

Conflict Resolution in Love Triangles: Perspectives Offered by Chinese TV Dramas

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Abstract

This study examines the perspectives on conflict resolution in love triangles presented in Chinese television drama serials. Changes in various dimensions of social life that accompanied the economic reform were presented as the main causes of triangular love relationships including extramarital romance. Regardless of their causes, conflicts were found to be resolved mostly in peaceful manners rather than confrontation through conversations between rivals. The finding was partially explained by the increasing societal tolerance for the violation of traditional values governing romantic and marital relationships. Television as an entertainment medium, though controlled by the state, nonetheless reflects such changes and may unintentionally promote such tolerance.

Love is regarded by some philosophers as “always altruistic, not selfish” (Adler, 1995), which presumably should lead to peace and harmony. However, a romantic relationship can be a potential source of conflicts, which arise “when a difference between two (or more) people necessitates change in at least one person in order for their engagement to continue and develop” (Jordan, 1990). This is especially so if such a relationship is complicated by the involvement of a third party, forming a love triangle or triangular love relationship.

The days are long gone when romantic rivals would challenge each other to a duel to resolve their conflict, but such conflicts continue to remain part of human life and the search for their resolution has never ended. Researchers have developed theoretical models of romantic love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; Sternberg, 1986) and explored the means to maintain marital relationships (Attridge, 1994; Vangelisti & Huston, 1994). But studies of romantic love treat it as an ahistorical and transcultural phenomenon without much consideration to social, political, and economic factors. And few studies focused on cultural specificity in conflict resolution in love triangles. Conclusions of some studies on ethnic differences in handling conflicts in interpersonal relationships lead us to think that cultural differences do exist in resolving conflicts arising from triangular love relationships (Collier, 1993; Cushmen & King, 1985; Krumagi & Straus, 1983; Ting-Toomey, 1986, Ting-Toomey, Trubisky, & Nishidal., 1989). This study approaches the case of China.

In ancient China, no dating or courtship preceded marriage except in cases of secret romance which was often against parents' will and the norms for feudal propriety. And given the practice of rich men taking multiple concubines, stories about conflicts in love triangles were few and not frequently presented in dramatic forms (Lin, 1977; Tsai, 1989).

Things began to change after the founding of the People's Republic and especially after the economic reform started in 1978. With the country's drive for the emancipation of women, no matter how incomplete (Andors, 1983), family structures have changed and so do gender relations (Li, 1989). With greater sexual freedom and flexibility in people's perception of and attitude towards courtship, love, sex and marriage, and with much more open and frequent interactions between the male and female in work places and on social occasions (Brugger & Reglar, 1994), greater opportunities and possibilities arise for extramarital romance and complicated romantic relationships which result in triangular love relationships (Liang, 1997). China's current push for a market economy has further enhanced this trend.

In the capital city of Beijing, divorce rate had doubled in four years between 1990 and 1994 and it was predicted that in the near future one in every five new marriages would end in divorce ("China's current marriage patterns," 1995). Government officials ascribed this phenomenon to two causes: greater financial independence of women and a marked increase in the number of extra-marital affairs. It was reported that more than 70% of the divorces initiated by female spouses were a result of their husbands' extramarital affairs (Brugger & Reglar, 1994), which used to be condemned as "bourgeois" practices but are now tolerable (Faison, 1995).

In addition to extramarital affairs, free competition as the hallmark of a market economy has also resulted in greater individualism of the young, who find in it justification for their free pursuit of love, including chasing after another person's girl or boy friend and cohabiting outside of wedlock. A love relationship is no longer regarded as a result of *yuan* (destined affinity), a Buddhist concept used to explain human relationship (Chang & Holt, 1991), or sharing common ideals according to the Communist philosophy. Instead, love is now considered by many young people in China today as a negotiated outcome of interpersonal relationship, which depends a lot on communication according to some scholars in the West (Chang & Holt, 1991).

This new trend provides an opportunity to examine conflict resolution in love triangles in a broader social context in current China, which is characterized by rapid changes in personal attitudes and social values against a backdrop of reform. Traditional social norms governing the experience of love and the conduct of romantic relationships are no longer clearly defined and are increasingly seen as irrelevant. The Chinese government has lessened its interference in the private life of its people, allowing them greater freedom to pursue their own lifestyles.

How would a society that traditionally favored stability and harmony in all facets of interpersonal relationships handle conflicts arising from triangular love relationships in the current social context? Considering the fact that triangular love relationships could start for a variety of reasons, what are the typical strategies for resolving conflicts arising from them? Are certain methods contrary to traditional Chinese values and norms such as filial piety and women's obedience to men tolerated if not recommended? To answer these questions, this study examines how conflicts arising from love triangles are resolved as presented in Chinese TV dramas.

The complexity of a triangular love relationship and the profound emotional entanglement of the parties involved make such a relationship a popular genre for Western

literature. Many story plots center around such relationships. But triangular love relationships in general and those involving adultery in particular were considered decadent bourgeois practices in Communist China before the reforms, and they were rarely treated as a serious topic in Chinese novels and movies. With current changes in cultural norms and social values, more and more literary and artistic works dealing with such relationships have appeared. Television dramas are such examples.

The choice of TV dramas is made with a consideration of the special relationship between mass media and social reality. Media can be considered as primary molders of society as well as reflectors of it (McQuail, 1983). As reflectors of social reality, media presentation of the resolution of conflicts arising from love triangles has to be realistic and “follow public norms in such matters as tastes and values” (Defleur, 1970). This is especially so when the commercialization process of the Chinese media is forcing them to pay more attention to public concerns rather than Party propaganda (Chan 1993, 1995; Hao & Huang, 1996; Kim, 1987). Chinese TV dramas are a symbolic representation of the current social change (Jiang, 1995).

On the other hand, the media may also “stimulate new forms of behavior that receive widespread social approval” and under certain circumstances, “create new cultural norms” (Defleur, 1970). By highlighting commendable behavior and “bringing deviant behavior into public view,” mass communication performs an *ethicizing* function by strengthening social control over the individual members of the mass society (Wright, 1966). While it has been documented how Western cultural influence filtered through the media has shaped the familial and romantic values of the Chinese people (Chu & Ju, 1993), very limited research has been done on how entertainment media actually reflect such values in the context of economic reform.

China’s television programs broadcast by China Central Television (CCTV), China’s national TV station with an 800-million audience and 87% TV coverage (Jiang, 1995), are closely monitored and censored. The fact enables us to see to what extent certain means for resolving conflicts arising from triangular love are recommended, tolerated or condemned according to the Party as well as the public.

In viewing such special relationship between mass media and social realities, this study aims to examine the Chinese perspective for resolving conflicts arising from triangular love relationships within a dynamic, changing social context through the prism of entertainment media. We acknowledge that a triangular love relationship is mainly interpersonal, but its development and outcome to a larger extent also depend on the social context. Examining the dramatized version of such relationships allows us to observe how they operate in an open system with constant interactions with the larger society. Methodologically, this helps to bridge a gap between studies focusing on interpersonal communication and those focusing on mass communication alone.

Methods

TV dramas broadcast by Channel 1 of CCTV between 8:05pm and 9pm, a prime time slot for entertainment programs, were selected. Because of the popularity of the channel and time slot among the national audience, the programs are more likely to reflect the public tastes and to have an impact on the Chinese audience. In addition, since such programs are more closely watched and censored by propaganda officials, they are also more likely to reflect the government’s attitude towards conflicts brought about by triangular love relationships.

Between July 1992 and June 1995, the first three years after China officially announced its national policy for a market economy, CCTV Channel 1 broadcast a total of 847 episodes from 50 TV dramas during this prime time slot. Of these, the 15 TV dramas (300 episodes) involving triangular love relationships in the context of contemporary China were selected for our analysis. In addition to the detailed, episode-by-episode story description provided by China's *TV Guide*, we watched all the episodes to ensure a "whole picture." The coding of the content was based on both printed description of the drama stories and personal viewing.

Some of these serials show only one case of triangular love relationship and some involve more such relationships. Each romantic relationship in which either two males pursue (love) a female or two females pursue (love) a male was taken as a lover's triangle. Overlapping triangles were counted separately, each involving only three people. Altogether 30 cases of triangular love relationships were identified in these dramas. Using each case as the unit of analysis, we analyzed the people involved in such relationships, various characteristics of such relationships, types of conflicts and methods for resolution.

Specifically, the characters involved in a triangular love relationship were categorized into the intellectual/professional type, the worker/farmer type and a mixture of both categories. Overall treatment of the third party involved was classified as positive, negative and neutral. A note is taken if extramarital affair is involved in such a relationship. Existing marriage or courtship was classified into love-based, non-love-based or transfer of affection if the original relationship had started on the basis of love. The triangular love relationship was also classified into three categories: those started as an open conflict, a hidden conflict, or an open conflict that developed from a hidden conflict. Resolutions were also categorized into various types, including parental intervention, organizational pressure, voluntary resolution, etc. The outcomes of resolution of such conflicts were classified into "divorce (or one party quit)" if the third party did not succeed to tie the knot after the original couple split, "third party succeeded," "marriage or original relationship maintained," and "indecisive." It was also recorded if the parties involved had attempted to use violence, verbal abuses, slander or other irrational means to communicate their emotions or resolve the problem.

Findings: Causes of Conflicts

Before we proceed to an analysis of conflict resolutions, a brief look at the major causes of conflicts in lovers' triangles as presented in TV dramas is necessary.

Conflict between Pursuit of Knowledge and Pursuit of Money

Such conflicts are best illustrated in *Half Building*, in which four young people (three intellectuals and one businessman) entangled in two overlapping love triangles constantly find themselves caught between the pursuits of money and knowledge in the context of economic reform where education may not lead to material payoff. A young businessman wins the heart of a girl with his generous financial help for her father's medical expenses. This enrages his rival, a college graduate who is also fond of the same girl. The two men confront each other verbally, and despite parental persuasion and coercion, the businessman refuses to give up his pursuit. He even has a quarrel with his father. The vexed graduate complains to his mother, "We have all our learning. But what good does it do? The uneducated rich men gamble away thousands of dollars overnight while we haggle for pennies! Now they can even buy love!"

Conflict between Career Aspirations and Familial Roles

With the improvement in women's social status and greater freedom for people to pursue personal aspirations, women's conventional role in the family is challenged. *Half Building* includes a love triangle caused by a married couple's dispute over the issue of career vs. family. Both have reached middle age and are anxious to succeed in their careers. But their baby daughter and household chores demand their time and attention. While the husband maintains that a wife's duty is to attend to the house, the wife insists upon her right to pursue her own career. One of the husband's students, a bright and beautiful girl, falls in love with her teacher. The couple decide to divorce when the wife attains her goal of going abroad to study. The girl's persistent pursuit finally wins acceptance by her teacher, though the story leaves an ambiguous end: the ex-wife invites her ex-husband abroad for a research trip, and upon leaving he promises the girl that he will soon return.

Conflict Arising from Arranged Marriages

Though prohibited by marriage law since 1949, arranged marriages are still common in parts of rural China, especially by poor families hoping to profit from their daughter's marriage and rich families wishing to "buy" an expensive daughter-in-law for various reasons: to satisfy their son's desire for a pretty girl or find a companion for their handicapped son. Such practice is illustrated by two of the three TV dramas featuring rural life: *Shen He Yuan* and *Story in the Village*.

In *Shen He Yuan*, a shrewd father marries his daughter off to the richest man in the village, disregarding her plea that she be wedded to her boyfriend who is poor. The poor young man works for the rich one in order to be close to his former lover after she is married. Verbal and physical fights take place between the conceited rich husband and his poor employee. The cause of these two men's conflict, the unwitting wife, pleads with her former boyfriend to quit the battle, "I am already his wife! It is useless for you to fight!"

Story in the Village runs a similar line, except that this time the girl is married to a dumb husband from the richest family in the village, and her former boyfriend offers himself to be the rich man's son-in-law so that he can live under the same roof with the girl. Therefore, the triangle is out in the open, though no direct, confrontation between the two men. The girl begs her former boyfriend to take his mind off her. Soon after she dies in a storm. Her former lover finally reconciles himself to "fate" and to his own wife.

In neither case does romantic love prevail over the arranged marriages bounded by the power of money.

Conflict between Different Life Goals

A third drama on rural life *Handsome Men and Women* unfolds the story about rural township enterprises around a series of overlapping lovers' triangles. Among six characters, three triangles are formed. The two main triangles involve four unmarried young people: a girl named Li who directs the village factory, her boyfriend Su, a young man named Zhang in charge of the village, and his girlfriend Yu. As the story develops, it shows that the enterprising/ambitious Zhang is more compatible in character with the innovative/brave Li, while Su always opposes Zhang out of envy for his official position. Yu is timid, obedient and virtuous for an ordinary country girl, and she begs Zhang to give up his reform ideals which have brought him many criticisms. "Please, I just want to have a stable life with you. I don't want anything great." Zhang, though fond of her, cannot give up his ideals. So in the end Zhang and Li come together in their pursuit of common goals, while Li's former

boyfriend Su is thrown into prison for having killed his secretary by accident. Yu marries her widowed brother-in-law, who has the same modest expectation for a stable life.

Conflict Caused by Change in Social Status

Little wonder that in China's reform and open era, changes in people's social status are as common as changes in women's fashion. Such changes are often depicted as causes of changes in romantic and marital relationships.

Bleak Road features a love triangle formed by three young people who had been exiled to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), a decade of national turmoil. Later they return to the city under different circumstances. The girl is lucky enough to go to university, and one of the two boys becomes her classmate and suitor, though the one left in the countryside is her original boyfriend. When the two men challenge each other, the proud university graduate's argument renders his rival speechless, "She and I are now on a par. We have common interests and social status. All you have are just a few yellowed pictures of the past, and soon the last tinge of romantic color will fade. You are just back into the city, a mere vendor, and she is a university graduate. How can you two come together?"

Chinese Girls in Foreign Companies features three office girls, all involved in overlapping love triangles. One of them marries her Japanese boss, who divorces his wife, loses his job, and gets beaten up by the girl's former boyfriend. This cross-cultural romance begins with mutual suspicion/attention, turns into a conversation on their shared aspirations, and leads to the final expression of mutual love. In reply to the attempts made by her mother, sisters, and Chinese boyfriend to persuade her against marrying the Japanese man, the girl staunchly defends her action: she has broadened her horizon, and only after knowing her boss does she realize what is romantic love.

Conflict Caused by Non-Love Marriages

A second office girl in *Chinese Girls in Foreign Companies* is caught between her husband of a loveless marriage and her former boyfriend, who is secretly admired by yet another office girl Xiao Su. The husband is framed in a business scandal and sentenced to jail. Despite many verbal fights with her husband before his fall, the wife does not unite with her old time sweetheart, who has expressed his enduring affection. Instead, she goes abroad and leaves the triangle behind. Xiao Su is depicted as idealistic and loving, and upon finding that her "prince of charm" is still in love with his former girlfriend, she quits the triangle at her grandfather's counsel.

Other cases of non-love marriages are shown as justifications for extramarital love that leads to lovers' triangles. The leading characters of *Root of the Imperial City* are a couple of doctors. The husband had married for social status and for his father-in-law - a renowned doctor's heirloom. His male colleague used to be his wife's boyfriend and persists in pursuing her. While the wife remains faithful to her husband whom she does not love, the husband carries on a secret affair with his former girlfriend, has a baby with her, and discloses the truth only after he gets drunk and emboldened by wine, dumbfounding his wife.

Women in Villa features professional women. One of the male characters has married for his mother-in-law's high official status to help boost his career, but he carries on an illicit relationship with his former girlfriend, who inevitably becomes his wife's enemy and the three often engage in verbal assaults. Reconciliation comes when the lover, devastated by the man's unwillingness to sacrifice his marriage for her, is dazed into an accident and, the wife out of sympathy consoles her. The story leaves an indecisive end.

Conflict Caused by Mere Transfer of Affection

A man and a woman might have been in love, and even married, but it is normal if one party transfers his/her love to a third person - this seems to be the message from *This World Will Not Be Lonely* and *Drama Life*. With no personality conflict between lovers/couples, it is the mere transfer of the lover/husband's affection to a third party that forms triangles. In the end, the female characters who lose their love to the third parties manage to accept the change. Out of retaliation, one of them marries her other suitor whom she does not love, thus asserting her value and independence. The other initiates a peaceful talk with her husband's secret love after discovering their affair.

Findings: Resolution of Conflicts

Our analysis of the cases show that dramatized triangular love relationships can fall into two major categories: hidden and open ones. Both types generate conflicts in interpersonal relationships. While the open ones often result in direct confrontations between the rivals, the hidden ones can also result in profound conflicts of emotion and interest among those involved. Once a hidden relationship becomes open, emotional conflicts, which are more personal in nature, can turn into direct interpersonal conflicts.

Findings show that out of 30 love triangles 13 are open from the beginning, 14 go through the hidden stage to become open only at the end, and another three include hidden affection harbored by one party, or rivaling affection by two competing parties who never even get to know each other.

Of the 30 conflicts, 15 end by voluntary resolution (settled among those directly involved), six by parental intervention, two by organizational pressure, one by the elimination of one party from the scene by forces beyond human control, while another six cases leave an indecisive end, letting the audience provide their own answer. So organizational pressure and parental intervention, which used to be the main factors determining the outcome of such conflicts in China (Tsai, 1989), seem to have yielded their place to voluntary resolution of such conflicts, reflecting greater independence of the Chinese in managing their own destiny.

Irrational means are used in only about one third of the cases. In the dramas, physical fights take place between male rivals only, and so do most of the verbal challenges and insults. Women are depicted as less likely to resort to irrational means to settle the conflict. Most of them either listen to parental persuasion (*Half Building*), have a peaceful conversation with their rivals (*Scholarly Entrepreneurs*; *Love Fills the Pearl River*; *Drama Life*; and *Root of the Imperial City*), or quit the triangular relationship without revealing their emotion (*Chinese Girls in Foreign Companies*). Overall, conversation with their husband/boyfriend or their rival is the most common way of resolution sought by the female characters. Only in one case, in *Weathered Beauties*, a "shrewish" wife makes a scene in the office of her husband's former girlfriend by screaming and yelling out her anger. In general, men are definitely portrayed as more violence prone than women in seeking resolutions for such conflicts.

Another notable fact is that in 20 of the 30 cases, the main characters involved in love triangles are urban professionals. Another five cases involve reform-minded farmers. The rest include army officers, bureaucrats, and in only one TV drama are the chief characters factory workers. This seems to conform to the stereotype that the better educated professionals and intellectuals are more "sentimental," and hence can be presented in a greater variety of emotional conflicts and as more resourceful in resolving such conflicts, capable of multiple

techniques of expression. Or, given the fact that the television audience targeted by advertisers are predominantly urban people, the setting should be urban to better appeal to the audience.

To a larger extent, resolution of triangles hinges upon the disposal of the third party. And the way the officially approved TV dramas “handle” such characters reflects the socially tolerated, if not accepted, attitude towards third party intrusion into a romantic/marital relationship. For intertwined triangles, the typical resolution is “regrouping” of the lovers, each finding his/her more suitable mate. So there is no “losing” party at the end. *Half Building* and *Handsome Men and Women* offer such examples. But in most cases a choice must be made between maintaining the original relationship/marriage and letting the third party take over. Evidence shows that nearly half of the cases end with the third party successfully replacing the original lover/spouse. Even in cases involving extramarital love, only six out of 17 marriages are shown as saved. This correlates with the finding that more than half (16) of the 30 third parties are portrayed as positive characters, such as helpers, caregivers, supporters (especially females) of their loved ones, or protectors and rescuers (especially males) of “victims” of loveless marriage or broken romance. Another 11 receive neutral portrayal, i.e. they seem to have been driven by love alone to enter triangular love relationships, with no intention to break up a marriage or love relationship. Only three are portrayed as negative (bent on breaking up a relationship between others), two of whom are mere characters in the background of the drama.

So contrary to the traditional cultural attitude that “ten temples may be torn down but not a single marriage should be broken,” the third parties in these dramas seem to have their well justified presence in the triangular relationships. More often than not they are portrayed as good people whose presence is almost indispensable to their lovers. Then it follows that they are justified in winning their lovers’ affection, which in many cases is transferred from a spouse.

What does this mean? At a macro level, it suggests that as economic reforms caused major changes in all dimensions of people’s life, demanding value adjustment and attitudinal accommodation, the conventional norms and values governing love relationships have also changed, and people are in general more tolerant towards matters such as transfer of affection, extramarital affairs, and divorce.

At a micro and individual level, market economy accords greater social mobility and more opportunities for individuals to pursue their personal goals, including the choice of a life mate. Meanwhile, ideological condemnation on unconventional behaviors has long ceased to exist. For example, a third party intruding into a marriage would not be publicly labeled a “bourgeois element with a corrupt lifestyle,” a typical practice during the days of Cultural Revolution.

The traditional Chinese beliefs in *yuan* (destined affinity or a force bringing people together) and *ming* (fate) seem to play a large part in the resolution of conflicts in triangular love relationships in the three dramas featuring relatively less educated farmers and housewives. *Shen He Yuan* ends with the victim wife of an unhappy arranged marriage remaining with her husband, though her former lover has risen above poverty and courts her. “It is fate,” she says. In *Story in the Village*, after the death of his former girlfriend, the leading male character reconciles his own thinking to the force of fate, “A life time is very long. How can we expect to have everything after our own desire?” A more vivid illustration of belief in *yuan* can be found in *Ebb and Flood*, which tells the life story of a couple separated for forty years, who blame it on the force of fate and the lack of destined affinity.

So it implies that the third party is predestined to replace the leading male character's original lover.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings offer various implications to research on interpersonal conflicts across cultures. First, as a typical setting for high-context communication (Hall, 1976), the Chinese cultural context requires people to use implicit, restricted, evasive, and non-confrontational codes in conflict resolution (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua, 1988). This observation is partially confirmed by our findings. But evidence does not support Barnlund's (1975) claim that concealment of conflict is vital in high-context cultures where little is explicitly conveyed but much is left to conjecture. In most cases analyzed in this study, little effort is made by the parties involved to hide their involvement from those with whom they are in conflict. Does this suggest that the TV dramas are "leading" the change in the public's cultural values? Interestingly, though, in the only case where the leading characters in the lovers' triangle are from a family upholding traditional Chinese cultural values (*Root of the Imperial City*), the hero and heroine adopt an avoidance-oriented style of conflict management and resolution (cf. Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey & Chua, 1988).

Second, the findings show that the style of open competition in managing a market economy has infiltrated the sphere of interpersonal relationships in China, especially romantic relationships.

Third, once conflicts arise from love triangles, the style of management and resolution tends to be non-confrontational, in keeping with the traditional Chinese culture. This phenomenon seems logical in the current context of "value clash" between the new and the old - especially in a **transitional** society like China. But a possible rival explanation is that with the broadening of each individual's horizon of life in swift social changes and greater need to survive in such changes, love or romance in life is less overwhelming compared with the past. If it is not a matter of life or death, why fight it out?

Fourth, virtually none of the "losers" in love triangles is portrayed as incurably depressed or despondent over the result of the conflicts. They just go on with other pursuits of life such as career. With this kind of endings, the TV dramas alleviate the traditional perception of the dissolution of a romantic/marital relationship as a disgrace beyond repair. In this regard, the predominant norms in these dramas show a marked departure from tradition. But at a deeper level, such endings conform to the traditional Chinese audience expectation of a harmonious end to each story - not a linear process of winning and losing, but a synthetic, spiraling process (Cheng, 1987).

Fifth, the resolutions of nearly half of the conflicts with the third party replacing the original lover/spouse are predicated at least partially on the success of the third party in the economic reforms, be it rural township enterprise management or university structural reform. An implicit message seems to be that these heroes (and heroines) who can ride the tides of the reforms will "inevitably" win the hearts of lovers - even those who are already attached to others.

Sixth, parental intervention occurs in quite a few cases, but except for two incidences, the parents' will and wish are not totally obeyed, indicating greater independence of the young people. The two cases in which parental intervention is successful are both set in the rural context, and the daughters are not well educated.

Seventh, a retrospective look at the main social causes of conflicts in triangular love relationships reveals the following pattern: the resolution always leans toward **reconciliation**

- between rivals, between spouses, between rivaling ideals and norms, or even between the character and his/her perception of fate. When the pursuit of money vs. pursuit of knowledge intervenes in a love relationship and causes conflicts, the end result is the recognition that both money and knowledge are important (*Half Building*). Where career aspirations clash with familial duties, a third party willing to sacrifice her career for family soothes the contradiction (*Half Building*). Victims of arranged marriages, especially those who lose their lovers to such marriages, always seem to manage to overcome their personal hatred and find alternatives in life (*Shen He Yuan* and *Story in the Village*). As for those love relationships broken up by disparities between different life goals, each party is shown as finding his/her better partner in the end (*Handsome Men and Women*). Even in cases where the rivals have a physical fight-out, in the end the “loser” still shows good will to his former girlfriend (*Chinese Girls in Foreign Companies*). In love triangles involving marriages motivated by factors other than love, the rivals do not become mortal enemies at the end; instead, they are often shown to be empathizing with each other (*Root of the Imperial City* and *Women in Villa*). Even the seemingly least justified cases of triangular love relationships caused solely by one party’s transfer of affection are solved by rivals through peaceful conversations (*Drama Life*).

Eighth. the study shows that romantic relationships cannot be examined in an isolated manner. It is a social construct. The full variety of conflicts it might involve tend to find manifestation in changing social contexts. And if such conflicts have deeper social causes beyond the interpersonal domain, resolutions of such conflicts are also socially grounded. As conventional values in all spheres of life dissolve in a changing society, people must mentally accommodate for such changes and become more tolerant. The area of romantic relationships (including extramarital affairs) is no exception. Two decades ago, triangular love was condemned as negative in literary works recommended to the youth by the government (e.g. Cong, 1983). Extramarital lovers suffered public humiliation and were disciplined by their work units. But now even the officially controlled national media refrain from passing such moral judgment on those thus involved.

Finally, entertainment media content, such as TV dramas, may not be intended by either the government or the producers to educate the audience with certain norms and values. The primary goal is to entertain. This is especially true for the commercialized Chinese media today. However, one unintended result is that the implicit views and values tolerated in the entertainment media content may contradict those promoted and upheld by government officials. The Chinese government certainly does not promote triangular love relationships; nor does it endorse extramarital affairs. But such stories are part and parcel of the content of “life dramas” depicting social changes in the reform era - at least it was what the greatest majority of these 15 dramas had set out to do. As such, stories of lovers’ triangles may be perceived by the audience as an **integral** part of people’s life in the reform era. What kind of long-term consequences such perception might have on people’s understanding of and attitude towards love and marriage remains to be further explored.

In conclusion, TV dramas in the entertainment media controlled by the Chinese government have by and large presented conflicts in love triangles as the inevitable or “natural” result of larger conflicts, e.g. conflicts between new and old values, and competing social interests. Thus grounded, the management and resolution of conflicts involve few confrontational measures, verbal or physical. Instead, a peaceful, conversational style characterizes most of the processes. Traditional Chinese values such as filial piety and women’s obedience to men are no longer determinants in the resolution of love triangles.

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