

# STUDY ON THE “PUBLICIZATION” OF LOVE IN EARLY 20TH CENTURY CHINA: CENTERED ON DU CHENG SHU&QU JIANG’S LOVE LETTER

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## ABSTRACT

This article attempts to answer the question of "love" and why it has been prohibited from entering the public sphere in Chinese history. This article takes the "Love Letter Incident" as a case study and uses process tracking method to analyze the love letter incident between Du Chengshu and Qu Jiang. In this event, various social groups interacted on this matter, so this article horizontally compared the thinking and self-expression of young men and women in the face of love issues, and vertically explored the premature and delayed disclosure of love issues under the trend of gender equality in China since the early 20th century. The publication of male love letters has forced love writing, which originally belonged to the private sector, to be placed under the spotlight of the public sector of paper media for public evaluation. The examination and evaluation of love issues by various parties in the public sector is a necessary process for private love writing to move towards the public sector. Through various evaluations of love letters, the issue of love has entered the public domain. However, in China at the beginning of the 20th century, the issue of love still faced scrutiny from traditional Chinese gender ethics and morality, making it difficult for love issues to be made public.

**Keywords:** Early 20th Century China, Free Love, "Publicization" of Love, Public Sphere, Feminism in China

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## INTRODUCTION

In traditional Chinese society, sexual morality between men and women often cannot enter the public sphere, and the issue of love has always been regarded as an "informal exchange". However, in late 19th-century China, social changes ushered in a shift in the public-private boundaries of traditional male and female sexual morality. With the modernization of learning from the West, the trend of free love also prompted men and women to try to "publicize" their mutual love interactions. However, "freedom of love" is incompatible with traditional Chinese male and female sexual morality, in which the relationship between men and women needs to maintain a certain distance. In particular, men and women who are not in a marriage relationship cannot hand over items to each other, which is known as "men and women do not touch each other". This idea symbolizes that love between men and women cannot become a formal public issue. In addition, with the entry of Western newspapers and media into Chinese society since the 19th century, newspapers have become a venue for the public to express their views. Due to the public nature of the newspaper venue, people more often perceive its issues as referring to "important issues of the country and society", but neglect that as "citizens", their "opinion" and "love" issues are also subordinate to the country and society. Although China was undergoing a transformation from a "dynastic state" to a "nation-state" from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, China's social transformation was driven by state power, and its social moral norms showed a stagnant situation.

This article is based on Xia Xiaohong's (夏晓虹) article "New Education and Old Morality: Taking Du Chengshu's (杜成淑) Refusal to Concede as an Example", which provides a comprehensive analysis of historical materials related to the love letter incident between Du Chengshu and Qu Jiang (屈疆). Using the three letters between Du Chengshu and Qu Jiang as a basis, this article explores the writing and consideration of love issues among young men and women in the late Qing Dynasty, and further explores the reasons for the alienation and distortion of love issues in the public sphere. In February 1907, during the Spring Festival holiday, Qu Jiang, a student at the Peking Translation School, saw Du Chengshu, a student at the Sichuan Women's School, selling books on the street. Qu Jiang wrote a letter in person, and on the second day, Du Chengshu sent Qu Jiang's original letter to Zhang Qin (章梗), the supervisor of the Peking Translation School. Qu Jiang was subsequently punished with dismissal. The incident of Qu Jiang's letter to Du Chengshu and the original letters between the two were then published in newspapers. Qu Jiang eventually withdrew from school and left Beijing, and Du Chengshu was involved in a controversy with the Chinese Women's Association to clarify her identity. Therefore, this article focuses on the love letter incident between Du Chengshu and Qu Jiang in 1907, and attempts to answer the question of why the issue of "love" between men and women has always been considered "not open to discussion" in China as a "citizen" until the early 20th century. Why did the relationship between gender and public and private boundaries in Chinese society at the beginning of the 20th century not "modernize" along with the transformation of the state and society?

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

Firstly, the current research on gender in China in the early 20th century and around the May Fourth Movement focuses on the exploration of the change of gender morality between the old and new. Yang Lianfen (杨联芬) (2016) and Xia Xiaohong (1995 & 2014) have explored the evolution of gender issues in literary texts since the late Qing Dynasty. Yang Jianli (杨剑利) (Yang, 2021) analyzed the cognition and debate of gender ethics among Chinese intellectuals before and after the May Fourth Movement, and pointed out that the gender writing of male elites in the late Qing Dynasty was essentially a demarcation of the reconstruction of women's virtue. Rebecca KARL (KARL, 2012) explored the dissemination and expression of feminist

thought in China in the early 20th century, and pointed out that women's liberation must be combined with economic revolution, otherwise it will not be able to touch the essence of the problem. However, the author separated men and women in the trend of women's liberation, without explaining the interactive relationship between men and women in the dissemination of feminist thought. Hirayama Nagatomi (Hirayama, 2020) explored the opportunities and characteristics of the family revolution in China in the early 20th century, and the efforts of men to break through the big family system, as well as the role of the family revolution in promoting free love. Xu Huiqi (许慧琪) (Xu, 2008) combed the three debates on old and new sexual morality in the 1920s, pointing out that the process of sexual morality debate is the necessary way to define sexual morality. Zhou Huimei (周慧梅) (Zhou, 2020) analyzed the gender discourse of Zhou Jianren (周建人), showing the speech of intellectuals on gender issues in the Republic of China. Yang Lianfen (Yang, 2014) analyzed the discourse of free love between men and women in novels in the early 20th century in China, revealing the way in which love letters in the novels described intimate relationships between men and women. The author was limited to the level of literary expression and did not analyze the intimate relationships between men and women in social practice. He Yi (何祎) (He, 2012) explored the concept of mate selection among young men and women in the 1920s, but the analysis of the background under the concept of mate selection among young men and women was lacking. Secondly, some scholars have explored the social practice of new and old gender ethics in free love, free marriage, and divorce issues, and conducted case studies on women's voices and practices in the public sphere. Zhou Ning's (周宁) (Zhou, 2015) review of the historical facts of the Han Yang Love Letter incident is helpful in restoring the truth of the matter, but the analysis of male and female discourse in the press field is superficial, and does not reveal the new and old gender ethics considerations of young men and women in the Love Letter issue. Tracy Ying Zhang (Zhang, 2018) explored the Chinese female magician community in the public sphere in the early 20th century, revealing the role of female magicians in shaping the image of women in the public sphere. Xia Shi's (Xia, 2021) article reveals that the adjustment of male and female gender roles among late Qing diplomats was mainly due to practical diplomatic considerations, but it promoted the emergence of the public wife role. However, the author ignored that the public wife role derived from diplomatic activities was still an extension of the traditional "male outside, female inside" concept, and the so-called new women in diplomatic occasions were merely a decoration of male politics, without breaking the traditional gender ethics, and even emphasized traditional gender ethics. Zhuyuan Han (Han, 2023) explored the description of the self-subjective status of Chinese women since the 1920s, but the extent to which the voices of women in the Women's Magazine can demonstrate women's subjectivity is in need of further clarification and differentiation. The above research has been of great help in clarifying the new and old changes in gender ethics in China in the 20th century, but there are not many practical cases of women entering the public sphere, and there is no analysis of the deep-seated reasons why women cannot enter the public sphere.

**The following is a definition of the concept:**

1) "Love":

According to Yang Lianfen's research, the translation of the word "love" (爱) into English as "love" began in the 19th century with missionaries who came to China. In the 1908 English-Chinese Dictionary edited by Chinese Yan Huiping (颜惠庆), the word "Lianai" (恋爱) included "love between men and women" in addition to the broader meaning of "love".

2) "Publicity":

Social entities with differences can engage in open consultations and dialogues in the public sphere to reach consensus and gradually achieve fairness and public interest.

3) "Public sphere":

Every inter-behavioral dialogue promotes the formation of a public group, and a part of the public domain is formed. When behavior entities (including countries) engage in dialogue and interaction on their own interests, issues related to private interests transform into public issues, thus creating an interactive domain that affects the relationships and perceptions between behavior entities.

4) "Private sphere":

A relatively narrow area of privacy, namely the areas of commodity exchange and social labor, as well as private areas such as the family, personal private life, and narrow inner worlds. Society emerges from the exchange market, where all people are transformed into commodities. The exchange market is filled with a variety of producers and laborers, but not with people, but with goods and exchange values.

5) Publicization of "love":

The process of a certain issue entering the public sphere from the private sphere, losing its private characteristics and adding public characteristics, and thus becoming public is a dynamic process. At the beginning of the 20th century, the attempt to break the boundaries of the previously private realm of love issues and enter the public realm was the first step towards the publicization of love issues. The game played by all parties in the publicization process is essentially a debate on whether love issues should have "publicity". The completion of publicization refers to the acceptance of love issues by the public sphere, where they can be reasonably discussed, and thus become public. Failure of publicization refers to the stigmatization of love issues after entering the public sphere, which in turn creates resistance to the entry of other related love issues into the public sphere.

## RESEARCH METHODS & THEORIES

This article uses a quadruple-evidence method to collect and select historical materials. The text of the letters between Qu & Du and others and the text of the letters of the Chinese Women's Association are the first level of historical materials. The news texts written in the field of newspapers and magazines, including textual and image commentary, are the second level of historical materials. The collected works of Zhang Qin of the Peking Translation School and the memoirs of Qu Jiang are the third level of historical materials. The love letters of male students in the campus after the May Fourth Movement in China are the fourth level of historical materials. At the same time, this article also uses the process tracing method to conduct causal analysis on the process of publicizing love issues in the public domain, and reveals the reasons why the publicization of love issues was forced to abort.

First-level data: The text of the letters from Qu and Du and the text of the letter from the Chinese Women's Association

Level 2 data: Text and image reviews in newspapers and periodicals

Level 3 data: The collected works of Zhang Qin and the memoirs of Qu Jiang, both of whom studied at the Peking Translation School

Level 4 data: Love letters from male students in the campus field after the May Fourth Movement in China

- 1) Tracking the interaction process of Du Chengshu and Qu Jiang's love letters
- 2) Analyze how the love letters between Du Chengshu and Qu Jiang went into the public domain
- 3) Tracking how the public sphere responded to the love letter incident between Du Chengshu and Qu Jiang
- 4) Analyze why the issue of "love" failed in the social reform of China

This article attempts to integrate Robert Cox's theory of environmental communication and Pan Yaling's (潘亚玲) theory of international norm generation, and construct a new analytical framework to examine the interactive relationship between social change and the public sphere

(Pan, 2019). Environmental communication is a form of symbolic action in which our language and symbols play a role in creating meaning and actively constructing our world consciousness. Regardless of what "nature" and "environment" are, they are entangled with our human understanding of nature and the way in which nature interacts with itself. Robert Cox noticed the interactive relationship between "structure" and "cognition", but the natural environment is not constant (Cox, 2016). Although we are in the natural environment and construct the knowledge of the natural environment and ourselves, the natural environment on Earth is actually a changing continuum. Behavioral agents and structures need a certain amount of time to adapt to each other and recognize each other, which creates an interactive space, which is Robert Cox's public sphere. However, Robert Cox did not provide a good explanation of the generation mechanism of the public sphere, so this article will expand on this basis.

Pan Yaling's normative generation model is actually a kind of construction of public sphere (Pan, 2008). Pan Yaling's normative generation model is based on Barry Buzan's securitization theory (Buzan, et al., 2020), which believes that the generation of norms is a process of securitization. The so-called "securitization" refers to a process of "threat" being designated and accepted. For example, when a threat is presented as an "existential threat" and requires the adoption of measures that go beyond normal political procedures but still constitute legitimate emergency measures, securitization occurs.

When explaining the generation of international norms, the securitization theory requires the identification of four types of actors: securitization actors who perform securitization operations, referent objects whose security needs to be protected, threat agents, and ordinary audiences. The securitization actors are similar to the advocates of norms; the threat agents are similar to the opponents of norms; the referent objects and audiences sometimes overlap, and they often play a passive role in the process of securitization and norm generation. The generation of international norms often goes through four stages.

Firstly, during the public agenda creation stage, securitization actors or norm advocates will propose a securitization logic and strive to promote the progress of relevant public agendas. To this end, actors must gather like-minded people and form a "securitization operation alliance". Secondly, after entering the public debate stage, in order to shape political pressure, it is necessary to promote the logic of securitization through debate, which requires actors to use "focusing events" to continuously promote the moral and temporal logic of norms. Thirdly, after entering the political debate stage, it is necessary to further compress the issue through a platform to establish candidate norms. Finally, through formal international negotiations, the norms can be concretized, that is, the problem solving methods, behavior regulations, and norm forms can be concretized, and ultimately promote the creation of international norms.

Pan Yaling International norm generation model (Pan, 2008)

**Table 1** drawn by the author

<b>Stage:</b>	<b>Public agenda creation</b>	<b>public debate</b>	<b>political debate</b>	<b>Generate Specification</b>
Functionality	Establish security logic	Popularization of security logic	Establish the norms for candidates	Create a specification
Core Behavioral Body	security actor (Promoter of norms)	Secure audience (Followers of the norms)	Find or create a platform	specification of norms

We can see that Pan Yaling's norm generation is a collective public opinion and public sphere generation mechanism, but it always focuses on the collective structure and ignores the individual's agency. Therefore, we reconstruct it by integrating the characteristics of the collective and the individual. Environmental changes are an objective reality in both man-made

and natural societies, and this was the case for Chinese society from the late 19th century to the early 20th century.

The change of the (social) environment promotes the change of symbolic action of people, so the forces of social change will work together in the private and public spheres. At the same time, there is a process of "publicization" from the private sphere to the public sphere. In order to explain how "publicization" proceeds in the process of social change, this article traces the mechanism of the incident of Du Chengshu and Qu Jiang's love letter.

**Assumption 1:** With the occurrence of social changes, issues in the private sphere have gradually broken the original gender-based distinction between public and private spheres. After breaking the gender-based public-private boundary, symbolic sexual behavior has been impacted. New agendas and social changes have challenged the old moral norms, and the public sphere for this issue has also been formed at this time.

**Assumption 2:** As the issue breaks down the distinction between public and private, issues that originally belonged to the private sphere begin to enter the discussion of civic ethics. At this stage, public debate determines whether the issue can attract the attention of experts.

**Assumption 3:** If an issue enters the stage of expert debate, it represents that the issue is given sufficient attention by the society and the national elite. At the same time, it also indicates that the opportunity for new issues to become new moral norms increases, and the issues of discussion practice and risk will be addressed during this period.

**Assumption 4:** Entering the stage of social moral formation means that the issue has become a new social consensus. This social consensus is recognized by the state and society, and the state and society may ensure the legitimacy of the new morality in the form of a system. After establishing legitimacy, it will be reflected in the changing environment.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### **The blending of old and new in Chinese education in the new century**

In ancient China, women were restricted to the private sphere and were unable to enter the public sphere. Women did not have the same legal status as adult men in the private sphere, and the public sphere excluded women. In the private sphere, traditional Chinese women were required to obey their fathers and husbands before and after marriage, and after the death of their husbands, they were required to obey their sons (在家从父, 出嫁从夫, 夫死从子). "Men take care of the outside world, while women take care of the inside world" refers to men's participation in social and public affairs, while women take care of household affairs. Women in the private sphere are expected to be "good assistants" to their husbands, and they need to focus on the cultivation of their four abilities: morality, speech, appearance, and needlework (four virtues refer to the virtues of women, the language of women, the appearance of women, and the work of women, which refers to morality, rhetoric, posture, and needlework). The traditional discipline of "women without talent are virtuous" deprives women of the right to receive education equal to that of men. "Men and women are not allowed to be intimate" stipulates that women cannot enter the public sphere and participate in social affairs with men. Since the Opium War, the country's doors have opened, and the church school founded by missionaries has pioneered Chinese women's education, breaking the sluggish situation of women's education to a certain extent. The church school has carried out a compromise between Chinese and Western cultures in terms of teaching content, retaining some traditional virtues of women on the one hand, and introducing modern Western courses on the other. The opening of women's schools provides opportunities for women to break through the traditional moral discipline of "three obediences and four virtues" (三从四德), and lays the foundation for women to move from the private sphere to the public sphere.

After discussions among Sichuan officials in Beijing, it was agreed to establish a Sichuan Girls' School in the Sichuan Guild Hall in Beijing (Ching Hua Jih Pao, 1906). Du Chengshu was a

student at the Sichuan Girls' School in Beijing. In April 1906, the Sichuan Girls' School opened its doors. Wang Shanquan (王善荃), Du Deyu (杜德輿), and Sichuan officials in Beijing provided financial support for the Sichuan Girls' School. In terms of public morality, the emphasis on "female citizens" (nǚ kuo min, 女国民) in the Sichuan Girls' School reflects the aspect of women's education that echoes the issue of survival in the era of salvation. In order to enhance the importance and responsibility of female students towards female citizens, the location of the Sichuan Girls' School was set on the site of the memorial hall of Qin Liangyu (秦良玉), a female general of the Ming Dynasty. The establishment of the Sichuan Girls' School was incorporated into the issue of the rise and fall of the nation, and the support of the scholar-bureaucrats for women's education was also an extension of their traditional aspirations of self-cultivation, governance, and peace.

The teaching purposes and school regulations of the Sichuan Girls' School reflect the contradictions between Chinese social gender morality and public morality in the early 20th century. The Sichuan Girls' School's General Regulations were compiled by Wang Shanquan and Du Deyu (Ching Hua Jih Pao, 1906). The diversity of classroom settings and the cultivation of female citizens reflect the modern characteristics of the school. However, in terms of gender morality, the General Regulations continue the ancient Chinese norms of prohibiting physical contact between men and women. The teaching purpose of the school is to teach women general knowledge on the basis of inheriting traditional female virtues. The school curriculum is divided into ten subjects, including self-cultivation, Chinese language, history, geography, abacus, books, handicrafts, foreign languages, music, and physical exercise, which takes into account the multidimensional development of students' morality, intelligence, and physical fitness. However, on the issue of female students' school safety and travel safety, the school upholds traditional gender norms. The Sichuan Girls' School has specific and detailed regulations to ensure the safety of female students when they go to and from school. Teachers and workers in the school are all women, and parents are required to send female servants to take care of students when they go to and from school. The school sends patrols along the way to protect students when they go to and from school. The emphasis on the personal safety of female students in the Sichuan Girls' School is to reduce the opportunities for female students to come into contact with men during their school days and school trips, highlighting the isolation of men and women during the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China. The educational objectives and school safety regulations of the Sichuan Girls' School embody the characteristics of blending old and new. On the one hand, the diversification of curriculum settings highlights the westernized characteristics of the school. On the other hand, the protection of students' personal safety and the separation of men and women are a replication of the traditional Chinese concept of men and women not being intimate.

Although the teaching goals and purposes of the Women's School were mixed with the neutralization and compromise of traditional female virtues, the emphasis on women as citizens was a preliminary attempt to promote women's entry into the public sphere from the private sphere. In terms of gender morality, the Sichuan Women's School strictly adhered to the norms of traditional gender morality. In terms of public morality, women were required to assume social responsibility and become "female citizens". Du Chengshu, a student of the Sichuan Women's School, also embodied the characteristics of mixing Chinese and Western elements in the educational environment of the blending of Chinese and Western cultures. On the one hand, Du Chengshu, who was influenced by the issue of salvation, used rhetoric of salvation to refute Qu Jiang's love letter. On the other hand, Du Chengshu, who was trained in the etiquette of male and female separation, used traditional gender morality of male and female separation to refute Qu Jiang's dating.

In terms of gender ethics, Du Chengshu insisted on the traditional morality of male and female separation. Compared to Qu Jiang's way of sending letters and dating, Du Xin proposed a more

reasonable way of meeting people than sending love letters privately. Du Chengshu's bookstore was located very close to Qu Jiang's tea stall. If Qu Jiang had a crush on Du Chengshu, he could express his interest in her face-to-face and get the consent of his elders before dating (Shun T'ien Shih Pao, 1907). Du's letter refuted the words in Qu Jiang's letter about their existing relationship one by one, and declared and confirmed unilaterally that they had never met. Du Chengshu refuted Qu Jiang's ambiguous words such as "the destiny of heaven" and emphasized that she had always recorded her visitors and informed her elders of this rule of receiving visitors. Therefore, she had never met Qu Jiang. In the letter, Du Chengshu talked about the rules of receiving visitors in general. Every day, visitors must be registered in the register. If guests of the opposite sex need to inform their parents, they can only meet after getting the consent of their parents (Shun T'ien Shih Pao, 1907).

In terms of public ethics, Du Chengshu believed that women should bear social responsibility, and Qu Jiang's private sending of love letters interfered with women's pursuit of social value. Du's letter believed that Qu Jiang's private sending of love letters to Du Chengshu was a slight. During the Spring Festival holiday, Du Chengshu sold books in the cold wind to raise money, which was a heroic act of women to bear social responsibility. Qu Jiang's private sending of love letters hindered women from realizing social value. Eventually, the women's world will be in a very dark place, and there will be no day when the clouds will be cleared. In Du Chengshu's letter, there are heroic words such as "In the future, 200 trillion compatriot women can all come out to work, become angry and independent, and will not cause men's worries." (Shun T'ien Shih Pao, 1907) Du Chengshu is open-minded in public morality, but conservative in gender morality. Du Chengshu's gender morality lags behind public morality.

In terms of gender morality, Qu Jiang tends to be open-minded. In his love letter text, Qu Jiang used the recent trend of open communication between men and women to justify the delivery of his love letter. In the opening paragraph, Qu Jiang talked about the current situation of gender segregation in China, where there are no public and legal opportunities for men and women to interact except in private areas between members of the opposite sex. Qu Jiang also compared the styles of the north and the south. The south has been more open-minded in terms of men and women's interactions, but the north is relatively conservative (Chin Pao, 1907a). Qu Jiang pointed out that there are already signs of public interaction between men and women in the south, and later claimed to have interacted with female friends in Suzhou and Shanghai, comparing the restrictive atmosphere of the north while also stating his own open attitude towards men and women's interactions. When Qu Jiang studied in Suzhou and Shanghai, he had several female friends.

Qu Jiang defined writing to Du Chengshu as a normal area of interaction between men and women, and there should not be too many restrictions on interpersonal exchanges between the sexes. After being dismissed from the Peking Translation School and Du Chengshu making public Qu Jiang's original letter, Qu Jiang once again talked about his attitude and principles towards interpersonal relationships between men and women in his "Letter to Female Student Du Chengshu" (Qu's response after Du made public his letter). When reading foreign books and newspapers, Qu Jiang learned about the etiquette of interpersonal relationships between men and women in the West. As long as the men and women feel mutual attraction after meeting, they can communicate and chat. If they feel compatible, they can continue to interact, and if not, they can separate (Qu, 1907).

If we look at it from the perspective of Western rules of male-female interaction, Qu Jiang's behavior of writing to Du Chengshu and inviting her to the park is not excessive. In his third letter, Qu Jiang placed his motivation for writing to Du Chengshu in the context of normal male-female friendship, and listed the principles of Western male-female interaction to defend the reasonableness of male-female correspondence. Qu Jiang once again emphasized that male-female correspondence is a normal part of male-female interaction (Qu, 1907).

In terms of public morality, Qu Jiang believes that learning Western interpersonal communication is also an important part of China's modernization. Qu Jiang talked about the current situation of gender segregation in China, where there are no public and legal opportunities for men and women to interact in the public sphere, except for interpersonal relationships between members of the opposite sex in private areas (Qu, 1907). Qu Jiang believes that China has learned from Western advanced ideas, and that communication between men and women is also part of the process of modernization, and should not be prohibited (Qu, 1907). At the end of the letter, there is a phrase about going abroad to find freedom, which expresses inner dissatisfaction (Qu, 1907). In Qu Jiang's love letter text, Qu Jiang used the recent trend of open communication between men and women to justify the location of the love letter delivery. Qu Jiang's love letter conveys his expectations for the modernization of Chinese interpersonal communication, which reflects the synchronization of Qu Jiang's public morality and gender morality.

The Sichuan Girls' School and the Peking Translation School, the former being a model for opening up the female school atmosphere, and the latter being a new type of school for cultivating modern diplomatic talents, both represent the pioneers of Chinese school education for both men and women in the early 20th century. However, under the background of the new and old changes, the hybrid situation of running schools in China and the West made the definition of gender morality in schools ambiguous. The gender morality of male youth represented by Qu Jiang was synchronized with their public morality, hoping to achieve the publicity of men and women's social interaction, that is, the modernization of men and women's interpersonal communication. However, the gender morality of female youth represented by Du Chengshu lagged behind public morality. Du Chengshu criticized Qu Jiang's behavior in the national language and traditional sexual morality rhetoric. At the beginning of the issue of love and affection, due to the ambiguous definition of gender morality, in the process of men and women's repeated exploration of gender morality, public power regulated the ambiguous gender morality through punishment and criticism based on public opinion and discussion, thus strengthening traditional sexual morality.

### **The publicization of the Qu & Du incident and the public domain's commentary on the Qu & Du incident**

After receiving the letter from Qu Jiang, Du Chengshu handed over Qu Jiang's original letter to the principal of the Peking Translation School, marking the beginning of the publicization of the Qu Du incident. On February 22, 1907, Du Chengshu sold books to raise funds for the disaster area and received a handwritten letter from Qu Jiang, a student of the Peking Translation School. On February 23, 1907 (the 11th day of the first lunar month), Du Chengshu presented Qu Jiang's original letter to Zhang Qin, the supervisor of the Peking Translation School, and wrote a letter to Zhang Qin briefly describing the negative impact of Qu Jiang's behavior of seducing girls (by sending private letters to seduce). Du Chengshu pointed out that Qu Jiang's private letters not only related to his own reputation, but also to the reputation of the Peking Translation School and the Chinese Women's Association (Chin Pao, 1907b). In the afternoon of February 24 (the 12th day of the first lunar month), the principal Zhang Jin responded by saying that Qu Jiang violated the eighth student code of the Peking Translation School and expelled Qu Jiang. The punishment of Qu Jiang by the Peking Translation School was publicly announced on the morning of February 24 (Sheng Ching Shih Pao, 1907).

Du Chengshu's publication of the letter in the newspaper deepened the publicization of the Qu Du incident. Relying on newspapers, public debate was opened. Du Chengshu handed Qu Jiang's original letter to the president of the Translation School and also sent the letter to major newspapers, hoping that the editor would make it public (Chin Pao, 1907b). It can be seen that Du Chengshu intended to make it public before punishing Qu Jiang at the Translation School. On February 26th, the Beijing Shuntian Times published "Du Chengshu, a Chinese student of

the Sichuan Girls' School, answered the secret letter of Qu Jiang, a student of the Translation School" (Shun T'ien Shih Pao, 1907), which was one of the earliest newspapers to publish Du Chengshu's original letter. On the same day, the Shuntian Times published news of Qu Jiang's dismissal (Shun T'ien Shih Pao, 1907). After the Shuntian Times made public Qu Jiang's private love letter, many newspapers such as the Pei Ching Jih Pao (北京日报), the Ta Kung Pao (大公报), the Tianjin's Chin Pao (津报), the Japanese China New Women's Magazine, and the Sheng Ching Shih Pao (盛京时报) reported on it.

In public debate, the public power represented by the Peking Translation School had an impact on the agenda setting of the newspaper field. Through the chronological analysis of the newspaper texts, it can be seen that Qu Jiang was expelled from the Peking Translation School first, and Du Chengshu's reply to Qu Jiang's letter and Qu Jiang's original letter were published later. It can be seen that the reporting and criticism of the private delivery of love letters in the paper media had nothing to do with the decision of the Peking Translation School's supervisor Zhang Qin to expel Qu Jiang. Later, many newspapers' criticism of Qu Jiang was influenced to some extent by the Peking Translation School. The paper media's critical attitude towards Qu Jiang's private delivery of love letters has resulted in an overwhelming criticism of Qu Jiang's behavior in the public sphere, reflecting the enchantment of the paper media field in the public sphere towards the government-run school. The sheng ching shih pao published an article saying that Qu Jiang's letter was very frivolous (Sheng Ching Shih Pao, 1907).

The evaluation of Sheng Ching Shih Pao in favor of Du Chengshu is still implicit, but the editorial of China New Women's Magazine attached too much editor's emotions to Qu Jiang's original text, and the criticism of Qu Jiang exceeded the attitude of taking things as they are and rose to the level of personal attack. China New Women's Magazine added annotations to each sentence of Qu Jiang's original text to refute the love words in Qu Jiang's letter. The editor of China New Women's Magazine believed that Qu Jiang's study tour in Suzhou (苏州) and other places in Shanghai (上海) was not a real study tour, pointing out that Qu Jiang talked about several female friends, and the editor believed that normal people would not be friends with Qu Jiang. Here is the original criticism of Qu Jiang: I venture to submit (I know it already), forgive my intrusion (I really forgive you), but I hope you will love me (I love my country, my family, my body, my compatriots, my society, my world, I love everything, I love all the time, but I don't love you, the stupid thief in the academic world, the enemy of civilization)... I studied in Suzhou and Shanghai last year (maybe not a real study tour), and I have had several girlfriends (who dare to be friends with you in a normal way)" (Chung Kuo Hsin Nü Chieh Tsa Chih, 1907). The detailed commentary of China New Women's Magazine on Qu Jiang's original letter can be seen as the magazine's criticism and negative attitude towards Qu Jiang. Due to different positions, newspapers and periodicals have different positioning of the degree of evilness of Qu Jiang's behavior.

As a student at the Peking Translation School, Zhang Xincheng (张心澂) experienced memory loss when recalling the expulsion of Qu Jiang years later. However, through Zhang's recollection, we can see the attitude of Chinese youth towards love issues in the 20th century. In the Memoirs of the Translation School, it is mentioned that Qu Jiang was expelled for writing a love letter. "At that time, there were no game fields in Beijing, and only half a month of the New Year was spent visiting the factory. C-level student Qu Jiang was drinking tea in the tea shed of the factory, and saw a Sichuan female school student named Du across the tea shed. They looked at each other, and Qu thought she was interested, so he wrote a love letter to her. Her father reported to the supervisor of the school, and Qu was expelled (The Literature and History Materials committee, 2000). In Zhang's recollection, he believed that Qu Jiang thought Du was interested in him after seeing her across the tea shed, so he wrote a letter to Du Chengshu, and it was Du Chengshu's father who reported Qu Jiang.

As the number of reports in the print media increases, there are more and more discussions in the public sphere about Du Chengshu and Qu Jiang. Although the criticism of Qu Jiang is widely reported in newspapers and periodicals, Du Chengshu, as the person involved in the incident, cannot escape the fate of being criticized. The clarification of Du Chengshu's membership status by the Chinese Women's Association is an effective proof of her being criticized.

On March 18, 1907, the Nanyang (南洋) branch of the Chinese Women's Association published an article stating that Du Deyu and his wife were very concerned about the disaster relief work, but Du Deyu's daughter Du Chengshu was not a member of the Chinese Women's Association (Shih Pao, 1907a). Du Chengshu's status as a secretary of the Chinese Women's Association was mistaken. On March 30, the Chin Pao newspaper published the original text of the letter from the Nanyang branch of the Chinese Women's Association to the president of the Beijing Women's Association, Ying Shuzhong (英淑仲). The text emphasized that Du Chengshu was not a secretary of the Women's Association. It stated that Du Chengshu was temporarily serving as a volunteer secretary for the Women's Association's sales department, and that Du Chengshu's mother Huang Mingxun (黄铭训) was temporarily recommended as a receptionist for the Chinese Women's Association (Shih Pao, 1907b). The Nanyang branch of the Chinese Women's Association stated that if the identity of Du Chengshu was not clarified, the spread of rumors would cause the women of the aristocracy to discuss each other, which would be detrimental to the development of the women's sector. The split between the Chinese Women's Association and the Du Huang couple delineated the stance of the Chinese Women's Association, asserting that women should not be active participants in public discourse concerning erotic matters. In response to rumors and criticism circulating in the public sphere, rather than aligning with Du Chengshu, the Chinese Women's Association unequivocally sided against him to safeguard their association's reputation.

**Table 2** drawn by the author

	<b>Chinese Women's Association</b>	<b>Beijing Translation School</b>	<b>The New Women's Journal of China</b>	<b>Ta Kung Pao, etc.</b>
Qu Jiang (male)	oppose	oppose	oppose	oppose
Du Chengshu (female)	oppose	Supporting	Support-Opposition	Supporting

During the public debate, after the head of the Peking Translation School imposed a withdrawal punishment on Qu Jiang, the criticism of Qu Jiang in the newspaper field attracted widespread public attention and discussion. As the person involved in the incident, Du Chengshu was inevitably impacted by rumors. The Chinese Women's Association's clarification of its relationship with Du Chengshu reflects its attitude of self-preservation under the rumors, and also opposes Du Chengshu's public letter. Taking the attitude of the Chinese Women's Association as a turning point, the public power represented by the Peking Translation School and the Chinese Women's Association denied Qu Jiang and Du Chengshu. The denial of the two by the public power is essentially an affirmation of traditional gender morality. At this point, the ambiguous gender morality became clear through punishment, and traditional gender morality was strengthened.

## DISCUSSION

In China in the 20th century, when the issue of love and romance entered the public sphere from the private sphere, it was limited by the ambiguous boundaries of gender morality. At the

beginning of the creation of public issues of love and romance, it faced scrutiny from traditional gender morality. In the public debate, public power opened up criticism of gender morality for young men and women, strengthening traditional gender morality and stifling the budding modern gender morality. Du Chengshu's use of national issues as a refutation argument was an attempt to enter the public sphere as a form of self-protection for women, reflecting the deep-rooted tradition of gender morality. Qu Jiang's pursuit of free love embodied the expectations of young people represented by Qu Jiang for modern gender morality, but the public power represented by the Peking Translation School and the Chinese Women's Association gave legitimacy to traditional gender morality through punishing Qu and Du. After the May Fourth Movement, although the ideas of democracy and science were widely spread in China, and the process of coeducation between men and women continued to advance, the issue of love and romance entering the public sphere still faced the fate of stigmatization. In the public debate, women used traditional gender morality norms as a way to prove their innocence, and the rhetoric of traditional gender morality in the public debate again demonstrated the dominant position of traditional gender morality in China in the 1920s. The government's public power's criticism of free love reinforced the legitimacy of traditional gender morality. After the May Fourth Movement, the issue of love and romance in the process of becoming public still could not avoid the backlash of conservative forces in the public debate.

## CONCLUSION

In the process of publicizing love issues from the private sphere into the public sphere, there are four stages: public agenda creation, public debate, expert debate, and new social morality formation. This article uses the process tracking method to analyze the 1907 Qudu Love Letter incident and compares it with the 1923 Peking University Korean Yang incident, trying to explain the reasons for the failure of the publicization of love issues and explore which stage of publicization halted the publicization of love issues. The study found that after Du Chengshu threw the issue into the public sphere, the public agenda for the love issue began to be created, but in the public debate stage, traditional gender ethics still dominated, which led to the suppression of the love issue by public power represented by the Chinese Women's Association, and traditional gender ethics were strengthened. The love letter incident ended with Qu Jiang's withdrawal from school and Du Chengshu's reputation damage. After the May Fourth Movement, the social atmosphere became more open, and although modern gender ethics were promoted, love issues still could not be reasonably explored in the public sphere. In the 1923 Peking University Korean Yang incident, Du Chengshu once again used traditional gender ethics as a self-protection weapon. Han Quanhua and Du Chengshu's self-justification reflected that in the public debate stage of love issues, for women, traditional gender ethics and modern gender ethics can better protect their vital interests.

In the early 20th century, the gender morality awareness of the Chinese public was uneven. In the public debate on love issues, women were easily pressured by public opinion to defend themselves with conservative gender morality, while male elites flaunted themselves with open gender morality and criticized women's conservative attitudes. The attack on modern morality by public power made young men and women who practiced free love the target of criticism. In the process of practicing "free love", young men and women encountered criticism and unusual comments in the press field. These opposing voices also demonstrated the dominant position of traditional gender morality, which further reflected the difficulties and twists and turns of love issues entering the public sphere.

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