



Family Relations • Campus Ethics • Social Network Ecology: A Glimpse and Reflection on Contemporary Youth Growth Issues——Taking Luoluo’s Youth Films as an Example

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Abstract: Youth are the driving force of social development and the future of the nation. Attention to and narration of youth growth issues remain a perennial topic. Since the beginning of the new century, youth films, as a cinematic genre, have demonstrated a narrative pattern of “youth–film–youth,” while focusing on the real dilemmas encountered during the growth process. This article, by taking three youth films directed by Luoluo—a young filmmaker observing young people from a youth perspective—as case studies, concentrates on three major growth stages of contemporary youth: middle school, university, and the workplace. It also highlights the three public spaces through which youth connect with social life: family, campus, and online networks. The study reveals the difficulties and underlying causes in the growth of young people. Through the lens language of film, it explores and reflects on the problems that have emerged in youth growth since the new century, and further proposes countermeasure considerations.

Keywords: youth film; Luoluo; youth growth issues; emotional healing; reflection and countermeasures

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the new century, with the rapid development of the market economy, the social environment in which contemporary youth live has become increasingly complex and diverse, and together with the rapid rise of new media as well as its deep intervention in and influence on individuals’ daily life[1], the issue of youth growth has become a social topic of key concern across all sectors. Film, as a medium that represents social phenomena and tells social stories through the combination of images and sounds, possesses the characteristic of presenting and conveying social issues more directly, and at the same time film also has the ability of rapid dissemination and expression. Thus, film first belongs to a form of consumer culture, establishing a cultural chain of “communication–reception”; secondly, film is also a medium of expression, serving as an effective form that can reflect social problems or narrate human ethics, and having such features as popularization in form, entertainment in content, seriousness in theme, and rapidity in provoking reflection. The film industry has already become an effective channel for timely reflecting social problems and for the public to quickly accept and respond to issues. Meanwhile, in recent years, the degree of attention paid by Chinese cinema to the youth group has been gradually increasing, mainly reflected in the strength of promotion and the breadth of coverage of youth film projects, such as the

CFDG Youth Film Director Support Program (Green Onion Project), the Youth Filmmaker Training Program, and the China Movie Channel's "Stars of Tomorrow" Young Actor Selection Program, whose promotion and implementation have gradually formed a dual-dimensional youth cultivation model from film directors to film and television actors. It can be said that Chinese cinema has gradually become a prism for paying attention to, supporting, and cultivating youth, fully embodying the linkage between youth and the future.

Chinese youth films are closely connected with the developmental history of the Chinese nation, and from the perspective of the historical axis, before the Fifth Generation and Sixth Generation directors, Chinese youth films exhibited a linkage with the discourse of political sovereignty. Some scholars have pointed out its three major characteristics: "First, such films demonstrate unwavering faith in Mao Zedong's theory of people's armed struggle; second, the films instill in the masses an understanding that the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will always exist; third, and most importantly, they depict heroes representing the images of workers, peasants, and soldiers." The image of youth was endowed with numerous cultural memory symbols associated with revolution. Starting from the Fifth and Sixth Generation directors, the expression of youth films shifted toward a popularized narrative perspective, conveying the efforts and struggles of young people. Especially after the 1990s, "ordinary individuals + a changing economic and cultural pattern + predicaments and appeals" became the chain for narrating youth stories, and young people manifested their life attitudes and their recognition of morality and self amid social transformation, presenting a discursive shift from idealized youth to individualized youth. After the beginning of the new century, youth films presented more diverse expressions. Some scholars have pointed out that since 2010, Chinese cinema has entered a period of rapid development, with the formation of a market mechanism attracting Chinese audiences into theaters ... Youth films have broken through the traditional individualized growth narrative, using depictions of collective growth memories to appeal to younger audiences. Unlike the Sixth Generation directors, who favored individualized growth processes, most of these films are set against urban stories, adapted from best-selling novels, or produced directly by famous actors and hosts. With the dazzling urban landscapes, commercialized costume designs, entertaining storytelling methods, and topical publicity strategies, youth films have already become one of the major types of mainstream commercial cinema[2]. The chain between youth and the times and the nation has shown a temporary separation, while presenting a connection with the discourse of contemporary society. Whether it is the murmurs of growth or collective carnival, both embody a reflection on the youth itself, although the value orientation of the themes of such expressions is another matter.

Regarding motif studies, some scholars have pointed out: "Motifs express the collective consciousness of the human community and often become a cultural symbol of a social group"[1]. Motifs manifest typified characteristics, and when refracted into youth films, they form the narrative motifs of youth films. Youth films after the 1990s have expressed narrative motifs such as youthful sexual impulses during growth, the desire for youth development, youth violence narratives, and youth nostalgia. Since 2013, with Zhao Wei's film *So Young*, youth films have shown an explosive growth. Although they have inherited the expression of traditional narrative motifs, they have intensified the phenomenon of dialogue/confrontation between "social discourse and the individual experience of youth" (such as

campus abortion, material worship, etc.). At the same time, “youth subject + campus space,” as a story model, has continued to undertake the task of reflecting youth issues. However, in recent years, the discussion topics of youth growth problems have highlighted the characteristics of universality, sociality, and timeliness, just as some scholars have proposed: “The relationship between human survival and growth and the development and progress of society.”[2] The issue of youth growth has gradually transformed into a concrete social problem, and the campus has become the starting point of youth stories. Thus, with the increasing frequency of intersections between youth and society, the “youth–campus–family–society” has formed a closely connected chain. Youth can no longer retreat into the ivory tower but must engage in dialogue with society, and the process of dialogue constantly exposes the problems arising in youth growth that are closely related to society and their extensions.

In the strategic associative representation between film and youth, it is sufficient to reveal the mutual transformation of subject discourse between the two major subjects and objects of film and youth, and this transformation is particularly evident in the case of director Luo Luo. Luo Luo is both a writer and a post-1980s youth director, and her few film works closely focus on issues of youth growth. Moreover, she also traces the causes and developments of these issues and attempts to carry out an imaginative healing within the cinematic context for the problems and related extensions that emerge in the process of youth growth. Taking Luo Luo’s films as examples, arising from the perspective of the new century’s youth subject, observing the social problems encountered by contemporary youth, the notion of “youth observing youth” precisely demonstrates the possibility of realizing the dual form of “youth creating films, films representing youth.” This paper takes Luo Luo’s few youth films — *The Last Woman Standing* (2015), *Cry Me a Sad River* (2018), and *The End of Endless Love* (2020)—as objects of examination, exploring from multiple dimensions the problems and reflections that appear in the process of youth growth.

2. “Youth Observing Youth”: The Representation of Growth Issues Under the Lens

Entering the narrative dimension of film about youth, it can be observed that Luo Luo’s three films present differing narrative perspectives on youth issues. This paper places youth issues within various contexts of social ethics for discussion. In Luo Luo’s three films, social ethical consciousness is more often expressed as what Kant referred to as the “virtue of friendship.” He argued: “The motive of self-love and the moral motive bring forth the problem of friendship. The former is primarily based on considerations of self-love, aiming to achieve one’s own purposes; whereas the latter is mainly manifested as a universal mutual love for humanity, with the goal of promoting the happiness of others. Such friendship that promotes the happiness of others will be a process of mutual promotion or an exchange of happiness. Yet the real situation is often that everyone wants to obtain others’ friendship in order to promote their own happiness. Therefore, the two motives are frequently in conflict.”[3] Whether in the family, on campus, in the virtual network, or in real society, groups with different “ideals,” “concepts,” or “interests” will all face dilemmas. Just as Kant believed that “friendship” is an unachievable ideal, this does not constitute a reason to abandon its pursuit. This paper does not intend to explore the path to realizing “friendship,” but rather focuses on how such dilemmas precisely become representations of problems in youth growth. Through an examination of film narratives,

several major issues in youth growth are roughly presented.

2.1 Youth and Family: The Ethics of Familial Affection

The family is the first social unit that youth encounter. In terms of spatial concept, the family provides an environment for youth growth, and in terms of social attributes, it grants youth the most basic social roles. However, the relationship between family and youth is by no means one-dimensional, but rather one of mutual influence. Luo Luo's three films all touch upon concerns with the original family, yet they also display differences in narrative perspectives and expressive intentions.

Luo Luo's first film to enter the film and television industry, *The Last Woman Standing*, focuses on the problems of marriage and love faced by older youth after entering social life. When youth views on marriage and love become intertwined with social perspectives and family intervention, the differences in marriage concepts between youth and their families evolve into a spectacle of family conflict. The extended question, then, concerns the factors that influence youth views on marriage: reflections on issues such as "Whose marriage?" and "How to marry?" One point that cannot be overlooked is the entanglement between youth marriage concepts and social moral judgment. The problem here is: what role should so-called standards of social moral judgment play when intervening in youth concepts of marriage? From the perspective of the film's lens combined with current reality, youth views on marriage transform into a declaration of social responsibility, becoming a simple definition of "filial piety" to the family and "loyalty" to society. Then, what remains for the youth themselves? Therefore, how society should appear and what role it should play in the dialogue—or even confrontation—between family and youth concepts of marriage is a question worthy of deep reflection.

Subsequently released, *Cry Me a Sad River* points to the survival problems of youth under the family model of "single-parent family + special occupation." Within the social context, single-parent families are treated with hostility, causing youth to move from a sense of familial deficiency toward a sense of social loss, thereby forming a dual psychology of frustration in both family structure and social connotation. Added to this is the parent's special occupational identity (a massage worker), just as Julia Kristeva has put it: "Abjection, rejection; abjection of oneself, rejection of oneself. It makes one object."^[4] The perception of the degradation of occupation extends into the degradation of the subject of identity. Its connotation points to the fact that, whether within my body or within my mind, in the structure of cognitive relations, even if it is not the subject "I," it nevertheless elicits a response from "me." In the process of dynamic cognitive experience, a kind of cognitive empathy gradually emerges, which is most directly manifested through the acceptance or rejection of social opinion. Yet the stigmatizing treatment of disadvantaged family groups by public opinion undoubtedly intensifies the self-definition of inferiority in youth during the process of growth. Moreover, the social perception formed by the mother's occupation as a massage worker in the original family creates a linkage and sharing in the process of recognizing the daughter's social identity. Thus, in the shaping of youth within social recognition, there exists a close connection with the original family.

The last film released, *The End of Endless Love*, is adapted from Luo Luo's novel of the same name. Although the director frames the story under the banner of youth, presenting the appearances of contemporary college students' campus and social lives, the film consistently uncovers, layer by layer, the causes behind the psychological problems of today's university students. The female student Ji Ze's

depressive symptoms originate in the psychological trauma inflicted by her original family, as well as the traumatic memories that emerged from it. The film's indictment of the family is manifested in its focus on domestic violence.

The problem of domestic violence is no longer a simple family dispute, but rather escalates into a social issue, since it generates social "pathologies" and wide-ranging effects, with the greatest victims being the youth caught deeply within it. The narration of domestic violence in the film takes two forms: first, the father's physical violence against the mother; second, the father's voyeurism of his daughter, which constitutes sexual assault. From a gendered perspective, women are positioned as the bearers of violence, which simultaneously touches upon the articulation of family ethics. A husband's violence against his wife and a father's violence against his daughter—two familial roles and two forms of violence—collectively dismantle the defenses of women, both bodily and psychologically. In the film, the direct consequence of domestic violence is that the mother becomes hearing-impaired and disabled, and, unable to endure the father's voyeurism of his daughter bathing, commits homicide and is imprisoned. Ji Ze, the daughter, is thereby forced into the status of a "social orphan." At the same time, traumatic memories of violence originating in the family and enacted by men create obstacles for her when attempting to participate in social life.

It becomes evident, therefore, that the ethics of familial affection exert the most immediate influence on youth. The stability of the family environment and the healthy enactment of familial roles are closely tied to youth's social cognition and psychological development. Thus, the construction of familial ethics stands as the very frontline in addressing the issues of youth growth.

2.2 Youth and Education: The Ethics of Campus Education

Education is also one of the important representations in the process of youth growth, as it is concerned with shaping the correct worldview, outlook on life, and system of values for young people. The campus thus becomes the concrete space for youth development and the formation of character. At the same time, the campus is also the most frequent and effective place where young people come into contact with and engage in social relations. This is manifested not only in the teacher-student relationships formed between school members and youth, but also in the emotional interactions among the youth themselves—the latter precisely becoming both the content and one of the effective pathways through which the former is presented and examined.

Luo Luo's *Cry Me a Sad River* vividly presents the relationship established between youth and the campus, exposing the problem of bullying that occurs in schools. The campus, which ought to be a cultural space guiding and educating youth toward positive growth, instead becomes marked by groups engaging in violent behavior and the embryonic formation of violent spaces. Yet what is more incisive in Luo Luo's cinematic language is its focus on tracing and articulating the agents of violence, which is manifested in two ways.

On the one hand is the shifting of positions between perpetrators and victims in school bullying, where bullying emerges as "the weak against the weak." In the film, Tang Xiaomi transforms from the bullied object into the bullying subject. Rather than reflecting upon the suffering caused by enduring violence, the weak seek out someone even weaker to perpetuate the violence. Thus, what we need to consider is the continuation and transference of school bullying.

On the other hand is the grafting effect and reflection of school bullying with educational misconceptions. The film designs two sets of contrasts: the first is the juxtaposition of the so-called top student Qi Ming and the poor student Gu Senxi. When the heroine Yi Yao suffers and resists school bullying, the attitudes of the “excellent” and the “inferior” toward violence diverge into “endurance versus resistance,” thereby forming the discourses of the “good-natured person” and the “I am also a person.” Hence, the labeling of “excellent and inferior” renders the hierarchical identities on campus absurd. The second contrast lies in the principal’s attitude toward school bullying. As a superior figure in the campus power structure, the principal holds effective discursive authority. The film depicts a scene of the principal’s reprimand. The principal’s discourse reveals an obvious hierarchical classification of students, with “excellent = model” and “inferior = perpetrator” as a binary cognitive pattern—arguably another hidden manifestation of school bullying.

Thus, school bullying is constituted both by acts of violence among youth themselves and by the grafting of educators’ differential recognition of youth. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White note in their interpretation of Bakhtin’s thought: “Carnival, in part, is both a social and a narrative form, in which social hierarchies and power structures surrounding ‘high’ and ‘low’ status are often temporarily inverted through parody, with the purpose of subverting order and making what is serious within the social order appear comical and ridiculous.”[7] From a certain perspective, the principal and the youth perpetrators of school bullying form a kind of carnivalesque of power discourse. The normal structure of knowledge and power within the campus is deconstructed and reconstructed into a confrontation between groups of perpetrators and victims of violence. As a result, the seriousness and academic rationality of the campus are called into question, producing an absurd campus landscape.

Moreover, whenever school violence occurs in the film, it is always accompanied by mocking laughter, which constitutes a celebratory carnival. When explaining “the laughter of the carnival,” Bakhtin stated: “It is not the reflection of an individual upon some isolated ‘comic’ event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. ... Carnival laughter is ambivalent. It is cheerful, light, and unrestrained, yet at the same time it is sarcastic, mocking, and derisive. It both praises and denounces, buries the old in death and at the same time revives in new birth.”[5] Bakhtin’s notion of “carnival laughter” manifests effects of transgression and ambiguity; that is, while it raises attitudes of critique and suspicion, it also becomes complicit—an expression of the relativity of carnivalization. The laughter of carnival under the discourse of violence in the film precisely blurs the identities of critic and accomplice. Whether in the principal’s collective reprimand or in the final dialogue between Yi Yao, who takes the blame for Gu Senxiang’s death, and the entire group of violent peers, the campus subject and the violent space are transformed into an equivalence that spans from spatial to cultural connotations. Yet even within the mire of violence and the discursive confrontation between perpetrator and victim, one can still discern forces and hopes of reflecting upon violence and rescuing the victims (such as Gu Senxi, the homeroom teacher played by Ren Zhong, and the female bully who engages in self-reflection). This not only fully interprets Bakhtin’s cognitive relativity of carnivalization, but also urges us to reflect upon the campus and education.

Another dimension linked to campus and education is the issue of depression among university students, which is also one of the major current focuses of the Ministry of Education’s work on the

mental health of enrolled college students. Director Luo Luo not only pays attention to external or collective acts of violence, but also focuses on the dimension of youth psychological trauma. The End of Endless Love addresses university student depression only as a pathological manifestation, while what truly needs to be uncovered are the underlying causes of depression. Indeed, in exploring the causes behind the heroine Ji Ze's depression, the film reveals a variety of personal experiential aspects, pointing to the combined effects of family, employment, internet culture, and other factors. What seems to be highly individualized experiential expression actually possesses universality and typicality, as the psychological problems of contemporary university students largely stem from these key issues.

Thus, how campuses and educators discover the psychological problems of university students, how they can most effectively guide students in relieving psychological stress, and how they can construct a healthy and stable emotional state are all essential aspects of campus and educational work. Looking at recent news cases concerning university students' mental health in society, since 2019 multiple tragedies of student suicides caused by depression have occurred in Chinese universities. From this perspective, the task of providing psychological counseling for young university students is indeed urgent.

2.3 Youth and Employment/Internet: The Ethics of Social Profession / The Ethics of Online Ecology

Since the release of *The End of Endless Love*, a large number of critical voices have emerged, focusing on the accusation that the film borrows the topic of youth depression while in fact narrating a youth love story with a touch of magical realism. I share the same sentiment, yet it should be noted that in this relatively concise film, Luo Luo also pays attention to the many predicaments contemporary youth face when participating in social life—problems that have long existed but have not received sufficient attention.

One of the issues touched upon in the film is the employment problem faced by art students. The employment rate has always been one of the important indicators in the evaluation of universities, directly influencing the degree of social recognition that higher education institutions receive. However, the most crucial subject of employment should be the youth themselves: how they understand employment, how they choose their careers, the anxieties, helplessness, and even emotions of anger and sadness that arise during the process of employment—these may in fact be the true focal points deserving attention.

Within the discourse on employment, there is also a particular group of youth worth focusing on, namely art students. Due to the specialization and niche nature of their majors, the problems they encounter in the employment process appear more complex and uncontrollable. *The End of Endless Love* highlights precisely this employment issue of art students. Taking Ji Ze, a folk-music major, as an example, music and arts students, when facing employment, to a large extent expect financial support to continue their professional development, but this expectation quickly gives rise to related social problems. As depicted in the film, when the music art student experiences sexual assault, an implicit exchange emerges within the social discourse framework of employment between “body” and “opportunity,” and such improper exchange relationships are becoming a social representation of the connection between youth and employment. Therefore, when discussing the issue of youth employment, the expansion of focus to the specificity of certain groups of subjects has become something that can no

longer be ignored.

Another magnified issue is the impact of the online environment on youth, manifested in the ethical problems of the online ecology caused by cyber violence. With the updating of new media and the development of online data, the internet has increasingly become a platform for youth to conduct social interactions. From moving out of real society into the virtual world, the internet age, while demonstrating the progress of technology, also reveals significant “side effects.” As Baudrillard argued about the “hyperreality” of simulacra, the problem it generates is that “in consumer society, reality is replaced by the ‘hyper-reality’ of codes. The validity of ‘external reality’ is abolished.”[7]What emerges in the current internet era is that cyber violence is a virtualized form of verbal violence, which can easily evolve into a collective pattern of verbal attacks. The greatest hidden danger of virtual time and space lies in the one-sidedness of cognition regarding online events, especially in the context of self-media, where conflicts in language arise when personal perspectives diverge from collective discourse. In the film, when Ji Ze becomes a self-media internet celebrity and livestream host, her audience consists of a wide range of online users. There is a convergence between catering to the aesthetic demands of viewers and fulfilling company performance metrics, yet for the self-media producer herself, the environment is unfriendly. Terms such as “eye-catching,” “hype,” “catering,” and “passing off the false as true” become high-frequency, irrational vocabulary within internet culture, and the problem they create is the discursive orientation of online communities.

When online verbal violence becomes a form of collective cognition, for self-media hosts it means being subjected to the threat of cyber violence. The popular term “social death” precisely interprets the consequences produced by online verbal violence. This, in turn, not only raises problems concerning the ethical ecology of the internet, but also exerts significant impacts on the psychological health of youth and their cognitive engagement with the online world.

Based on the above analysis, it can be seen that Luo Luo’s three films all focus on youth, each presenting the problems of physical and mental health encountered by young people in middle school, university, and after entering society. It can be observed that the growth experiences of youth in these films all involve the issue of “discourse.” So-called discourse, although defined as a form of linguistic practice, takes on the function of managing power relations among people when it circulates and is applied across different groups. As Foucault emphasized in his elaboration of the concept of discourse: “Language does not simply belong to the forms of power embodied in institutions; the language of specific discourses is an expression of that power and those politics, just like numerous imagined and symbolic expressions. ... Human subjectivity and identity themselves are products of different discursive configurations, the result of the subject entering into language—a language that is always permeated with, saturated with, power, politics, culture, history, and the ideological residues of metaphors and codings organized through particular relations and networks.”[7-84]At the same time, he also pointed out: “The network of discourse is used to express the social and cultural relations between power and knowledge.”[7-85]It is thus evident that discourse, in its articulation and in the networks of interpersonal and cultural relations it constructs, is closely connected with power. In all three of Luo Luo’s films, the associative relationship between knowledge and power is revealed to have a profound impact on youth development. When young people enter public institutions and social

contexts, the problems they face are multifaceted, and these also demonstrate the direct encounter between power discourse and youth.

3. “Virtual Imagination”: The Possibility of Healing within Filmic Discourse

Through an examination of Luo Luo’s three films, it is evident that the problems of youth growth are constantly intertwined with the external environment, involving issues of ethics, education, family, and more. One of the functions of cinematic language is to trace problems and reflect phenomena; once the camera captures such problems, the task the director assigns to film points toward attempting to resolve them. Thus, after revealing the multiple facets of contemporary youth growth problems, Luo Luo unfolds the imaginative possibility of healing.

From the perspective of cinema’s healing function, in *The Last Woman Standing* the intensity of social challenges faced by young people in the workplace is not particularly high. As a youth group equipped with a complete knowledge system, they possess independent and autonomous plans for career and life. Therefore, the film does not present much intergenerational conflict, but rather focuses more on the views of young men and women regarding marriage and love in the workplace. *Cry Me a Sad River* exposes the realities of the campus not only through conflicts among students, but also through the power relations between superiors and subordinates within the campus. The essence of school bullying is the manifestation of discursive hegemony; when such hegemony is not deconstructed, tragedy cannot be brought to an end. The film pushes the tragic trajectory forward until the very end, when the heroine Yi Yao commits suicide by jumping into the river, at which moment all discursive hegemony is temporarily dissolved. Yet the ending of the film is bleak: Yi Yao “reconciles” with the campus, but such reconciliation is built upon her hazy youthful affection with the male lead Qi Ming. In addition, Gu Senxi’s transfer to another school presents a phenomenon of “youthful departure.” Thus, all forms of “reconciliation” are connected with emotional “avoidance and transference.” The poetic quality of the cinematic language nevertheless reflects the helplessness of youth under the real conditions of campus and society, where disadvantaged groups—even if they do not succumb to death—still find it difficult to transcend the suppression of discursive hegemony.

It is evident that Luo Luo’s first two films do not dwell much on the representation of psychological healing for youth, but rather focus on presenting phenomena. *The End of Endless Love*, however, expresses itself quite differently: while portraying the dilemmas of youth growth, it also attempts to carry out explicit acts of rescue for the youth subject. First, in terms of the film’s formal choices, it rejects the conventional narrative of youth stories and instead incorporates elements of magical realism, presenting the model of mutual rescue between aliens and human beings through the youth subject. In particular, the passageway to the alien planet is depicted as a beam of intense white light, through which the discursive expression (imagination) of “light and hope” and the mythological structure of “saving/being saved” (reality) are accomplished. Under this surreal discursive expression, the problems of youth are imaginatively deconstructed.

If “youth mutual aid + magical realism” is regarded as a narrative mode of youth films, then the specific acts of healing in the film are expressed through the connection between “voice” and “happiness.” “Whether one is happy or not” becomes the landing point after the concretization of youth’s comprehensive problems. The content of youth mutual rescue revolves around two central foci: the “reasons for unhappiness” and “how to be happy.” “Voice” functions as a kind of superpower that

accomplishes the emotional linkage between aliens and humans. Although the content conveyed by “voice” is an illusory lie, it nonetheless points to a healing function of emotion, focusing on the courage and strength that human beings need at their most vulnerable moments. At the same time, it is important to note the particularity of “voice”: it is received through the auditory sense as abstract linguistic content. As Lacan remarked, “Language does not describe what is present”[7]. The content of “voice” points to an imaginative identification between the expressive subject and the receptive object. Thus, this highly symbolic “voice” becomes an important pathway for youth to attain temporary healing. We should recognize that the essence of “voice” actually originates from the inner monologue of the afflicted youth—a form of self-consolation and self-expectation. The intervention of the alien figure renders this symbolic imagination reasonable and vivid, and the externalized presentation of the inner monologue more directly reveals the youth’s inner struggles and emotional appeals.

The narrative mode has enriched the ways in which youth films tell stories, yet the greatest selling point of youth films still lies in the presentation of youthful romance. Compared with the magical imagination that employs devices such as superpowers, the romantic coloring of youthful love more readily satisfies the audience’s emotional appeals and achieves the effect of empathy. Youth romance also serves as an important pathway for healing the predicaments of young people. Whether it is the ambiguous youthful friendship in *Cry Me a Sad River* or the cross-temporal youthful love in *The End of Endless Love*, both rely on the power of emotion to achieve reconciliation with real-life contradictions and tragic memories, thus accomplishing a fusion of romanticism in theme and nihilism in connotation. In the films, the healing and salvation of the real traumas of youth growth are achieved through two forms—youthful romance and superpowers—both of which deconstruct problems and reconcile emotions. Yet this imaginative self-healing precisely further reflects the “predicament” within the dilemmas of youth growth.

Overall, the healing function manifested through filmic images and cinematic language is saturated with utopian imagination: the cruelty of reality can only be resolved or transferred through certain forms of superpowers. Such healing further highlights the impossibility of true self-healing and instead points toward the demand for constructing a healthy social order and improving the system of social ethics. Combined with the state’s attention to youth growth issues and the corresponding strategies implemented in the Medium- and Long-Term Youth Development Plan (2016–2035) issued in 2016, this sufficiently reflects the state’s sensitivity and specificity in its long-term planning for youth development.

4. “From Images to Reality”: Reflections on Countermeasures Related to Youth Growth

Youth have always been the focal point of national development, and their presence is ubiquitous throughout the developmental course of China’s modern and contemporary history. As a vital force in social development, youth—amid the process of socialist modernization—face new forms, new stages, and new demands of national development. Accordingly, expectations and concerns for youth have become increasingly focused. In particular, the promulgation and implementation of the Medium- and Long-Term Youth Development Plan (2016–2035) indicates that the state has recognized the existence of pressing problems in youth-related work that remain to be solved.

This long-term plan for youth development pays close attention to strengthening youth ideology, emphasizing the importance of socialist core values in building the ideological and cognitive systems

of young people. Notably, the plan also focuses on the potential predicaments that may arise in the process of youth growth. For example, it calls for strengthening the construction of both physical and psychological health for youth; it emphasizes attention to youth social/practical education, in which the observation of education inevitably entails reflection on the campus and educational environment; it points out the contradictions and difficulties in youth employment, and while removing barriers to employment, it also encourages youth to actively pursue entrepreneurship and provides policy support for innovation; and, after youth enter social life, as pressures from work and life increase, it underscores the necessity of guaranteeing support for youth in areas such as marriage, family, and social welfare. From these various forms of social security and humanistic care directed toward youth at different stages, it becomes evident that the state has undertaken comprehensive planning and advancement in work related to youth growth and development.

Concerning the specific issues of youth growth and participation in social life, the Long-Term Plan points out detailed directions of work: “Concerning the health of youth: (1) Improve the physical health level of youth. (2) Strengthen youth mental health education and services. (3) Improve the health level of various youth groups. Do a good job in the prevention and treatment of occupational diseases among youth, and greatly reduce the incidence rate of occupational diseases among employed youth. Pay attention to the health conditions of migrant youth workers entering cities, and carry out health monitoring. (4) Strengthen youth health promotion work.”[6]

The Long-Term Plan starts from the youth as the subject and comprehensively pays attention to the issues of youth physical and mental health. The plan focuses on the description of “campus diseases,” as well as problems arising on campus such as natural disasters, disease calamities, and internet traps, and it sets requirements for the response capacity and professional teams of schools, almost constructing youth physical and mental health and campus/education into a relationship of equivalence. In fact, there are many factors that endanger youth physical and mental health, and only by tracing back to the roots can the right remedy be applied; attention to youth health also requires detailed analysis and responses. Of course, in terms of youth employment and marriage, the Long-Term Plan also puts forward corresponding ideas and guiding opinions, the commonality of which lies in the regulation of the overall direction of development.

In connection with the film texts discussed in this paper, although youth growth problems take youth as the subject of occurrence, the most important influencing factors are still the family, campus, and internet. The state’s planning for youth development has realized a comprehensive coverage of youth growth issues, with a broad scope, grasping the main contradictions, and not overlooking the subtle problems that threaten youth health. At the policy level, it has indeed achieved holistic planning and attentiveness toward the problems of youth growth. However, in the Long-Term Plan, an excessive focus on the youth subject may in turn neglect attention to those groups or factors that directly affect youth development. In fact, Luo Luo’s three youth films provide us with great inspiration, offering new perspectives for refining the analysis of youth growth issues.

First of all, when discussing the relationship between campus/education and youth, we often mechanically take youth as the focus. However, the problem is that the main members constituting campus/education are not only young students, but also educators, and the latter are power holders in

the division of social functions. This group has a huge influence on young students. Therefore, the construction of a healthy campus environment should not only target youth students from a one-dimensional perspective, but should also include the promotion of educators' professional ethics and professional conduct. Educators are not only the ones who resolve doubts in the professional field of youth, but should also be the guides for their mental health. Therefore, we should strengthen two major requirements for educators: on the one hand, attention to the construction of educators' own mental health. Before realizing professional skills, educators should first be independent individuals. Therefore, as human subjects, they may also have mental health problems, especially in recent years, as the occupational pressure of campus educators has been increasing day by day. The phenomenon known as "young teachers dying early" occurs frequently, making stress-relief work for campus educators an urgent task. On the other hand, re-education concerning the professional function cognition of educators. In recent years, there have been no shortage of news reports about campus incidents caused by educators, especially sexual assault cases and the shift of teacher-student relationships toward a "mercenary/long-term hired laborer" type, which has aroused heated discussion and criticism in public opinion, fully reflecting the urgency of education in professional ethics and conduct. In addition, correction of educators' consciousness of power is needed, namely the eradication of bureaucratic thinking in education, especially the construction of invisible high/low classes based on the family financial strength of young students. Particularly in universities, the bureaucratic trend of student cadres has even gradually appeared (joining the Party and running for student cadre positions becoming political capital for employment), which is undoubtedly closely related to the administrative mechanisms of campus education itself. Third, vigilance is needed against labeling and diverting students on the basis of academic performance. The construction of social identity is not in itself difficult, but the harm it causes to youth psychology and self-confidence is significant. When the identities constructed for young people need to be deconstructed, it is already too late, because what we are facing are concrete persons, not abstract concepts and phenomena.

Secondly, the problem of youth (juvenile) crime caused by campus bullying largely originates from the absence of the original family and the discursive system of campus hegemony, which can be most easily observed in the two films *Better Days* and *Cry Me a Sad River*. When entering the discursive dimension of the campus, bullying is also a manifestation of hegemonic discourse. As Gramsci defined hegemony: "The guidance of knowledge and morality... its main constructive elements are consent and persuasion. It can be said that a social group or class plays a hegemonic role, causing the whole society to be filled with the cultural and ideological belief system it has established."^[7] Starting from the campus youth subject, young people construct different interest groups on the basis of their own moral systems and knowledge structures, forming two major aspects of youth (juvenile) criminal behavior: criminal behavior in which youth are simultaneously both perpetrators and victims. The former is manifested as campus bullying incidents, while the latter is manifested as various crises and predicaments within the processes of family, campus, internet, and social employment. Therefore, attention to the problems of youth growth cannot only focus on the youth subject itself, but also needs to extend to the groups that are closely related to youth.

Secondly, the regulation of the online environment and the new media ecology is imperative. With the

rapid development of technology, the environment in which young people receive information has shifted from the real world to virtual space. The near “fast-food” style information era, while expanding horizons, has also brought challenges to youth. In recent years, the rise and development of self-media streamers and short video culture have brought opportunities to young people, but have also bred the problem of cyber violence. In the face of online verbal violence, the construction of psychological defenses among youth is of primary importance, and the regulation of the online ecology must not be neglected.

5. Conclusion

As a young director, Luo Luo tells the stories of youth through youth films, discovering the crises and predicaments in the process of youth growth, and attempting to identify the root causes of these problems. With the notion of “the films of youth, the youth of films,” she discovers and pays attention to young people, while the perspectives reflected are indeed the problems that exist and are being enacted in contemporary society. Attention to the youth group is an important component of national policy. Youth have become an important indicator and realizing subject in creating and reflecting the cultural soft power of the nation. The saying “When the youth flourish, the nation flourishes; when the youth are strong, the nation is strong” is clearly no longer just a stereotypical slogan of cultural propaganda, but has become a concrete reality of youth as an important subject in cultural construction. General Secretary Xi Jinping, in his speech during an inspection at China University of Political Science and Law, stated: “The future of China belongs to the youth, and the future of the Chinese nation also belongs to the youth. The ideals and beliefs, spiritual condition, and comprehensive quality of the young generation are an important embodiment of a country’s vitality for development, and also an important factor of a country’s core competitiveness.”[7] When emphasizing the linkage between youth development and national rejuvenation, greater attention is paid to the cultivation of youth ideals, spirit, and quality, and these precisely point to the issues of youth physical and mental health. In connection with the state’s planning and attention to the health problems of youth growth, it can be seen that youth have always been under the gaze of society, while youth issues still have a long way to go.

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