

Urban Striver Women and the Politics of Economy, Gender, and Sexuality in Internet series
Women in Beijing

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Abstract:

My PhD thesis mainly explores the questions how urban Chinese women's pursuit of economic and sexual autonomy is narrated in the internet serial drama *Women in Beijing* (2018); how women benefited from and contributed to the party-state's agenda of social governance; and how the narration about woman's autonomy attributed to the global neoliberal and neo-feminist (or neo-consumerism) cultural trends.

Theoretically, the research is placed on the intersection of gender, media, and marketing studies and is expected to probe into the issue of Chinese gender in a global context. I divide the research into two parts, which respectively investigate the representations of urban striver women in the series and relevant ethnographic issues, and the series producers' effort to market the striver prototype on social media among young Chinese female audience. For the first part, I engage with the scholarships about contemporary China and the global feminine culture, addressing China's gender dynamics, woman's flexible identities, neoliberalism and neo-feminism. For the second part, I take advantage of researches from marketing studies and digital media studies, which questions how the internet series use social media platforms and celebrities to promote itself among netizens. Methodologically, for the first part of thesis, I intend to provide a comparative perspective to compare *Women in Beijing* horizontally with its sister productions *Women in Shanghai* (2018) and *Tokyo Girl* (2016), and vertically with *Go Lala Go* (2010) and *Sex and the City* (1998) and so on.

For the first part, I argue that *Women in Beijing's* producers and the state collaborated to instill the official gender discourse and up-to-date politics into young urban women through the narrative about several striving urban women. They promoted the ideas that firstly, economy is the ultimate device to enable individual woman's social mobility; secondly, individual woman is responsible for her own well-being and therefore, she should work hard to be self-sufficient. Moreover, the state's socio-economic policies from the reform era to the late 2010s intensified emphasis on individual woman's labor, economic performance, and consumption. The change propelled urban women to seek for a more proactive and flexible gender identity than before in both public and private spheres, in order to emancipate their monetary and sexual desires and to secure their own possession of social resources. For the second part, I argue that the internet series adheres to its target female audience on the virtual community on the internet to acquire more market profit, while fulfilling the ideological propagation tasks, assigned by the state. The audience engage video watching, social media interactions with celebrities, fashion consumption with, subconsciously, study of up-to-date state policies of gender and economy.