

# Discussion on the Generation and Incorporation of Female Subjects in Mirror Double Heroine Films

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**Abstract:** In recent years, films with two female heroines appear frequently. The two female heroines mirror each other and construct the blooming subject in observation. Through the plot of rebellious girl's death, the film makes the subject become a visible social subject in submission. This plot setting reflects the existence of discipline power in the film. Power marks a specific behavior as "deviant," and relies on the public display of the punishment of deviant, as well as realizes the repeated indoctrination of discipline code in the audience through the reuse of the audience's desire of "to be." Audience identity ensures the smooth incorporation of power to the audience subject. The double female master setting seems to give freedom to the role and the audience, but the appearance of this freedom is the locus of power. The audience's deviant viewing may break through in the ruins of the repeated process.

**Keywords:** "Double heroine" films; Subject; Power; Female

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the character setting of "double heroines" has frequently appeared in domestic youth films. Such films mostly focus on women and describe the friendship and competition between the two female images. Lingling Cui divides the setting of double female main roles into four categories: "Twin sisters," "two female roles with similar looks," "dual life \ dual personality of one role fission" and "two roles with different looks"<sup>[1]</sup>. This paper focuses on the fourth kind of role setting. The two female images are different in appearance and personality, and the heterogeneity between them endows them with a mirror dependent relationship. Therefore, it is defined as a mirror double heroine film.

This paper mainly analyzes three recent representative films: *The Left Ear*, *Ne Zha* and *Soulmate*. Ansheng, Bala Li and Xiaobing Wang, as the rebels of the mainstream norms of society, form a mirror structure with Qiyue, Er Li and Xiaodao Li. As the narrative strategy of the film, this mirror structure aims to make them mirror each other and find themselves in the interactive observation. In the mirror structure constructed by twin flowers, they recognize themselves and build their own self-consciousness in the process of staring at each other.

## 2. Self and subject generation in mirror structure

### 2.1. Self-sublation of the other

Staring at the mirror image originates from the lack of individual instinct, which is reflected in the mutual admiration between the two heroines in the film. In *Soulmate*, Ansheng who lacks family care yearns for a warm family of Qiyue, and Qiyue who lives safely and stably also yearns for Ansheng's exciting wandering

life. Twin flowers cannot know themselves, but construct their self-knowledge through the process of imagining themselves as others and referring to others as selves. The essence of the desire to gaze at the other is still the desire for the subject's self. "The self can know themselves only by recognizing and knowing others" [2].

The problem is that the essence of self-knowledge in the psychoanalytic dimension is a misunderstanding, and twins become each other's shadow in observation. Ansheng lived a stable life after Qiyue's death. After Bala Li's death, Li Er also changed her former dress up. In this way, the desire for the other seems to lead to the loss of self. Other narcissistic narcissism on the mirror projects the ideal self on the other, and self-cognition is limited to mirror image and cannot be free. The encounter with the other is indispensable to the construction of self-awareness, but the other must be overcome, otherwise it will make self-awareness in trouble.

Thus, the formation of self-consciousness is a negative and destructive process. The death of the other overcomes the otherness of the subject's own characteristics. The death of Qiyue ended the double misunderstanding in the mirror stage, and Ansheng's personal transformation (from the third person to the first person) marks the completion of Ansheng's self-sublation of the other, and the final landing of independent self-consciousness.

## 2.2. The desire for recognition: The subject construction of alienation

Sublation of the other is not equivalent to complete rejection. "Sublation" is translated as "supersession" or "sublation" in phenomenology of spirit. "It has three meanings at the same time: lift, cancel and retain - although these meanings seem irreconcilable [2]." Butler regards sublation as the "development sequence" of desire, "intake desire, desire for recognition and desire for others [2]." "Intake desire" constructs independent self-consciousness through the death of the other, and "desire for recognition" urges the subject to strive for the recognized subject status. In order to avoid being "killed", the subject has to deliver himself to the external social norms; In order to be recognized, the subject can only obtain the status of existence by succumbing to the mainstream norms of society.

All three films ended the rebel's resistance with death or return. Ansheng, the only survivor, pointed out the rebel's way of life, that is, turning into a tame subject in submission. As Yujue Wang said, "if an individual wants to become the subject and occupy the subject position first, he must first succumb and be dominated and conquered by social norms [3]." Only by accepting the discipline of social norms can individuals occupy the main position recognized by the society and obtain cultural rationality. The desire of "to be" forces the subject to "voluntarily" submit to repressive power and be used by power to "shape a subject in line with normative requirements [3]." The subject is thus reshaped as an alien subject. This dissident construction is reflected in *Soulmate*. At the beginning of the film, Ansheng was asked by a reporter whether she was Ansheng and whether she knew Qiyue. Her answer is thought-provoking. She said:

"My name is Ansheng, but not this Ansheng (in the novel). I don't know Qiyue either [4]." At this time, "Ansheng" becomes a kind of "graffiti name" and "represents the 'virtual' self, which is separated from the spiritual and physical self [5]." In other words, Ansheng established a stable subjectivity on the basis of rejecting the once deviant self. But behind the subject identity is the replacement operation of the individual by the alienated existence. The film implies the alienation in the construction of Ansheng's subject through the pictures of middle-aged Ansheng and the people in the mirror staring at each other.

In the film, "the middle-aged Ansheng takes a self-portrait of the mirror, the camera moves from left to right behind Ansheng, and the image in the mirror gradually changes from Ansheng to Qiyue [6]." the lens turns right and Ansheng appears again. "The real space is Ansheng's body, but the voice outside the painting is the voice of Qiyue: "Wandering Qiyue knows that when she looks back one day, the person

stepping on her own shadow must be Ansheng who has lived a happy life.” The left-right transformation of the mirror image reflects Ansheng’s sublation of the mirror image of Qiyue. Ansheng finally becomes the shadow of Qiyue, and the pursuit of the desire for recognition finally reaches the alienation of the subject.

### **3. Female audience identity and subject editing**

The ultimate direction of film discipline is still the audience, especially the young female audience. Through a series of narrative strategies, the film constructs the female audience’s recognition of narrative and internal value domain, in which the audience subject is incorporated. The construction of subject is exclusive. Therefore, individuals not only reject the existence outside the normative boundary, but also regard these excluded existence as other essential parts of the construction subject. It is in the process of using and conquering these rebels that the double heroine film incorporates and compiles the main body of the audience. The double heroines form a double mirror image with the female audience, and together with the female narrator give the female audience freedom of choice in form. The appearance of freedom obscures the oppressive side of power. Power stitches up the main position through the death of rebellious to realize the incorporation of female audiences.

#### **3.1. Narrative strategy and audience identity**

##### **3.1.1. Dual mirror structure: Audience and double heroine**

The double mirror structure between the audience and the double heroine is the unique feature of the mirror double heroine film. Female audiences are mostly young people who are similar to Qiyue and Li Er in the film and whose realization of self-worth is blocked. The overlapping growth situation and the communication between the people seeing and seen promote the formation of the first mirror, and the screen becomes a mirror for the audience to stare. The audience gazes at their repressed desire through watching the film, and out of deficiency, they yearn for female roles who dare to pursue themselves. The projection of rebellious desire generates a second mirror structure between the audience and the role. In a sense, the screen provides the audience with “double shadow of double shadow of self <sup>[7]</sup>.” which gives birth to a long-term love and despair between the image and “I.” This love originates from the desire to find self, which is narcissism for self-mirror image. The film satisfies the audience’s narcissistic viewing, and incorporates the female subject in the narcissistic gaze.

##### **3.1.2. The adoption of female narrative subject**

This is the uniqueness of *Soulmate*. On the premise of weakening the male perspective, the film uses the female perspective to carry out the film narrative, and the heroine narrates herself, so as to make the film narrative more authentic. The female perspective narrative makes the female role free from male gaze in form, changes from the object waiting for men to watch to the discourse subject with the autonomy of expression, and makes the role’s life choice (such as the final return of rebellious girls) have the appearance of free choice. The false transfer of discourse autonomy gives the audience the illusion of domination and control. In the illusion, the female audience in the mirror structure gives birth to the identity of narration, but also obscures the repressive side of power.

### **3.2. The incorporation of power to the audience**

In his *Youth Subculture and Media*, Bill Ostrober pointed out that “Mass culture, especially its way of media communication, is a key place to exercise hegemony <sup>[5]</sup>.” and “at the same time, it is also an arena for resistance and challenge <sup>[5]</sup>.” As one of popular culture, film is undoubtedly the field in which the ruling power is produced and strengthened. The “death” ending of the rebellious girl in the film shows the power that permeates it.

### **3.2.1. Creation of rebellious or “deviant” labels**

The indication of “rebellion” or “deviance” implies the first operation of power. However, “deviance” is not the essential attribute of behavior, but “created” through strong social control institutions to label minority vulnerable groups as “deviance.” Through the distinction between deviance and non-deviance, people who deviate from the norms are marked as “outsiders”. In other words, deviance is actually “the result of applying other people’s rules and punishing the “offender”<sup>[5]</sup>.” but the film characterizes deviance as the reason why the traitor is punished. With the reversal of the causal chain, power successfully becomes invisible and deviant - punishment becomes the plot flow of “nature.” In this way, the film gathers the audience’s reaction into the preset emotional direction. Deviance as a prerequisite judgment makes the audience acquiesce, and the consistency of emotional response makes it possible for the power to punish and recruit the audience.

### **3.2.2. Performance of public punishment**

The incorporation of rebellious girls in the film appears in the form of public punishment, which in Foucault’s view is “a major ceremony to show the recovery of power.” With the public display of punishment, standardize hegemony and make the audience aware of the infinite existence of power with the body of criminals. “Public executions are not the restoration of justice, but the revitalization of power<sup>[8]</sup>.” Deviant is not only the object ostracized by power, but also the premise of power manifest. Power needs to show its legitimacy by punishing rebellion, and consolidate its central position by rejecting dissidents.

Public punishment is also a ritual to re-install codes in the audience. Through the plot setting of “executing” the traitor, power connects the symbols of rebellion, resistance and punishment in the minds of the audience. Thus, repeated ritual death becomes an obstacle before deviant ideas, reducing the possibility of deviation in the process of audience subject standard reproduction. In a word, through the performance of public punishment for deviants, the discipline power completes the repeated indoctrination of the discipline code to the audience.

### **3.2.3. Reuse of existential desire**

Through the use of the audience’s existential desire, power can be summarized as the rejection of the other and the conquest of the social dead. The rebellious girl in the double heroine film, as the rebellious one, whose ending of “being killed” symbolizes the rejection of the norm to the deviant. The audience has accepted this rejection in identity and maintained its dominant position through exclusivity. For the audience, “only by producing and maintaining the existence of the social dead can they realize and maintain their “social existence”<sup>[3]</sup>.”

The conquest of the rebels who are “social dead” is an attempt to internalize the discipline of power. The three rebellious girls were “killed”: Bala Li and Xiaobing Wang were really “killed,” while Ansheng was reborn in the process of being “socially killed”. The actual “being killed” connects the resistance / rebellion and punishment symbols in the audience’s mind, which is the direct reinjection of the resistance punishment symbols by power to the audience; Ansheng’s “being killed by society” is the further conquest of the dead by power. Through the conquest of the dead one, power makes use of the subject’s desire “to be” again and completes the discipline of the viewing subject. The rebels are shaped into aggressive public enemies by power, and their “death” is in line with the interests of “our group” and recognized by the audience. Identification ensures the power of the audience’s main body.

## **4. Deviant viewing of female audience**

Power tries to incorporate female subjects through various tricks. Does the audience still have the possibility

to resist? The transfer of narrative subject seems to return the freedom of female subject, but this freedom should be at the cost of the freedom of real use of language. The mirror structure seems to give the audience multiple viewing positions, but the plot of the rebel's death has long stitched the audience's dual viewing positions. The expression of female roles and the audience's freedom of viewing are just appearances, which are designed to cover up the operation of power.

The transfer of narrative subject is not equal to the complete freedom of female characters to express themselves. Although the use of third-person voiceover in *Soulmate* provides a favorable channel for publicizing female consciousness and realizing female self-expression. There is no denying that women's autonomy in self-expression is itself a negotiated compromise, at the expense of their right to use their own language. In other words, "a person gives up another freedom while buying one freedom <sup>[9]</sup>."

It is difficult for the narrative subject to get out of trouble due to his alien language, but the female audience has the opportunity to get out of trouble by deviant watching. When talking about the phenomenon of the modern race, Dick Herbdigg said, "the modern race was finally neutralized by 'the opposite cultural forces' and the meaning of exposition was changed by the media." The resistance has disappeared, and only the performance continues. The media controls the style of the modern nationality, and in turn bombards it with its own language, its own symbols and its own images. In the mirror heroine film, "deviant" behavior is dispelled by the media and reduced to a patterned rebellious performance. The patterned narration highly coincides with the audience's viewing expectation, which leads to the occurrence of the audience's deviant viewing.

Deviant viewing means that the audience deviates from the emotional response preset by the film, questions the film narrative, and cannot get the pleasure of watching the film. The stereotyped narration of the double heroine film induces the disconnection of audience identity, which leads to the deviation of viewing. The final death of the traitor appears repeatedly in the film. This plot setting is not so much intended to be recognized by authentic presentation, but rather to re-infuse ideological ritualized performance. The false narrative mode is difficult to resonate with the audience, and the audience's deviant viewing may be able to achieve active resistance in the gap in the process of power reaffirmation.

## 5. Conclusion

The special mirror image structure of double heroine films affects the construction of female subjects as "seeing" and "being seen," and through the power's conquer to the death of the rebel side, it incorporates deviant subject. In this process, the female subject obtains false freedom, and the appearance of this freedom is just a technique used by power to cover the track of its own existence. For the subject ensnared by power, freedom seems to be an unreachable existence. However, there is also a source of audience initiative in submission. The subject takes a second look at the film in the deviation of viewing, which finds a glimmer of vitality for the subject's breakthrough.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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