

## Literature Review

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### A Literature Review on Structural and Cultural Reasons of the “Early Love” Taboo and its Diminishment in Recent Years

“Zao Lian”(Chinese word: 早恋), Chinese term of puppy love, has been a unique taboo in Socialist China from 1950s to early 2000s. Although often translated as puppy love, the more direct translation of “Zao Lian” is early(Zao) love(Lian), or premature love. Early love, in China, is most commonly defined as dating or having a love relationship before college. From late 1970s to early 2000s, parents and teachers spare no efforts in preventing and suppressing early love; some schools suspend or even dismiss young lovers; policy makers issue strict censorship on arts and literatures containing themes of early love. In recent years (since late 2000s), however, there is an increasing tolerance on puppy love in the Chinese society. This literature review will focus on two categories of past papers and how they relate to my research: the ones that look into historical or structural reasons for the formation and development of this taboo, and the ones that reflect changes in recent years.

Yubin Sheng, Scholar at Georgetown University, in *Too young to date! The origins of zaolian (early love) as a social problem in 20th- century China* (2015), examines the factors that lead to this strong opposition from both “Moral and Ideological” and “Structural/Institutional” perspectives. Shen argues that Chinese opposition to early love stems from at least the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (pp. 90), and that traditional Confucian culture, the Neo-Confucianism in particular, plays an important part in opposition to early love, since the Neo-Confucianism forbids contacts of single men and women and emphasizes marriage through parents’ arrangement (pp. 90). However, Neo-Confucianism, instead of opposing having a love relationship during certain stage of one’s life,

rejects the idea of romantic relationship completely, and therefore cannot provide a solid explanation for the Chinese negative attitude towards love relationship of teenagers after 1949s, when forced marriage by parents was forbidden by the law. Sheng's structural and institutional explanations, however, provide some insights on the factors that affect Chinese society's attitude early love. These explanations will be discussed later and will be quantified in my research.

In *Rethinking Sexual Repression in Maoist China: Ideology, Structure and the Ownership of the Body*, an article cited by Shen, Everette Yue Hong Zhang (2005), suggested that administrator in the Maoist era executed "no dating rule" partly because of the employment system. From Maoist era to early post-Maoist era, there was no free labor market, and young graduates from school must obey to the assignments. Couples could be assigned to locations far away from each other; although they were required to obey "revolutionary needs", couples who were separated, in reality, would strive to switch work units (the assigned office) (pp. 8). Therefore, Zhang argued that, the purpose of forbidding early love was to reduce the mobility of labor force between work units and to secure the proper functioning of the work unit employment system (pp. 8). While changes in employment system will not be the main focus of my research, my research will incorporate the idea that economic structure or economic situation would be one of the structural explanations, and will examine the difference in attitudes toward early love nowadays based on different economic situation. Specifically, my examination on different economic situation could involve differences in attitudes in urban and rural areas, visualized by head maps.

Shen's article also examines structural reasons for the Socialist China's antipathy towards China, but Shen primarily focuses on three institutional purposes of preventing early love: the prevention of early marriage, the control of fertility rate, and the exam-heavy education system (pp. 93). Through a comprehensive literature review, Shen demonstrated that from 1950s to early

1980s, the main concern of early love was early marriage, and such concern not only apply to students but to all the young men and women in the country. The *Marriage Law of 1950* raised the legal age of marriage of men and women to 20 and 18 respectively (pp. 95). Shen argued that the two terms “early love” and “early marriage” was combined until the early 1990s, and that the effort to prevent early love was, in fact, the effort to prevent early marriage, since early marriage was seen as not only harmful for health but also harmful for the nation at that time (pp. 95). The Chinese society became more strongly against early love and early marriage after 1978, when One Child Policy was implemented. Shen stated that the repression of early love was indeed a powerful enforcement of policies that eradicate early marriage and control overwhelming childbirth rate, and that as practices of early marriage and uncontrolled birth rate were gradually diminished, early love became the only social problem among the three “early” practices (pp. 97). Like Zhang’s study, this article is also a survey and analysis through past articles and documents. In my research, I will quantify the two structural factors, marriage and childbirth, by practicing statistical analysis on marriage rate and total fertility rate data in China since 2000s, and use computational tools to inspect their relationships with the change of attitude towards early love.

Another institutional factor considered by Shen was the education system and policies on education. The compulsory education, introduced in 1986, required that all children and teenagers of school ages attend to school (pp. 97). Therefore, the opposition against early love became a means of preventing dropouts from schools and of increasing education rate in China. Since then, the target of early love switched from uneducated rural youth to teenagers in schools (pp. 97). Another article demonstrating the change of attitude towards early love also focuses on the education. According to Jie Wang, author of *Puppy love no longer taboo* (2013), a newspaper article from *Shanghai Daily*, parents and teachers in middle school and high school start to view

early love positively, arguing that early love can be sweet memories and motivation to work hard towards exam, and that adolescence should be more than just exams and piles of homework. The author implied that the cultural reason for this attitude change is that those parents and teachers had bad experience of being forbidden from early love and being controlled and punished by their parents and teachers, and thus more sympathetic towards the new generation of teenagers, but did not provide further structural reasons for this shift in attitude. However, this article implies that the exam score, while still important, gradually ceases to be the one and only core of education in China. Therefore, part of my research will be treating the influence of change in education system in China, and will use the data of Chinese students studying abroad each year, since studying abroad indicates the diversification in forms of education.

Another study that reflects the changing social norms of early love is *Love and Sexuality of Chinese Teenagers: A Random Sampling Based on Census of populations aged 14-17, 2010*, by Suiming Pan and Yingying Huang (2015). Although this study focuses more on sexuality and physical relationships of teenagers, it uses computational tools such as binary logistic regression, to analyze the influence of difference in urban and rural area, the level education and the presence of sexual education at school (pp. 58, Table 6). The data from this study comes from computer-based surveys that were completed by the participants when no one else was present. While those were not online digital surveys, they were computer-administered surveys, adopted a combination of closed and open questions, and used lying-detecting techniques. This article justifies the importance of using computational tools in sociology researches in love relationships of teenagers. Besides the computational tools, this article also demonstrates a more open attitude towards love relationships and sex among urban teenagers with higher level of education and sex educations in

schools (pp. 58), which motivates me to look into urban-rural difference and education systems when I study the structural reasons that bring about changes in attitude.

Past literature reviews on the development of the “early love” taboo provide some structural factors to quantify and to examine in my research, while surveys on love and sex of Chinese teenagers demonstrate how computational tools could play a significant role in furthering my research.

#### References:

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