Article

Collective Emotional Experience and the Formation of Marriage Perceptions in Chinese Costume Television Dramas

Jingfang Chen

Kangwon National University, Chuncheon, 24341, Republic of Korea
Correspondence: chen_jingfang@hotmail.com

Abstract: ***Background:*** The rise of real-time comments, social media discourse, and short video recirculation has meant that the act of viewing has transformed from an individual activity into a process of collective emotional participation. Given changing marriage values in contemporary China, the way in which media culture is shaping marriage perceptions has become a critical area of inquiry. ***Purpose:*** This study examines how Chinese costume dramas influence the formation of marriage perceptions via collective emotional processes and explores the mediatized transformation of Émile Durkheim's theory of 'collective effervescence' within contemporary media. ***Methods:*** Adopting Durkheim's (1912/2011) theory of collective effervescence, this study analyzes situational aggregation, emotional arousal, interactive resonance, and value identification during the broadcast of costume dramas. ***Results:*** Through character design, ritualized narratives, and emotional resonance, costume dramas shape audiences' perceptions of marriage. Interactive platforms further strengthen emotional dissemination and value identification, extending collective effervescence into digital media spaces. ***Conclusion:*** The influence of Chinese costume dramas on marriage perceptions is not achieved through direct didactic instruction, but through emotional participation, interactive communication, and collective resonance. In contemporary media environments, collective effervescence has become an important mechanism connecting individual emotions with social value identification. By leveraging emotional narratives and digital interaction, costume dramas provide a new cultural pathway for the dissemination of positive marriage values.

Keywords: Chinese costume dramas; collective effervescence; marriage perceptions; emotional resonance; digital media interaction

Citation: Chen, J. F. (2026). Collective Emotional Experience and the Formation of Marriage Perceptions in Chinese Costume Television Dramas. *Journal of Global Arts Studies*, 4(2), 19-34. https://doi.org/10.23112/jgas26063002

Check for updates

Received: May 24, 2026
Revised: June 7, 2026
Accepted: June 10, 2026
Published: June 30, 2026

Publisher's Note: KIHSS stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Copyright: © 2026 by the author(s). Submitted for possible open-access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

In recent years, the Chinese television drama industry has continued to develop in both content production and dissemination. Chinese costume dramas, in particular, have occupied an important place among young audiences because of their distinctive cultural symbols, historical imagination, and rich emotional expression. Such works not only provide an aesthetic experience but also offer important cultural references through character relationships, plot conflicts, and value expression, thereby shaping the audience's understanding of love, marriage, and family relations. At the same time, young adults' perspectives on love and marriage in contemporary China are undergoing evident changes, marked by stronger individual consciousness, greater emotional autonomy, and more diversified value orientations. Changes in marital attitudes affect not only individual life choices but also family demographics, population structures, and modes of social operation. Therefore, against the backdrop of coexisting pluralistic values, how to use popular culture to guide rational and healthy marital attitudes has become an important issue of shared concern in both academic and social contexts.

Existing literature has noted the role of film and television works in guiding views on love and marriage, and researchers have also paid attention to the amplifying effect of bullet-screen comments, social media discussions, and short video recirculation on

audiences' emotional expression. However, previous studies have rarely placed the narrative mechanisms of costume dramas, digital media interaction, and the formation of marital attitudes within a single analytical framework. As a result, scholars have not fully explained why audiences form similar emotional judgments through co-viewing and sustained interaction, nor how such emotional judgments are further transformed into value identification regarding love and marriage. This research gap makes the value-guiding function of costume dramas easy to understand as a one-way information output, but it overlooks the dynamic relationship among emotional participation, interactive reinforcement, group resonance, and concept formation.

Based on this background, this study addresses the following research questions: First, how do Chinese costume dramas stimulate audiences' collective emotional experiences through character construction, ritualized narratives, and situational creation? Second, how do bullet-screen comments, viewer comments, and short-video recirculation reinforce audiences' emotional synchronization and constitute mediatized collective effervescence? Third, how may such group emotions be transformed into identification with marriage-related values such as loyalty, responsibility, moral bottom lines, and relational ethics? Through the discussion of these questions, this study attempts to explain the specific process through which costume dramas influence marital attitudes, rather than treating them merely as external tools of value propaganda.

Methodologically, this study takes Durkheim's (1912/2011) theory of collective effervescence as its theoretical foundation and adopts a combination of theoretical analysis and case interpretation. The discussion unfolds around four components: situational aggregation, emotional arousal, interactive resonance, and value identification. This study does not simply equate viewing interactions in digital media with bodily co-presence in traditional religious rituals. Instead, it understands them as a mediatized co-presence reconstructed jointly by platform mechanisms, synchronous expressions, and algorithmic dissemination. In this way, the emotional narratives of costume dramas and the interactive communication of digital platforms are incorporated into the same explanatory pathway.

The contribution of this study is the extension of the theory of collective effervescence from traditional ritual contexts to digital media viewing scenes, thereby revealing how costume dramas form a mechanism of guidance for marital values via the joint action of narrative texts, platform interactions, and group expressions. The following sections first explain the practical relationship and theoretical basis between the dissemination of costume dramas and the formation of marital attitudes in China. Subsequently, we analyze how costume dramas produce mediatized collective effervescence through narrative construction and emotional mechanisms. We further discuss how this mechanism can be used for the positive guidance of marital values. Finally, we summarize the research findings, theoretical contributions, practical implications, and directions for future research.

2. Dissemination of Costume Dramas and Their Communicative Relationship with the Formation of Marriage Consciousness in China

Continuous decline in the willingness to marry in China has attracted sustained scholarly and public attention, and recent studies have linked this trend to the diversification of marriage and childbearing attitudes, digital intimate relations, information cocoons in young adults' decision-making, and changing family values (Li & Lou, 2025; Shen, 2025; Wang & Yang, 2025; Zhang, 2025). It is also noteworthy that transformations and controversies in family life associated with a rising awareness of gender equality have encouraged many young adults to attach greater importance to private space and independent living while becoming more cautious toward marriage (Wu, 2022). In addition, economic pressure, educational expansion, platform-mediated cognition, and cultural imagination interact to form the social landscape of contemporary Chinese young adults' choices regarding love and marriage.

2.1 Structural Changes in the State of Marriage in China

First, it is necessary to examine the recent marriage situation in China. According to civil affairs statistics and national statistical data on marriage services, Figure 1 shows that from 2005 to 2024, the peak years of marriage registrations were mainly concentrated between 2011 and 2014. In 2013, the peak year, 13.4693 million couples registered for marriage. The lowest figure in the past two decades occurred in 2024, when 6.106 million couples registered for marriage. This represents an absolute decrease of 7.3633 million couples, or approximately 54.67%. In other words, the number of marriage registrations in the lowest year was less than half that in the peak year (Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025; National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2025).

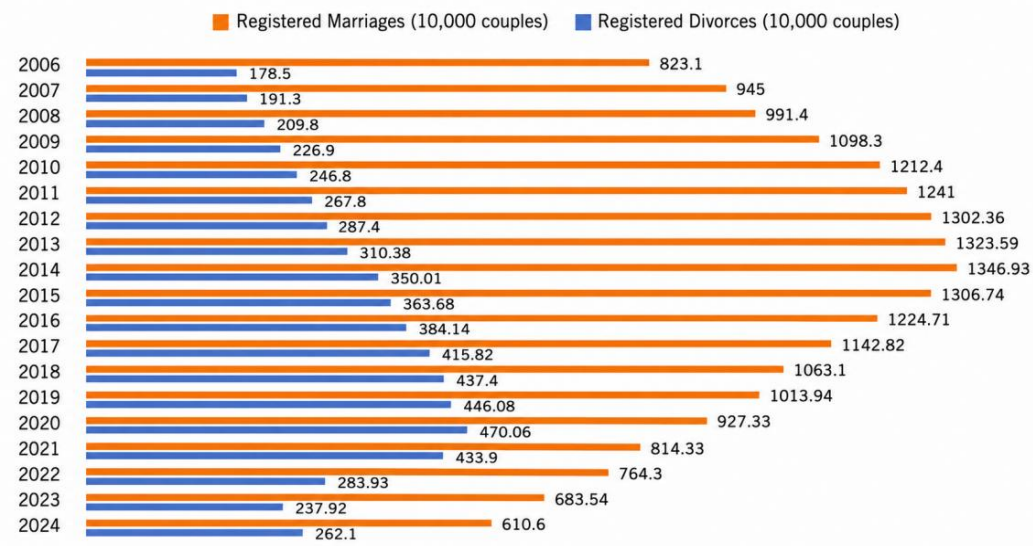


Figure 1. Marriage-service data in China, 2005–2024
Note. National Bureau of Statistics of China

As for divorce, the number of divorces registered during the same 20-year period remained far lower than the number of marriage registrations in the corresponding years. This indicates that marriage registration has remained the dominant form of marriage service processing across regions. Divorce registration data involve more variables than marriage registration data; therefore, this study further draws on the officially reported crude divorce rate. A longitudinal analysis of this indicator reveals changes in the divorce rate within the same region and also reflects the stability of social marriage. At present, neither governmental departments nor academia has established a safety threshold for the relationship between the crude marriage rate and social stability. According to international reference experience, a rate below 2‰ is usually considered a low divorce rate, mostly seen in traditional societies; 2‰–4‰ is considered a moderate divorce rate, indicating greater marital freedom and relative social stability; and a rate above 4‰ is considered high and calls for attention to possible negative effects. As shown in Figure 2, the crude divorce rate was 1.37‰ in 2005, the lowest level over the 20 years. It then rose gradually and reached its peak of 3.36‰ in 2019, which still fell within the internationally referenced range of stability, although the causes of the increase deserve attention. In 2020, the crude divorce rate decreased to 3.09‰, the first decline in 14 years. It continued to decline after 2021 and, despite a slight rebound in 2023, remained generally controllable. In 2024, the crude divorce rate was relatively low, a result of multiple social factors.

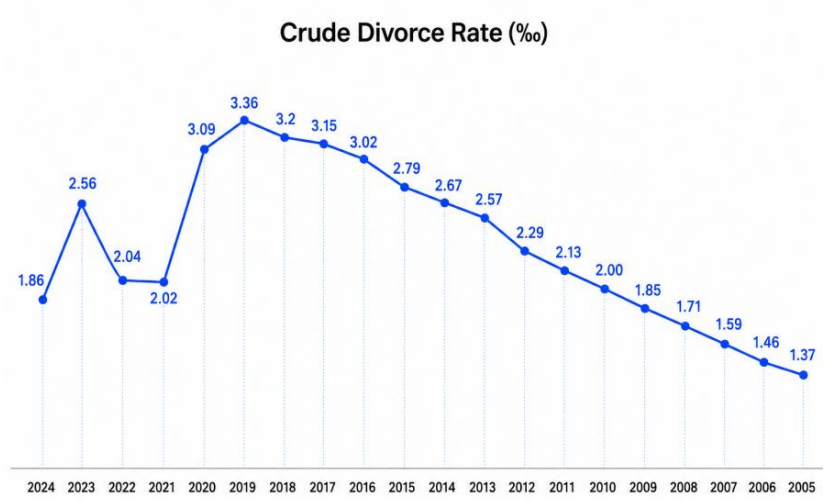


Figure 2. Crude divorce-rate data in China, 2005–2024
Note. National Bureau of Statistics of China

Taken together, the above data indicate that China's divorce rate indicators have remained generally manageable over the past two decades, while the number of people registering for marriage has continued to decline through to 2024. This decline may trigger a series of ripple effects, including the accelerated fall of the birth rate, changes in population structure, weakened consumer markets, and intensified intergenerational tensions. Therefore, ways of promoting growth in marriage registration figures deserve attention.

Second, it is necessary to consider the market influence of Chinese drama series. According to the *2024 Drama Market Report* released by Lighthouse Professional Edition, the top genres in terms of long drama viewership in 2024 were romance, costume dramas, and suspense, followed by urban dramas, crime, fantasy, family, comedy, period dramas, and war dramas (Lighthouse Research Institute, 2024). Datawin's annual observation of the 2024 long drama market also shows the importance of valid play metrics in evaluating online drama performance (Datawin, 2025). In short, whether in long drama series or short dramas, romance themes occupy a highly important position in terms of viewership and market share, and they have the capacity to attract a broad audience's attention.

Third, romance themes have a natural advantage in guiding values related to love and marriage (Deng, 2015). Emotional resonance provides a direct entry point through which abstract values are embedded in concrete narratives of love and hatred and in the fate of characters. Such narratives can easily cross cultural and temporal distances and reach audiences' inner emotional worlds. The romantic narratives in costume dramas further make skillful use of the distancing effect of historical time and space, giving emotional relationships more romantic and interpretive possibilities. Within a field of heightened public emotion, they constitute collective effervescence, enabling audiences, while following the story, to internalize value metaphors concerning loyalty, responsibility, devotion, and family cohesion, thereby completing a deeper transition from emotional experience to conceptual formation.

2.2 The Digital-Communication Turn of Collective Effervescence Theory

Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence was originally established in the social scene of religious ritual and bodily co-presence. Its core idea is that individuals, when jointly participating in rituals, generate collective emotional energy that transcends individual experience through bodily aggregation, emotional contagion, and symbolic identification (Durkheim, 1912/2011). When this theory is applied to digital media contexts, online interaction cannot simply be equated with traditional ritual scenes, but rather, how digital platforms reconstruct the mechanism of collective effervescence must

be recognized. During the viewing of costume dramas, bullet-screen comments, real-time comments, topic discussions, and short video recirculation cannot provide bodily co-presence in the traditional ritual sense. Nevertheless, through synchronous viewing, immediate responses, repetitive language, and shared emotional expressions, they form a kind of "mediatized co-presence" or "digital effervescence." Audiences no longer watch the plot alone; instead, they constantly confirm in platform spaces that "others are feeling this at the same time," thereby transforming individual emotions into a group-based emotional experience.

Compared with collective effervescence in traditional physical space, digital effervescence is more open, fluid, and platform-dependent. Physical effervescence usually occurs in relatively stable communities and concrete ritual fields, where participants achieve emotional synchronization through bodily proximity, voices, movements, and ritual order. Digital effervescence, by contrast, relies more on comment texts, emojis, reposting mechanisms, trending topics, and algorithmic recommendations to aggregate emotion. Its advantage is that it breaks temporal and spatial limitations and enables dispersed audiences to form immediate resonance around the same plot, character, or issue regarding love and marriage. Its limitations are also evident. First, online anonymity lowers the threshold for emotional expression and makes it easier for audiences to release emotion and participate in discussion, but it may also lead to emotional performativity and weakened authenticity. Some comments are not entirely derived from genuine feelings but are follow-up expressions formed under the influence of the platform atmosphere, group positions, or popular discourse. Second, algorithmic recommendations continuously push content similar to users' existing preferences, reinforcing the aggregation of similar emotions and value judgments and thereby producing emotional homogenization and echo-chamber effects. In this sense, digital effervescence is not always a naturally generated collective emotion; it is also deeply shaped by platform technology, traffic logic, and algorithmic distribution (Jiang & Sha, 2022; Men, 2022; Sang, 2024).

Therefore, this study does not mechanically transplant the theory of collective effervescence into digital media scenes. Instead, it understands collective effervescence as an emotional aggregation process reconstructed by platform mechanisms. The reason why marriage narratives in costume dramas can influence audiences' views on marriage lies not only in the emotional force of the plots themselves but also in the continuous amplification, synchronization, and reorganization of audience emotions by digital platforms. Bullet-screen comments, social media discussion, and short video dissemination together constitute a new digital ritual space in which audiences strengthen their identification with particular marital values through repeated watching, expression, and interaction. At the same time, this identification may also be affected by anonymous expression, algorithmic filtering, and platform-driven emotional mobilization. Digital collective effervescence thus has positive functions of emotional connection and value dissemination, while also carrying potential risks of emotional homogenization, performative expression, and cognitive closure.

2.3 The Information-Guidance Phenomenon of Chinese Costume Dramas

The continuing decline in the number of people registering for marriage in China reflects changing attitudes toward marriage among young adults (Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025; Wu, 2022). Many studies acknowledge that popular culture influences views on love and marriage. In the current media environment, social media, especially audiovisual media, has a strong effect in arousing users' emotions, can serve as a channel for individual attitude expression, and has also become a common method for the modulation of social concepts (Shen, 2025). As one of the most influential forms among audiovisual works, costume dramas are an indispensable genre in the Chinese film and television market. They often transmit modern marriage values through historical narratives, subtly influencing audiences'

cognition of love and marriage. Through narrative strategies and visual symbols, costume dramas guide information and affect audience cognition, emotion, and values. As the core carrier in the "Internet Plus" communication process, the information body of costume dramas is the substantive content unit through which creators connect with audiences. In the contemporary media environment, its elements and operating mechanisms show a certain complexity. As shown in Figure 3, the information-transmission process forms a feedback loop linking information producers, media channels, audience cognition, and subsequent content adjustment.

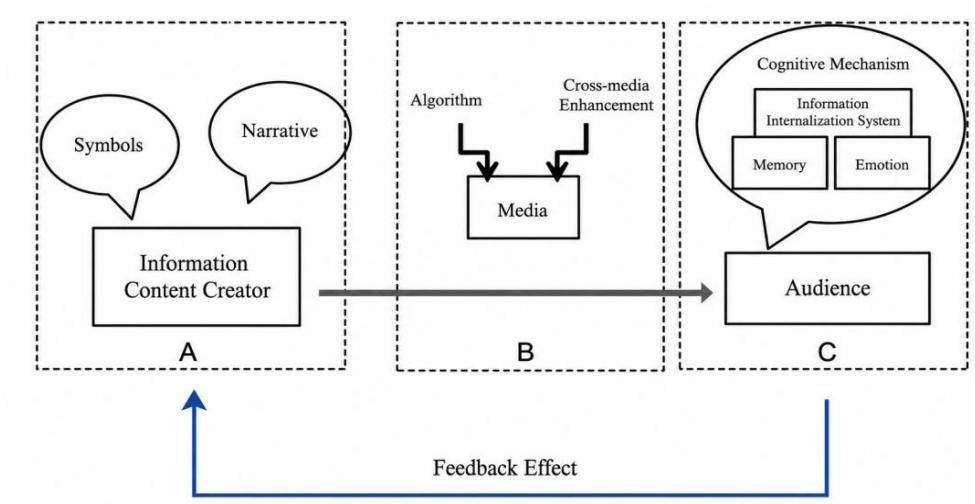


Figure 3. Flowchart of information transmission under the action of new quality productive forces
Note. Drawn by the author(s).

As the main sender in information transmission, the information body includes specific implementing subjects such as investors, directors, and planners. Creators process and encode information into symbolic meanings, including visual, auditory, physical, and spatial symbols. In the context of contemporary cultural communication, narrative works must integrate these symbols organically into narrative expression in order to realize effective value transmission (Hall, 1997). In addition, the exemplary effect of character styling, as a narrative core, should not be overlooked. According to Bandura's social learning theory, audiences learn by observing and imitating the character images and behavioral patterns in drama narratives. Character styling should therefore go beyond simple visual presentation and become a symbolic carrier of values. Through the organic combination of clothing, posture, speech, and behavior, it can construct character images with exemplary significance (Barthes, 1977; Hall, 1997). This requires character design to satisfy both artistic expression and social responsibility by constructing rich characters with a demonstrable exemplary effect.

In the era of traditional media, once the information body created a work, it was distributed through media entities such as television and cinema. Traditional media forms were relatively simple, and because of technological limitations, audiences had little choice over the work. This gave the information body a relatively high degree of discursive weight in content dissemination. Under the influence of new quality productive forces, however, the media have become very different from traditional media alongside technological development. First, contemporary media communication is diversified (Castells, 2010; Jenkins, 2006). Audiences now watch dramas through television, leading video platforms, short video platforms, and short drama platforms, thereby triggering cross-media, value-added circulation. A single drama can receive different forms of audience feedback through different viewing channels, which in turn stimulates discussion and viewing enthusiasm, increases its popularity, drives audience consumption, and ultimately expands economic benefits. Second, supported by modern technologies and algorithms, media can provide precise, personalized recommendations

while also playing a role in promoting dramas and increasing their popularity. This invisibly reinforces the reproduction of audiences' aesthetic tastes (Bourdieu, 1984).

After audiences receive the information body transmitted through media, they decode it themselves, generate cognitive resonance, and are subtly guided. Costume dramas exert a deep influence on the cognitive structure of audiences through their distinctive narrative aesthetics. At the level of memory, carefully designed costumes, makeup, props, and historical symbols form anchors of cultural and historical memory. At the emotional level, the interweaving of national and family narratives and romantic legends activates empathy and raises the audience's empathic response. The two-way action of historical memory and emotion promotes the internalization of values. These three dimensions jointly construct the cognitive mechanism of audiences. The consciousness formed by audiences then feeds back into the adjustment and confirmation of the information body, creating a positive cycle. In this cycle, costume dramas may, under an ideal drama-industry ecology, realize a positive interaction between commercial value and social value.

It should be noted that feedback in the modern media context has an obvious duality. On the one hand, it appears as a mechanism through which emotional feedback is continuously reinforced and circulated. On the other hand, it also becomes an important media condition through which audiences move from dispersed individuals to emotional groups and achieve emotional aggregation. Under this dual mechanism, media communication is no longer one-way information transmission but is gradually transformed into a process of continuous interaction and intensified emotional generation.

More specifically, this feedback is not reflected only in the immediacy and efficiency of audience responses. More importantly, it lies in the diversification of feedback pathways and the structural changes driven by technology. Bullet-screen interaction, comment expression, and short video secondary creation turn audiences from simple receivers into participants who continuously express themselves and reproduce content, thereby constantly intervening in the communication process and forming diversified feedback mechanisms.

On this basis, these feedback pathways perform a dual function. First, they break the limits of time and space, connecting originally dispersed individuals into an emotional community with interactive relations and promoting the generation and diffusion of group emotion. Second, these pathways themselves constitute stable channels of emotional feedback, allowing emotion to be continuously recorded, amplified, and circulated, and gradually forming characteristic feedback patterns and communication structures. Thus, audience emotion no longer remains at the level of individual experience but becomes a group-based emotional process under the impetus of media mechanisms.

The influence of television dramas on audiences is not limited to the level of individual cognition. In the contemporary media environment, it has gradually developed into a group emotional process. Through bullet-screen interaction, social platform discussion, short video recirculation, and other forms of participation, audiences continue to express and interact. Their emotions are repeatedly amplified and diffused within the communication chain, transforming originally dispersed individual experiences into a more consistent group emotional state.

The emotional aggregation formed in this way provides an important clue for understanding how audience emotion moves from individual experience to group experience. It is precisely at this level that Durkheim's classical sociological theory provides an effective perspective for explaining how emotional resonance in film and television communication can further transform into value identification. In other words, television dramas not only stimulate emotion through narrative content; they also organize emotion into group experience through media mechanisms, enabling audiences to gradually form identification with and reconstruction of related marriage concepts through emotional resonance.

2.4 The Mediatized Turn of Collective Effervescence Theory

Émile Durkheim proposed the concept of "collective effervescence" in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, where it can be understood as an emotional mechanism gradually generated in group interaction and eventually influencing behavior (Durkheim, 1912/2011). Its formation usually proceeds through a continuous process of aggregation, arousal, resonance, and identification. Recent studies on collective effervescence, folk concepts of *renao*, and embodied co-presence in festival theatre experiences further indicate that collective emotion depends on both situational organization and shared symbolic experience (Duan & Yin, 2026; Song, 2025; Yu et al., 2023).

"Situational aggregation" refers to the process in which individuals enter the same emotional and cognitive field around a shared object of attention. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim argues that individuals receive significant emotional stimulation through collective gathering and joint participation, thereby forming a unified emotional experience and group consciousness. This process constitutes the precondition for the generation of collective emotion (Durkheim, 1912/2011, pp. 218–229). This theory was initially used to explain the social function of religious rituals and the mechanism of social solidarity. It holds that when group members gather to perform collective rituals, intense emotional resonance emerges, and this emotional energy enables individuals to transcend everyday states and form collective identity and social cohesion. Within the theoretical framework of collective effervescence, this link constitutes the precondition for emotional generation. Its core does not lie in actual physical gathering in space, but in the fact that individuals generate shared attention toward a specific object at the same time or under the same meaning orientation, thereby forming a state of co-presence. In contemporary media contexts, situational aggregation no longer depends on concentration in real space but is realized through platform mechanisms and content distribution. Specifically, television dramas, as core media content, attract audiences into the same topic field through unified narrative texts and a continuous viewing rhythm. At the same time, algorithmic recommendations, trending list mechanisms, and social platform dissemination further strengthen the concentration of audience attention. Comments and bullet-screen expressions concerning plot development, interpretation, and emotion allow originally dispersed individuals to form stable attention aggregation around the same content under different temporal and spatial conditions. Thus, situational aggregation is transformed from spatial co-presence into meaningful co-presence, laying the foundation for subsequent emotional arousal and group interaction.

Arousal refers to the process through which individuals move from everyday states into a high-intensity emotional state under specific situational stimuli. In his analysis of religious rituals, Durkheim points out that individuals are strongly stimulated in group gatherings and generate an emotional energy similar to electricity, entering a highly excited state (Durkheim, 1912/2011). Arousal constitutes the initial driving force of emotion formation. Its key lies in the way external stimuli activate individual emotions and move individuals from ordinary states into a more concentrated emotional experience. This process does not depend primarily on active individual participation but is more often triggered by the symbolic stimuli and meaning orientation provided by the situation itself. In the context of media communication, arousal is mainly achieved through audiovisual expression and narrative atmosphere. The setting of plot conflict, the tension of character relationships, and the concentrated presentation of key narrative nodes all directly stimulate audience emotion. At the same time, camera movement, musical rhythm, and performance intensity work together to strengthen emotional activation, enabling audiences to enter a high-intensity emotional state within a short time. In addition, arousal in media environments is continuous and variable. In the process of sustained viewing and repeated exposure to similar emotional nodes, audiences' emotional reactions are stimulated by different techniques and gradually accumulate, thereby providing necessary conditions for subsequent emotional diffusion and group

resonance. Arousal is therefore not only the starting point of emotion generation but also the foundational link through which emotional mechanisms unfold.

Resonance refers to a state in which individuals' emotions gradually converge and become synchronously reinforced during interaction. In the mechanism of collective effervescence, resonance is the key link through which emotion expands from the individual level to the group level. Durkheim argues that in collective situations, individual emotions do not exist in isolation; rather, they are continuously stimulated and strengthened through mutual influence, forming a unified and high-intensity emotional state (Durkheim, 1912/2011). This process enables individual emotional experience to transcend the private level and enter a group emotion characterized by sharedness. In the context of media communication, resonance is mainly realized through interaction mechanisms. Bullet-screen expression, comment interaction, and short video reproduction allow audiences to encounter others' emotional feedback during the viewing process, thereby adjusting their own emotions and moving toward convergence. In this interaction, emotion is no longer triggered only by the text; it is amplified and reproduced through continuous communication among audiences, forming a transmissible emotional flow. Resonance in the media environment has the characteristics of continuity and diffusion. Audience emotional expression can be recorded instantly and displayed in real time, enabling emotion to circulate among different individuals and continuously strengthen its influence. Resonance is therefore not only the result of emotional synchronization but also the dynamic mechanism of emotional diffusion and reinforcement, providing crucial support for the formation of collective effervescence. For example, when plots involve character sacrifice, emotional conflict, or identity revelation, large numbers of viewers may publish similar emotional expressions at the same time, such as "I'm crying" or "This is infuriating." When the leading characters successfully confess their love, the bullet screen may immediately fill with phrases such as "get married right now." Such moments clearly enter the stage of resonance.

Identification refers to the process in which individuals internalize the value orientation presented by the group into their own cognitive and evaluative standards through sustained emotional participation and interaction. In the mechanism of collective effervescence, identification is the final link through which emotion shifts from temporary experience to a relatively stable structure (Durkheim, 1912/2011). Durkheim's analysis of religious ritual shows that emotional intensification experienced by individuals in group situations does not remain at the level of immediate feeling, but is further transformed into acceptance of community beliefs and norms, thereby forming enduring social identification. In the context of media communication, identification depends on repeated emotional activation and the continuous operation of group interaction. After experiencing situational aggregation, emotional arousal, and interactive resonance, audiences' emotional experiences gradually stabilize through repeated contact and expression, and they are transformed into relatively consistent value judgments under the influence of group atmosphere. Specifically, comment sections, bullet-screen expression, and short video reproduction expose audiences to others' emotional positions and evaluative tendencies, encouraging them to compare, adjust, and move toward the mainstream cognition of the group. It should be emphasized that identification in the media environment is not the result of one-way indoctrination, but is gradually constructed through interaction. Audiences are not only receivers of emotion but also producers of emotion. Their expressive behavior, in turn, participates in shaping group atmosphere and further reinforces existing structures of identification. Identification thus appears as a dynamic process that is continuously generated and consolidated through interaction, enabling individuals to internalize relevant values through emotional resonance. After prior stimulation, many viewers may engage in concrete actions such as advance paid viewing or purchasing derivative products. Although current television dramas have not yet fully developed this dimension, audiovisual influence on audience behavior may become a common form as the relevant understanding deepens.

3. Narrative Construction and Emotional Mechanisms of "Collective Effervescence" in Chinese Costume Dramas

Having established the practical relationship and theoretical foundation, it remains necessary to answer how costume dramas actually produce collective effervescence. This study argues that collective effervescence in Chinese costume dramas is not generated naturally by audience size or viewership popularity alone. Rather, it is an emotional mechanism jointly constructed by narrative texts, audiovisual symbols, platform interactions, and group expressions. Its basic process can be summarized as follows: first, the work forms a shared object of attention through character relationships and ritualized scenes. Then, plot nodes such as conflict, romance, sacrifice, and reunion arouse strong emotion. Subsequently, bullet-screen comments, viewer comments, and short video recirculation complete interactive resonance. Finally, some emotional judgments settle into value identification concerning love and marital relationships.

First, costume dramas provide the narrative precondition for collective effervescence through situational aggregation. Costume dramas usually organize plots around family order, status differences, marriage choices, and emotional commitments, enabling audiences to sustain attention to the same character relationships and conflicts regarding love and marriage. The distance of historical time and space reduces the direct conflict of contemporary issues, while character fates and emotional choices reconnect with the lived experience of contemporary audiences. Thus, although audiences are dispersed across different times and spaces, they can enter similar emotional fields around the same plot, the same characters, and the same value questions.

Second, costume dramas use emotional arousal to move audiences into a high-intensity state of emotional participation. Character suffering, relational misunderstandings, identity revelation, wedding rituals, separation, sacrifice, and reunion scenes can transform abstract ethics surrounding love and marriage into concrete and perceptible emotional experiences. When audiences identify with the situations of characters, they not only understand plot information but also form evaluations of character behavior through emotions such as pity, expectation, anger, and relief. It is in this process of emotional arousal that values such as loyalty, responsibility, moral bottom lines, and relational ethics obtain a perceptible narrative basis.

Digital platform interaction extends emotion from individual experience to group resonance. Bullet-screen comments, viewer comments, trending topics, and short video clips allow audiences to constantly see the emotional reactions of others and to confirm, through repetitive language, emojis, and secondary creation, that "others are feeling this too." This confirmation mechanism prevents individual emotion from remaining private; instead, it is recorded, amplified, and circulated in platform spaces. When similar emotional expressions appear in large quantities within a short time, audiences are more likely to adjust their own judgments and join shared expression, thereby forming mediatized collective effervescence characterized by synchronization and diffusion.

Sustained group resonance may further be transformed into value identification regarding love and marriage. Costume dramas do not require audiences to accept a particular view of love and marriage through direct preaching. Instead, through character fate, emotional resonance, and group discussion, they enable audiences to gradually form evaluative standards for intimate relationships. For example, recognition of characters' responsibility, attention to moral bottom lines, vigilance toward unequal relationships, and expectations of sincere commitment may all be strengthened through repeated viewing and interactive expression. Thus, collective effervescence in costume dramas is both a process of emotional generation and a process of value understanding and conceptual reconstruction.

4. Implementation Paths for the Positive Guidance of Marriage Values through "Collective Effervescence" in Chinese Costume Dramas

4.1 Establishing the "Exemplary Effect" of Characters in Costume Dramas

The construction of the exemplary effect in costume dramas is essentially a story-based creative method centered on character construction. In any narrative art, dramatic plots and conflicts are guided by the basic situations of characters. Characters are also the main carriers of meaning. As a special story medium, costume dramas follow the same basic rule. When creators present healthy views on love and marriage through carefully designed character images and relationship networks, characters in the drama become living carriers of value demonstration. The realization of this exemplary effect relies on three interrelated dimensions. First, character construction must be typical: characters should be historically reasonable while also embodying the progressiveness of modern values. Second, the narrative must be organic, ensuring that the transmission of values is not rigid preaching but is naturally presented through character construction, conflict establishment, and plot development. Third, aesthetic expression must be affectively compelling, giving the whole work sufficient emotional appeal. Sometimes a drama may even concentrate one or two symbolic elements that positively affect audiences' views on love and marriage, such as a line of dialogue, a prop, or an idea, repeatedly impressing it upon audiences' minds so that it becomes exemplary.

For example, in *The Story of Minglan*, after Minglan experiences the Sun Xiucai incident, she discusses her possible marriage to He Hongwen with her grandmother:

"To stay with someone in the long term, what ultimately matters is the lowest point of that person's character."

"The lowest point?"

"Yes. Sun Xiucai's lowest point is shamelessness, while Brother Hongwen's, at most, is soft-heartedness," Minglan says with a smile.

Through Minglan's comparison between the negative example of Sun Xiucai and He Hongwen's character, an abstract standard for judging marriage is transformed into a concrete and perceptible point of reference. This mode of expression turns the complex problem of marital risk in real life into an understandable narrative form. The drama does not directly tell audiences what is right. Instead, through character dialogue and plot development, it turns a complex logic of judgment into an easier form of expression. When watching, audiences often connect their own experiences with the plot. While understanding the story, they may also form new points of reference for real-life choices regarding love and marriage. This kind of narrative language is more likely to be remembered and used by both male and female viewers when they encounter similar situations later. Minglan's judgment about "the lowest point of character" in *The Story of Minglan* is selected as a typical case because it concentrates on three key aspects of the exemplary effect of costume dramas.

First, it has clear character typicality. Minglan is not a traditional female figure passively awaiting a marital arrangement. Rather, within the constraints of family order and marriage institutions, she gradually becomes a female subject with the ability to make her own judgments. Her comparison of Sun Xiucai and He Hongwen does not simply distinguish between "good people" and "bad people." Instead, it identifies a risk in marriage that is easily overlooked: a person's moral bottom line and character weakness under extreme circumstances. Sun Xiucai's "lowest point" is shamelessness, which means that he may directly harm the marriage relationship. He Hongwen's "lowest point" is soft-heartedness; although this is not evil, it may bring long-term uncertainty in complex family relations. This mode of judgment has greater significance for modern views on love and marriage than merely emphasizing family status, talent, or romantic affection.

Second, this value expression is not external preaching but is generated naturally by the plot. After the Sun Xiucai incident, Minglan has already witnessed the real harm that may result from a mistaken marriage choice. Therefore, when she discusses He Hongwen with her grandmother, the statement that "to stay with someone in the long term, what ultimately matters is the lowest point of that person's character" is not an abstract comment, but the result of accumulated character experience. Through the preparation of

earlier and later plot elements, the drama transforms complex issues such as marital risk, moral bottom lines, and family relations into a single line of dialogue, giving value to expressive narrative rationality.

Third, this line has strong aesthetic appeal and communicability. "The lowest point of character" is itself a highly condensed symbolic expression. It is not direct moral instruction but a life-like and judgmental phrase that enters the audience's memory. When watching, audiences not only understand Minglan's choice but may also transfer this statement to real-life marital judgment: when choosing a partner, one should not only consider how good the person is under ideal conditions but also examine where that person's bottom line lies under conflict, pressure, and competing interests. For this reason, this case effectively illustrates how costume dramas transform healthy views on love and marriage into perceptible, memorable, and discussable value demonstrations through character construction and narrative expression.

This study selects this scene as a typical case not only because the line is memorable, but also because it fully presents the generative mechanism of the marital exemplary effect in costume dramas. Minglan's judgment is based on concrete character relationships and prior plot experience. It conforms to the survival logic of women's cautious mate selection in the historical context of the drama, while also embodying the emphasis on moral bottom lines, relational responsibility, and risk awareness in modern views on love and marriage. The drama does not directly tell audiences what kind of marriage they should choose. Instead, through the two points of reference represented by Sun Xiucai and He Hongwen, it transforms abstract value judgments concerning love and marriage into concrete, comparable, and understandable narrative experiences. In the process of understanding the plot, audiences also obtain a form of judgment that can be transferred to real life: the stability of a marriage relationship depends not only on emotional intensity or external conditions, but also on an individual's minimum standards in moral boundaries, responsibility, and relationship handling. In this sense, "the lowest point of character" becomes a representative value symbol in the marital exemplary effect of costume dramas. As shown in Figure 4, the dialogue between Minglan and her grandmother visually anchors the discussion of character-based marital judgment in Episode 37 of *The Story of Minglan*.



Figure 4. Minglan talks with her grandmother in Episode 37 of *The Story of Minglan*
Note. Screenshot from *The Story of Minglan*, Episode 37.

4.2 Establishing Ritual Consciousness in Costume Dramas

Durkheim pointed out that rituals strengthen social solidarity through collective action, and ritual narratives in dramas can likewise arouse the audience's identification with a shared cultural identity (Durkheim, 1912/2011). This state enables viewers to enter a state of emotional resonance similar to collective effervescence when viewing the drama. Drama series typically have relatively fixed publicity and broadcast processes. Even if viewers cannot watch a broadcast simultaneously, watching a drama is a simple ritual for individuals. This practice is often accompanied by habitual routines before viewing, such as lying down, eating, or doing housework. The narrative of a drama series also contains

multiple symbolic features, including broadcast rhythms and periodic ritual experiences. Weekly release schedules are themselves a modern media ritual: Audiences watch at fixed times and participate in discussion through bullet-screen interactions, comment exchanges, and the emotional rendering of short video clips. As technology advances, forms of interaction surrounding costume dramas have become increasingly rich. For example, in Episode 15 of *The Legend of Zanghai*, the bullet-screen comments during the meteor shower scene in which Zanghai and Xiang Antu visit the river, enjoy lanterns, and look at the stars during the Zhongyuan Festival instantly ignite audience emotion. Many costume dramas now develop different forms of audience interaction, greatly enhancing audience participation. Through these interactions, viewers naturally form collective practices resembling festivals. Before and after a broadcast, dramas often include previews, interviews, special programs, and other extensions. These practices gradually demonstrate the ritualized behavior surrounding drama series.

To participate in engagement, collective effervescence must have a dedicated space. The real-time interactive functions of digital media platforms, including Youku, iQiyi, Mango TV, Tencent Video, and short drama platforms, jointly create a new cloud venue for this collective effervescence. Viewers communicate about specific plotlines, conflicts, and characters through real-time comments and linked emoji expressions, forming an emotional community. Although this digital ritual has no physical presence, it still provides a venue for the emergence of the "collective excitement" described by Durkheim (1912/2011). People watch and discuss the same objects, including costume dramas, at different times and places. With algorithmic recommendation and platform operation, targeted delivery and immersive experience further amplify the scale and intensity of this effervescence, allowing emotional resonance to break through the limits of physical space. Such a shift from field co-presence to digital co-presence also echoes studies of collective effervescence in festival and theater experiences (Yu et al., 2023).

4.3 Anonymity and Deindividuation: The Psychological Mechanism of Audience Emotional Identification

Costume dramas construct a field of collective effervescence through their strong immersive advantage. Anonymity and deindividuation become key psychological bridges for deep audience identification. When audiences watch costume dramas continuously, they often enter a state of self-forgetfulness and may even place themselves in the position of characters. In bullet-screen comments, most emotional expressions are also made from the standpoint of the characters. At this moment, audiences' self-boundaries naturally weaken, and when many viewers weaken their individual boundaries together, the process of weakening becomes a form of synchronized action, jointly creating a strong visual suggestion of deindividuation. Narrative strategies stimulate audiences' group identification and emotional resonance, weaken the boundary between self and other, and thereby strengthen immersion, enabling audiences to feel as if they are present within the scene (Cohen, 2001).

Bullet-screen and comment cultures further reinforce this mechanism. When tens of thousands of similar bullet-screen comments, such as "the return of Consort Xi" or "get married right now," as well as various evaluations of character behavior, sweep across the screen, individual identity dissolves into the torrent of text. Audiences unconsciously imitate group language patterns and complete a psychological transformation from spectators to ritual participants. The sense of security brought by anonymity makes audiences more likely to accept the values transmitted by the drama. Viewers watching ritual scenes under conditions of deindividuation may show greater acceptance of the traditional rites represented in the drama than they would in a fully detached state. Through this subtle psychological mechanism, costume dramas enable modern audiences to temporarily set aside individual identity and complete a form of spiritual return to traditional culture within virtual collective effervescence.

In the digital field of collective effervescence, the virtual density of cloud space constructs a special mechanism of emotional transmission. Although this mechanism breaks through the limits of physical space, the depth and durability of its emotional contagion still have inherent limitations. High-density interaction under algorithmic architecture can produce instantaneous emotional resonance, but it is difficult to sustain genuine group identification. Studies suggest that emotional synchronization produced by this virtual collective effervescence often remains at the level of surface neural activation and lacks the deeper psychological imprint brought by offline rituals. While anonymity in cloud space lowers the threshold for participation, it also weakens individuals' responsibility and commitment within the group. When the digital carnival ends, the emotional fluctuations amplified by algorithms often recede like a tide, leaving only fragmented memory traces. This form of collective effervescence adapts to the communicative characteristics of the digital age, but it also raises the risk of echo chambers and group polarization (Sunstein, 2001).

5. Conclusion

This study has discussed how Chinese costume dramas influence the formation of marital attitudes. It argues that their influence on audiences' marital attitudes is not achieved through direct preaching but through a continuous process of situational aggregation, emotional arousal, interactive resonance, and value identification, which together form a mediatized mechanism of collective effervescence. In the process of jointly paying attention to plots, identifying with character fate, and participating in platform interaction, audiences gradually transform individual emotion into group emotion and reinterpret the meaning of love, marriage, and intimate relations within a group atmosphere.

This study has produced three main findings. First, character construction in costume dramas can provide audiences with an exemplary framework for judging love and marriage, making abstract values such as loyalty, responsibility, moral bottom lines, and risk awareness perceptible and memorable through concrete characters and plots. Second, bullet-screen comments, viewer comments, and short video recirculation strengthen audiences' emotional synchronization, allowing dispersed viewing experiences to be amplified, circulated, and transformed into group-based emotional states in platform spaces. Third, group emotion may be further transformed into value identification regarding love and marriage through sustained interaction, enabling audiences to form a renewed understanding of equal relationships, responsibility, moral bottom lines, and relational ethics through emotional participation.

At the theoretical level, this study advances the understanding of the mediatized turn of collective effervescence theory. Durkheim's discussion of collective effervescence was originally grounded in the contexts of religious ritual and bodily co-presence, emphasizing the relationship among group gathering, emotional contagion, and shared belief (Durkheim, 1912/2011). This study further argues that bodily co-presence is not the only condition for the generation of collective effervescence in digital media environments. Platform interaction, synchronous expression, topic aggregation, and algorithmic dissemination can also constitute new forms of mediatized co-presence, enabling dispersed audiences to form emotional synchronization through co-viewing and continuous expression, and further promoting the generation of value identification.

At the practical level, this discussion also provides implications for future creators, producers, and digital content distribution platforms of costume dramas. Costume drama creation should not pursue emotional stimulation and traffic popularity alone, but should maintain greater prudence in character relationships, marriage narratives, and value expression. Creators can guide audiences to understand equality, respect, responsibility, and boundaries in intimate relationships through more complex character construction, more logical relational conflict, and more responsible emotional narratives. Platforms should also avoid simply amplifying extreme emotions in content recommendation,

comment management, and secondary dissemination, and should promote a more rational, equal, and healthy discussion environment for love and marriage.

This study nevertheless has several limitations. It mainly adopts theoretical analysis and case interpretation and has not yet empirically verified the influence mechanism through audience interviews, bullet-screen data analysis, or questionnaire research. Therefore, how collective effervescence operates across different platforms, different dramas, and different audience groups still requires further investigation. Future research may combine specific drama samples, platform comment data, bullet-screen text analysis, and audience surveys to further test the actual role of mediatized collective effervescence in the formation of marital attitudes and to compare differences among various types of costume dramas in guiding love and marital values.

Funding: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: Not applicable.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

AI Use Disclosure Statement: The author(s) declare that no generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest: The author(s) declare no conflicts of interest.

References

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice Hall

Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text* (S. Heath, Trans.). Fontana Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (R. Nice, Trans.). Harvard University Press.

Castells, M. (2010). *The rise of the network society* (2nd ed., with a new pref.). Wiley-Blackwell.

Cohen, J. (2001). Defining identification: A theoretical look at the identification of audiences with media characters. *Mass Communication & Society*, *4*(3), 245–264. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0403_01

Datawin. (2025). *2024 annual observation report on online broadcasting of long-form drama series* [Industry report]. Enlightent.

Deng, M. (2015). Research on television drama culture and value guidance for contemporary college students (Doctoral dissertation). Hunan Normal University. https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=jit-Bskw5eSxInt3zyWzhWWg2MA7wuAWerCy4jiAhjVdHU6aOip18tOiaFXCVLzDIh5NBvqMWncUGDbc0cesVyWmnZnwJd7ec5yV84uUshWow9jJUndEM_wiUQmc02zl-7jVhulE3c5F5qrct-1sb1FCpnv5IGzvuVt6ujIfdAUiS_w5um_kXijfwpOiv-FA&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS

Duan, Y., & Yin, K. L. (2026). The generative mechanism, situational characteristics, and positive psychological effects of collective effervescence. *Advances in Psychological Science*, *34*(2), 364–381. https://doi.org/10.3724/SP.J.1042.2026.0364

Durkheim, É. (2011). *The elementary forms of religious life* (Q. Dong & J. Ji, Trans.). The Commercial Press. (Original work published 1912) [in Chinese translation]

Hall, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage/The Open University.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.

Jiang, N. P., & Sha, W. Z. (2022). Collective effervescence as interactive ritual: Online emotional performance among television audiences. *Chinese Television*, (11), 62–67.

Li, S. Z., & Lou, L. X. (2025). Current situation analysis of female college students' views on marriage and childbearing under the background of balanced population development and countermeasures. *Journal of Hubei University of Economics (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, *22*(12), 81–85.

Lighthouse Research Institute. (2024). *2024 drama market report* [Industry report]. Lighthouse Professional Edition.

Men, H. (2022). The meaning construction of Internet 'onlookers': A new face of collective effervescence. *Tianfu New Idea*, (1), 143–150.

Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China. (2025). *2024 statistical bulletin on the development of civil affairs* [Statistical bulletin].

National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2025). *China statistical yearbook 2025*. China Statistics Press.

Sang, M. (2024). Searching for 'lost media': Technological nostalgia and collective effervescence among Chinese social-media users. *Media*, (20), 94–96.

Shen, S. H. (2025). *Content presentation and audience feedback of marriage-and-love videos on Bilibili* (Master's thesis). Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. https://doi.org/10.27032/d.cnki.ggdwu.2025.000788.

Song, J. Y. (2025). Viewing folk society through *renao*: On the construction and reorganization of a landmark concept. *Open Times*, (6), 44–61.

Sunstein, C. R. (2001). *Republic.com*. Princeton University Press.

Wang, H. C., & Yang, H. W. (2025). The information-cocoon dilemma and its resolution in Gen-Z youth's marriage-and-love decision-making from the perspective of network ecological governance. *Youth Journal*, (6), 24–32.

Wu, X. Y. (2022). Family from a feminist perspective: Transformation, controversy, and implications. *Journal of Shandong Women's University*, (1), 20–29.

Yu, Z. Y., Yan, M., & Gu, P. P. (2023). Field co-presence and collective effervescence: Formation of tourists' communitas in festival-tourism theatres. *Journal of Sichuan Normal University (Social Sciences Edition)*, *50*(4), 82–88. https://doi.org/10.13734/j.cnki.1000-5315.2023.0409.

Zhang, X. L. (2025). Manufacturing 'intimacy hunger': Alienation of intimate relationships in the digital era and pathways beyond it. *Press Circles*, (5), 16–24, 34. https://doi.org/10.15897/j.cnki.cn51-1046/g2.20250428.001.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of KIHSS and/or the editor(s). KIHSS and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.