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Local Specificity and Everyday Politics of Chinese Postfeminism: Challenging and/or Reinforcing Traditional Gender Norms in Women's Self-Help Culture on Douyin

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Abstract

This study reconsiders the context specificity and significance of Chinese postfeminist popular culture by investigating how women's self-help short-videos on Douyin deliver advice about women's multi-faceted lives. This research complicates the Western hegemonic theories which interpret postfeminism as depoliticisation and undoing of feminism and contributes to the under-discussed field of local specificity of transnational postfeminism. It argues that, Chinese postfeminist self-help culture exerts everyday resistance towards the dominant gender politics and undermines the patriarchal social structure. This resistance gains legitimacy and visibility in the Chinese censored context by engaging with women's issues in more individual and pragmatic forms. Also, Chinese postfeminism's ambivalence and complexity lie at the contradictory strategies of negotiating heterosexual relationships, oscillating between de-centring and rejecting heterosexual romance and commodifying the traditional gender relations as means to material rewards. This oscillation shows the dual presences and interweave of conservative and radical gender values in the contemporary Chinese postfeminism and popular culture. Meanwhile, these strategies reflect the young, middle-class, heterosexual Chinese women's harsh individual struggle to survive and thrive in the neoliberal patriarchal system. Therefore, this study cautions global feminist scholars against unreflexively appropriating Western hegemonic criticism of postfeminism without recognising the systematic obstacle for women to access public collective politics in the specific context.

Keywords: everyday resistance; popular culture; transnational postfeminism; chinese feminism; douyin