consistently expressed a deep commitment to the plight of the marginalized in real life, a commitment that is further enriched by her own evolving identity. According to Professor Wong, "As a female director among the new power directors, Yang Lina's sense of femininity is consistent, from the portrayal of social history in her early documentaries to the personal narratives of her movies, and from the public space to the private sphere" (Wong, 2023).

### **Problem Statement**

Contemporary women's film studies has explored gender issues extensively. While the differences between men and women have received considerable attention, there has been limited analysis of the relationships and unique narrative styles of women in women's cinema. This study seeks to investigate whether women's cinema has a distinct narrative style and whether women directors embed their femininity or feminist perspectives in their films. By addressing these questions, researchers can broaden the scope of women's film studies. Understanding the narrative techniques employed by women directors will enable future

filmmakers, scholars and audiences to grasp the thematic perspectives and narrative methods unique to women's creations, thereby fostering deeper insights into the female experience.

### Literature Review

Postmodern feminist theorists, such as Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, integrate postmodern philosophy with feminist thought to critique the male-centric focus of traditional Western philosophy. They advocate for women to employ a new discursive logic to reconstruct their own value systems. Key principles of postmodern feminism, including anti-essentialism, decentralization, and the deconstruction of male-dominated logic, form the foundation of its theoretical framework. This approach seeks to destabilize established power structures and promote a more inclusive and pluralistic understanding of gender and identity. As summarized by Flax, postmodern feminism seeks to challenge and dismantle the patriarchal and binary frameworks that have historically constrained gender identities, promoting a more inclusive and pluralistic view of gender and feminism (Flax,1987). Hélène Cixous' *écriture féminine* is one of the theories that emerged in the context of postmodern feminist thinking.

*Écriture féminine*, or "women's writing", is a feminist literary theory from France. Cixous proposed this theory in her 1975 essay "*The Laugh of the Medusa*" *écriture féminine*, refers to a uniquely feminine style of writing characterised by disruptions in the text, such as gaps, silences, puns, new images and so on (Klages,2017). French psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray argues for the existence of a feminine mode of discourse, based on woman's unique sexual/anatomical make-up. Similarly, Hélène Cixous contends that women's literature displays the female unconscious by reconstituting the feminine imaginary, that is, a site of self-identity that is no longer dominated by a male-defined image (Kuhn,1981).Cixous advocates that "women must write about themselves" and "women must write about women", which means not only that women must tell their own stories and write about their own life experiences, but also that the "woman" as a signifier must relate to another signifier "I" in a new way, writing about the female self and subject within the symbolic world (Cixous,1976).In a similar vein,french director Agnes Varda herself refers to her cinema as *cinécriture*, merging the words "écriture" (writing) and "cinéma" to define her distinct cinematic practice(Pulman Jones, & Pulman Jones, M,2018).

*Écriture féminine* has always belonged to the realm of literary theory, but some scholars are now attempting to incorporate this theory into film and cultural studies. For instance, Novaczek's doctoral thesis is based on her own film work and aims to develop a new language of women's cinema through a combination of practice and theory (Novaczek,2015). In addition, Mitchell's study employed *écriture féminine* to analyse Julie Lopes-Curval's film.

Characters, plots, dialogue, scenes, and visuals in movies are utilized to illustrate how the film communicates a female point of view, follows a feminine plot, subverts standard masculine language, and communicates femininity and female sexuality (Mitchell,2019). Moreover, Andreas Jacke 's recent book in German focuses on the notion of *écriture féminine* to examine the femininity in the work of four female filmmakers. These female directors work in a unique way to deconstruct the phallic worldview and audiovisual language. From psychoanalytical, religious-philosophical and film-scientific perspectives, this study gives up a plethora of fresh ideas and possibilities for women's film (Jacke,2022). Each of these studies

offers a plethora of innovative ideas and avenues for exploration within the realm of women's film studies.

Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine* represents a feminist strategy that emphasizes the body as a central focus. This approach leads to a reconfiguration of gendered bodily representations, which in turn cultivates alternative modes of gender expression. It encapsulates "a feminine and feminist aesthetic" that aims to communicate to women how to uplift themselves by writing about "embodied female subjectivity" (Ince,2017). The deliberate selection of gender and cultural signifiers in Yang's women's trilogy exemplifies a narrative practice rooted in feminine writing. As articulated by director Yang in a discussion regarding *Longing for the Rain* (2013), "We inhabit a profoundly patriarchal society. While women are indeed creating films about women, the crux lies elsewhere. Hence, when afforded the opportunity, this research endeavor to craft a cinematic narrative that steadfastly adopts a female-centric viewpoint throughout its entirety"(Tao,2022).Thus, throughout the conception and realization of these three films, director Yang remained acutely cognizant of her evolving experience as a woman, consistently privileging a female perspective in her cinematic depiction and documentation, thus culminating in the creation of these three distinctively female-centric films.

### **Research Methods**

For this study, a close narrative analysis of each film was undertaken. One of the methods of film analysis will be through the lens of narrative perspective. This paradigm, rooted in rhetorical analysis, was originally proposed by communication scholar Walter Fisher (1984). It aims to illuminate a text within the context of storytelling, examining how the broader narrative framework influences audience responses and behaviour (Sellnow,2010).

When analyzing film narration, we need to consider how narrative figures interact with, and represent, such beliefs (Schweinitz,2010). Narrative research involves analyzing the ways in which stories are constructed and told in films, as well as the effects that these stories have on audiences (Hayward,2013). So this research attempt examining the incorporation of Hélène Cixous' concepts of *écriture féminine* in character development, plot structure, dialogue, settings, and visual design. The analysis of each film commenced with a synopsis, followed by an exploration of how the film conveyed female perspectives and concerns. It assessed adherence to the principles of *écriture féminine*, which encompasses open-ended narratives, the subversion of conventional male-centric language, and the articulation of femininity and female sexuality.

### **Result and Discussion**

#### *Women's Hidden Corners: Female Embodied Narratives*

In the pervasive shadow of patriarchy, the privilege to speak and reason is traditionally seen as a male domain, a notion that infiltrates all strata of society. Women and children's bodies are frequently perceived as "imbecilic," "sensual," and "uncertain," often relegating them to a status where they are presumed incapable of articulate and logical expression. Consequently, the weaker frequently lack distinctive discursive systems. As an 'ideological state apparatus,' patriarchy adeptly employs media texts to forge hegemonic definitions of femininity. Within this patriarchal narrative framework, women in media are typically depicted as ideal wives and mothers tasked with 'educating their children'. According to

Cixous the female body and female sexuality have been negated and repressed by centuries of male power. For her, a recuperation of the female body is, in fact, the main source of *écriture féminine* (Pontuale, 1997). In "Medusa's Laugh," Cixous asserts: "Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth. To write. An act which will not only "realize" the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength." (Cixous, 1976). Therefore, *écriture féminine* is elaborating the link between the body, sexual difference, and language (Lindsay, 1986).

The female body in media texts is often imbued with the theme of spectacle, particularly in relation to sexuality. Their representations are frequently encoded with strong visual and sensual impacts. As feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey has posited, in the narrative structure of classical Hollywood cinema, women often function as scenic objects and subjects of male desire, while men occupy the roles of observers and controllers. The cinematic camera thus serves as an instrument of the male gaze. In response, the concept of 'Écriture Feminine' introduced by Cixous offers both a theoretical and practical counterpoint, aiming to awaken women's self-awareness and liberate them from the confines of patriarchal dominance (Guo, 2013). Advocating for a decentralized and pluralistic notion of self, Cixous encourages women to begin by rediscovering the body, urging attention to our physical forms and drawing upon emotions and the unconscious. This approach to writing, characterized by its deconstructive and playful essence, provides theoretical support for postmodern women's literature and the creation of women's art.

In the contemporary Chinese film landscape, women's images are predominantly positioned as objects of the gaze, their identities molded by external influences and their desires directed by others. Director Yang Li Na, cognizant of this issue, embeds a strong female consciousness in *Longing for the Rain* (2013). This film positions women not merely as subjects but as active participants in crafting their narratives. The narrative perspective is overwhelmingly female, incorporating both the viewpoint of the female director and the protagonist's self, facilitating an environment of equality and introspective courage.

In *Longing for the Rain* (2013), women's desires are not only explored but are also fulfilled by the women themselves, moving away from a passive acceptance of externally imposed expectations. The film actively challenges the male gaze and asserts female subjectivity, illustrated through the protagonist Fang Lei's journey of sexual self-discovery and autonomy. This is depicted in scenes such as Fang Lei's encounters with her female classmates, their impromptu visits to entertainment venues, and their interactions with male servers chosen to accompany them.



Figure 1: A scene from *Longing for the Rain* (2013), Fang Lei went to a nightclub with her friends to seek the company of waiters

The "male protagonist" within Fang Lei's dream sequences, although ambiguous, perilous, and anonymous, exists solely for her own benefit, not his. In the film, Fang Lei's body becomes a symbol of her autonomy as she navigates her repressed identity and emotions through her dreams. The physicality depicted in the film carries a profound spiritual significance; the cinematography is meticulously designed to accentuate sensory experiences. Sexual arousal in this context acts as both a catalyst for the protagonist's oppressed spirit and a disruptive force against the constructs of her reality. A pivotal scene where Fang Lei shares the content of her dreams with her husband, who reacts with verbal abuse, and the subsequent scene of her "cleansing" herself in a car wash, metaphorically illustrates her struggle for personal autonomy and desire. The scarcity of spaces for women to freely express their desires in society is highlighted, suggesting that when true freedom is attained, the knowledge of how to harness desire and live authentically remains elusive. Consequently, Fang Lei's journey suggests that in confronting her body and the rebellion of her unconscious, her life may inevitably cycle through patterns of self-destruction, confusion, and desire, reflecting the infinite variability and complex fluidity of her experiences.

In *Spring Tide* (2019), the protagonist Guo Jianbo employs her body as an instrument of resistance against her mother's oppressive influence. After confrontations with her mother, Guo's actions—such as impulsively pinching a cactus and maintaining prolonged silence at home—manifest as self-destructive behaviors, including compulsive self-mutilation and smoking. These actions symbolize her rebellion against her mother's dominance.



Figure 2 : A scene from *Spring Tide* (2019), after an argument with her mother, Guo grabs the cactus with her hand in order to hurt herself

Conversely, the narrative of the final film, *Song of Spring* (2022) presents a more moderated exploration of feminine writing. Here, the body, and illnesses associated with it, become conduits that deepen the connection between daughter and mother. Yang has noted in interviews that her personal experiences have shaped her feminist perspective: "It's life that turned me into a feminist. It was my body that told me to see what the most important stage of a woman's journey in her life looks like" (Wang,2021). Thus, the exploration of the female body in Yang's films is not merely thematic but a subconscious choice rooted in her approach to feminine writing.

#### *Interconnections and Identity: Women's Relationships in Female Narrative*

In *Sorties in La Jeune né* (1975), using the classic fairy tale of *Sleeping Beauty* from a male perspective, Cixous reveals the universality and pervasiveness of the narrative mode of women in death, as well as the feminine nature of contemporary literature in a masculine structure: women are always the other, waiting to be awakened by the male hero, passive, negative. Cixous calls for a broad participation of women in writing in order to create a different kind of feminine nature (Li,2016). And in addition to the physical and poetic writing mentioned above, Cixous argues that if women are to be emancipated, they "must move relentlessly through the female body. From female to female, a territory of other worldly immensity must be amassed" (Wang,2010).

Through a close analysis of these films, this study finds that within the narrative framework of the Female Trilogy, relationships between women play a central role in both advancing the plot and shaping the protagonist's development. In contrast to traditional portrayals, where women often serve as mere supports or superficial competitors within heteronormative frameworks, these narratives depict a growth in which women use their relationships to explore and affirm themselves. This dynamic involves mutual support and, at times, the potential to create nightmares and pain. The portrayal of female relationships in this narrative system is nuanced and complex, like the open narratives that Cixous promotes in female writing, the moving beyond simplistic binaries to promote open and pluralistic interactions.

In the narrative of *Spring Tide* (2019), Guo Jianbo and her mother exemplify a self-sufficient single status in which their interactions with men primarily provide emotional rather than financial support. As they confront past traumas, their engagements with men serve as attempts at personal healing. Conversely, in *Song of Spring* (2022), another depiction of mother-daughter dynamics, where they draw some of their strength from the spiritual legacies of their deceased husbands and fathers, the director wishes to emphasise women's independence and personal agency in navigating their own lives.

Secondly, the Female Trilogy features the portrayal of friendships and alliances between women. These relationships serve as a source of inspiration, mutual support and nurturing, fostering the development of new values and personal identities that resonate authentically with them. In *Longing for the Rain* (2013), for example, when the protagonist Fang Lei struggles with recurring dreams, she seeks solace and support from her closest confidante. Together, they visit a Taoist priest in an attempt to alleviate Fang Lei's troubling dreams. Also, when Fang Lei becomes distraught over her inability to meet the man from her dreams, it is her friend who accompanies her to a nightclub to provide comfort and distraction. During this outing, her friend expresses unwavering support, telling Fang Lei: "I will treat you as if we have a karmic debt from past lives; I will cherish you and accept your departures. Such selfless and unwavering friendship exemplifies a notable thematic element within the narrative fabric of the women's trilogy.

Another interesting clip is, Fang Lei's mother-in-law, despite being an aphasic presence due to Alzheimer's disease, notably dreams of her daughter-in-law rather than her biological son prior to her death. This choice suggests a psychological dependency on Fang Lei, although there is no blood relation. This scenario illustrates the complex emotional dependencies that can exist within family dynamics, highlighting how women often bear the weight of these psychological dependencies.

In contrast to the extensive use of documentary-style handheld footage in *Longing for the Rain* (2013), the audiovisual approach in *Song of Spring* (2022) adopts a more conventional and commercial style. The narrative still includes numerous scenes of everyday life, but these sequences are imbued with the emotional dynamics between the women. A notable subplot emerges in the second half of the film, involving Zhou Xia, a bus thief who frames Feng Jizhen for theft and later attempts to break into her home with an accomplice. Surprisingly, Feng doesn't dislike Zhou Xia for this, but instead takes the initiative to vouch for her and even gives her a sum of money. In terms of narrative logic, this subplot is outside the main storyline of the mother-daughter relationship and has no specific profit motive to support Feng Jizhen's behaviour. But her help to Zhou Xia may be, to a certain extent, a means of consoling and relieving her own emotions. Like director Yang said in an interview, "Zhou Xia's intervention is necessary, and the relationship between her and Feng Jizhen is also a two-way redemption" (Lina & Ren, 2022).

Towards the end of the film, Zhou Xia not only brings her own daughter to Feng Jizhen's home to care for her after her amnesia, but also helps clean their rooms. This narrative choice not only presents a reconfigured order of interpersonal relationships and roles for women, but also imbues the story with a sense of optimism and confidence in the younger generation of women, exemplified by Zhou Xia. As director Yang said in an interview, "How do we



understand brokenness and wholeness? Women can live without marriage, and what the film shows here is exactly how women get along with each other, with their sisters, with their elders and their juniors, as if they don't need a man, they can live without a man, and at that moment they are also joyful" (Lina& Ren, 2022).



(a)



(b)

Figure 3 : Scenes from *Song of Spring* (2022), Zhou Xia brings a sense of vitality to the end of the film with her portrayal of a new woman

In addition to exploring female friendships, director Yang also delves deeply into the diversity and complexity of mother-daughter relationships. In *Spring Tide* (2019), for example, Yang departs from traditional depictions in Chinese culture, where mothers are typically portrayed as nurturing and daughters as obedient. Instead, the film depicts a nuanced dynamic where the daughter is no longer portrayed as merely submissive, and the mother transcends the role of unconditional love and selflessness. This portrayal adds layers and complexity to the relationship, making it more realistic and reflective of contemporary realities. The mother-daughter dynamic is a perennial theme in artistic representations of women. Hélène Cixous reflects on this relationship, stating, "The relation to the 'mother,' in terms of intense pleasure and violence, is curtailed no more than the relation to childhood (the child that she was, that she is, that she makes, remakes, undoes, there at the point where, the same, she others herself)" (Cixous, 1976).

In *Spring Tide* (2019), the mother character is portrayed as domineering and authoritarian, departing from the conventional cinematic portrayal of a nurturing maternal figure. She transfers the pain of her late husband to her daughters and then to her granddaughters. The family atmosphere fluctuates under the influence of her volatile temperament, which is characterised by emotional manipulation. As a result, her daughter,

Guo Jianbo, adopts a reserved demeanour, avoids intimate relationships and seeks solace in other men to satisfy her longing for the tenderness and affection that her mother fails to provide. This portrayal illustrates the complex interplay of family dynamics and emotional resilience within the narrative.



(a)



(b)

Figure 4: A scene from *Spring Tide* (2019), Guo finds solace by embracing the strange blind man in her fantasies

The mother-daughter relationship depicted in *Song of Spring* (2022) stands in stark contrast to the intense and confrontational dynamic in *Spring Tide* (2019), offering a softer and more fluid portrayal. Just as the mother in *Spring Tide* (2019) loses her ability to speak after a stroke, and the daughter in *Song of Spring* (2022) loses her autonomy to Alzheimer's, the intergenerational spiritual wound between them only begins to heal through the intervention of physical illness. This transformation manifests itself as a form of relief or mutual redemption. As Luce Irigaray eloquently describes the mother-daughter relationship: "For the woman, interiority and ego-intimacy are reconstructed through the repetition and rehearsal of the mother-daughter, daughter-mother relationship" (Irigaray&Nian,2012). This study also found a close resemblance to the mother-daughter relationship in Cixous's novel *Eva Escapes: Ruins and Life*, as Jordan summarises in her paper: "She does not suffer fools and loves and admires her brilliant daughter. While caring for her, Cixous, the daughter, equally relies on her still living mother" (Jordan, 2017).

In summary, whether one is engaged in the making of film narratives or researching women's cinema, it is imperative to focus on the bonds and connections between women. This approach allows women's narratives to diverge from traditional male-centric historical discourse and opens up new possibilities for exploring and reconstructing social order.

*The Imagery of Feminine Narrative: Cinematic Representations of Dreaming and Death*

Cinema has consistently excelled in harnessing the symbols, imagery, and surreal elements of dreams to convey the mental states and subconscious thoughts of its characters. Dreams are often seen as the confluence of the conscious and subconscious, while illness and death represent the cessation and final struggles of human consciousness. The exploration of both death and dreams is a crucial avenue for introspection. Freud posited that dreams are a means to fulfill subconscious desires. Building upon Freud's ideas, Cixous introduced the triadic concept of "dream-unconscious-writing." She argued that human beings cannot control the activities of the dream (unconscious) and that it is the dream that governs human behavior. Furthermore, she valued the role of the unconscious, stating that her writing "began in the unconscious zone" and that "dreams taught me to write." She maintained that dreams are a vital catalyst for the practice of feminine writing (Guo,2013). In Yang's "Women's Trilogy," the motifs of dreams and illness—or death, which is intrinsically linked to illness—are consistently woven into her narrative threads. This thematic integration emphasizes the profound interconnectedness of dream states and existential experiences, underscoring their significance in her cinematic exploration of feminine consciousness and identity.

*Longing for the Rain* (2013) delves deeply into the realm of women's dreams, exploring the subconscious sexual desires of its protagonist, Fang Lei. Through her repeated immersion into a dream world for self-satisfaction, Fang Lei unconsciously seeks an escape from the drab realities of life as a stereotypical wife and mother. The film not only explores themes of "transient joy" but also incorporates surreal elements. For instance, the heroine's mother-in-law suffers from Alzheimer's disease, but before she dies, she chooses to send a dream to her daughter-in-law, Fang Lei, rather than her son.

In *Spring Tide* (2019), a seemingly irrational argument between a mother and her daughter, Guo Jianbo, leads to a dream where doctors force their way into the home to remove a black sheep, which morphs into the image of her mother at the door. Guo Jianbo remains an indifferent bystander in this dialogue-free scene, which nonetheless vividly conveys the daughter's subconscious desire for someone to take her mother away, thus ending their unhealthy, struggling relationship. This is conveyed through subdued, muffled tones, and shaky, handheld camera work. Additionally, the film features a blind man who tenderly caresses the daughter in a dream, substituting maternal affection, and a woman in red who appears as a hallucination to Guo Jianbo. This mysterious figure hints at Guo's need to navigate her ambivalence towards her mother and the wider world.



Figure 5 : A scene from *Spring Tide* (2019), Guo dreamt that some doctors rushed into her home and took away a screaming black sheep, which turned into her mother when they reached the door

Dreams and hallucinations continuously depict the daughter's complex relationship with her mother, characterized by both intimacy and violence. For Cixous, the rhythms of women's writing express a unique connection with the "mother," suggesting that the mother is perpetually absent yet present in language that bridges generations. Daughters and sisters engage in a dialogic exchange that transcends the conventional boundaries of communication (Cixous, 1976).

The narrative element of water is present throughout *The Women's Trilogy*, moving back and forth between the protagonists' reality and their dreams. It not only demonstrates the women's desire to survive, but is also closely linked to the inevitability of death. In *Longing for the Rain* (2013), water serves as a vehicle for seduction and desire, but also implies danger. For example, while the protagonist, Fang Lei, is dreaming in her car, her daughter almost drowns in the river. And in *Spring Tide* (2019), at the end, water flows in all directions: from the mother's hospital room to the daughter's school to the river beyond the marshes, where water, like the amniotic fluid in the mother's womb, envelops and nourishes three generations of women. In the final film, *Song of Spring* (2022), water appears, as Yang Lina (2022) says in an interview: "For Feng Jizhen, water is also a 'door of life and death' between her and her father, through which she can pass. She can pass through this "door of life and death" to see her father, who is still alive even though he is dead, as if he can also pass freely through this water". Yang Lina's female writing with water, dreams and death is a kind of cinematic practice that emphasises women's subjective feelings and explains women's inner world from women's point of view.

As a female director, Yang resonates profoundly with H el ene Cixous's assertion: "A woman always has a little bit of her mother's quality milk left in her. She writes in white ink" (Cixous,1976). This statement encapsulates the enduring influence of maternal legacy and the unique narrative voice that women bring to cinema.

## Conclusion

Since its inception, women's cinema has been a quest to uncover the unique emotional pathways that define female experiences, aiming to establish its own narrative discourse. Integrating the theory of feminine writing into film theory studies offers a critical tool for challenging patriarchal cultural norms and existing linguistic structures. This integration is not solely an exploration of the self but also serves as a conduit for idea transmission. Whether through writing with a pen or filming with a camera, the goal is to engage an audience, to "write" in anticipation of readers or viewers. Incorporating questions into the analysis of film works—such as who is making the film, for whom it is made, who conveys the female narrative to the audience, and what type of experiences female viewers seek to see reflected by another woman—enriches the understanding of these films. Under the Framework of "écriture féminine," cinema is transformed from a mere expression of personal bodily impulses and streams of consciousness into a potent communicative tool that articulates both individual and collective demands.

Scholars argue that 'women's writing' liberates the rhythms of the body and mind, deeply tied to the maternal influence. This pre-symbolic imaginative order represents a realm of bisexual/polymorphic desires, providing an escape from the patriarchal culture's oppressive norms of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Guo, 2013). Yang Lina's use of the camera to write femininely underscores this notion, as it emphasizes subjectivity and articulates the inner worlds of women from a distinctly female perspective. By integrating feminist theory with film analysis, this study offers a new perspective on female filmmakers' work, highlighting cinema as a tool for self-expression and cultural critique. Within the context of contemporary women's cinema, the study illustrates how film challenges traditional gender norms, offering innovative portrayals of women's experiences and contributing to broader discussions on gender, identity, and social change.

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