

## Investigation of Mother-Daughter Relationships in China: An Installation Art Study

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### Abstract

Against the backdrop of China's one-child policy and 40 years of rapid social development, mother-daughter relationships have profoundly suffered, especially in Chinese families where two or three generations have born a single female child. When discussing "motherhood" in China, the traditional practice is to celebrate the belief in "great maternal love", but the relationship between mother and daughter is very complex and delicate. This study challenges the Chinese tradition and precept of "mother's kindness and daughter's filial piety" and "mother's love is great" by attempting to represent the "mother-daughter relationship" through the medium of installation art, which is underexplored in the arts. This study has two aims: to describe mother-daughter relationships through installation art and to investigate mother-daughter relationships through installation art. The study found the research gap through a review of literature, a case study, and an image analysis.

The researcher collected data on the relationship between mothers and daughters using cross-sectional research, sample studies, and unstructured interviews. And The researcher conducted an installation art experiment through practical reasoning to obtain a set of installation artworks on the relationship between mothers and daughters and an exhibition entitled “Will I be You when I Grow up?” on Mother’s Day. The effects of this research were demonstrable through participant observation and the quantitative analysis of audience message cards. This study contributes to an artist’s path to achieving accurate expression and provoking social reflection through art.

**Keywords:** Installation art, Mother-daughter relationship, Contemporary China, Investigation, Expression

## Introduction

All mothers were daughters, and daughters were future mothers. We have accepted the praise of maternal love since childhood, and people have already established the belief of “great maternal love” in our hearts. But the relationship between mother and daughter is very complex and subtle, and there are conflicts, contradictions, injuries, and resentments. In the Chinese version of *The Second Sex*, Simone Beauvoir describes the relationship between mother and daughter as follows: “Their relationship has a far more dramatic character. The mother does not greet her daughter as a member of a superior hierarchy: she seeks her own alter ego in her daughter.” (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 348) Mother-daughter conflict is a problem in many families. China’s fast development over the last 40 years, as well as the one-child policy, have influenced on the family structure, particularly in parent-child relationships. Parent-child connections, particularly mother-daughter ties, account for a significant portion of psychological therapy services.

Even though the fact that the subject has been covered in both literature and cinema, there is a notable dearth of visual art portrayals of mother-daughter relationships, especially through installations that deal with this important and challenging area of human relationships. The one child policy, which has been in place for more than 30 years, has become a thing of the past since 2016 when China advocated two children per couple.; hence, it is important to investigate mother-daughter relationships in the families impacted by the one-child policy and instigate discussions on artworks relevant to the subject.

Talking about the mother-daughter relationships under China’s one-child policy and the rapidly developing social environment is different from talking about the mother-daughter relationships in any other era. Due to society’s rapid development and the policy of breeding one child per couple, China’s family system has been severely affected, especially impacting parent-child relationships. Children born between 1979 and 1990 have witnessed the structural transformation of society, the emergence of social differentiation, the change of the social system, and the subsequent increase of social problems. They have endured many challenging conditions while growing up that their parents had never encountered. The impact of this could be observed on mothers having higher expectations from their only daughters while simultaneously being more dependent on them.

## Chinese art on the theme of “mother-daughter relationships

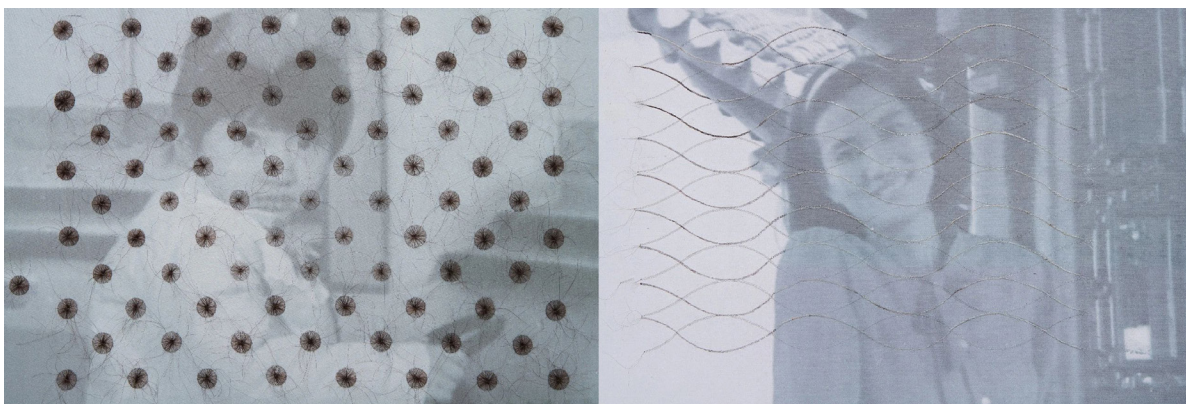
There are not many artworks related to mother-daughter relationships in China. Below are two artists working on a series of works specifically themed on this subject were CAI Yaling and Li Zijian.



**Figure 1** Oil painting “Humanity and Love” series

Note: From Li Zijian Art Museum, 1994

Li Zijian, an oil painter, born in 1954, focuses his works on motherhood and humanity, as shown in Figure 1. This series of oil paintings depict Li Zijian’s wife supporting her daughter. However, the works in this series, entitled Mother and Daughter, reveal an inherent “paradigm” of male artistic expression of the female figure. The series is not concerned with the relationship between mother and daughter and are instead “the viewed” characters in the paintings. They are merely idealized “perfect” women drawn from a male perspective.



**Figure 2** Installation art “Mother in 1987, Myself in 1987”

Note: From CAI Yaling, 2016



CAI Yaling is a female artist born in 1984 whose works are more inclined to express her own life experiences. Her creation process is also the process of female artists facing themselves. As shown in Figure 2, the materials chosen for the installation artwork “Mother in 1987” “Self in 1987” are the author’s and mother’s hair and cloth. These works reflect the author’s changing emotions toward her mother after she became a mother. These artworks were made by the author and her mother together. CAI Yaling tries to investigate the general relationship between women, as well as the author’s identity as a daughter and her relationship with her mother. The works and materials used are genuine, calm, and gentle, and it is considered an important part of this research. Female artists’ works tend to be more touching when they shift away from a revolutionary projection embodying male power and toward observation, recording, and performance of real ordinary women. According to the research goals, the current goal of feminist art is not to dissolve itself or to be the opposite of men, nor is it to rely on men’s mode of discourse so that both men and women can use their feelings and experiences to create art in their respective fields.

In contemporary China, the subject of the mother-daughter relationship has been explored and discussed more deeply in film art.



Figure 3 (Left) Movie poster for “Girls always happy”

Note: From The Guangzhou Nandu Guang Yuan Entertainment Co, 2013

Figure 4 (Middle) Movie poster for “Send Me to the Clouds”

Note: From The Bad Rabbit (Shanghai) Pictures Co., Hua Xia Film Distribution Co, 2019

Figure 5 (Right) Movie poster for “Spring Tide”

Note: From The Aim Media Co., Ltd, 2019

The newly released “2021 China Film Art Report” points out that in recent years, several women-themed films focusing on mother-daughter relationships have appeared in the Chinese film market. Women characters, especially mothers and daughters, are gradually beginning to receive attention. The works of some female directors have explored mother-daughter relationships profoundly. Figure 3-5 shows the posters for three films, “Girls always happy”, “Send Me to the Clouds” and “Spring Tide” which deal with the relationship between mothers and daughters who “love each other” or “hate each other”. In these stories, there is care, expectation, entanglement, and pain between mothers and daughters. The film “Spring Tide” illustrates this complex, tangled relationship between mothers and daughters. The relationship between mothers and daughters is shown to be full of conflict and yet firmly inseparable.

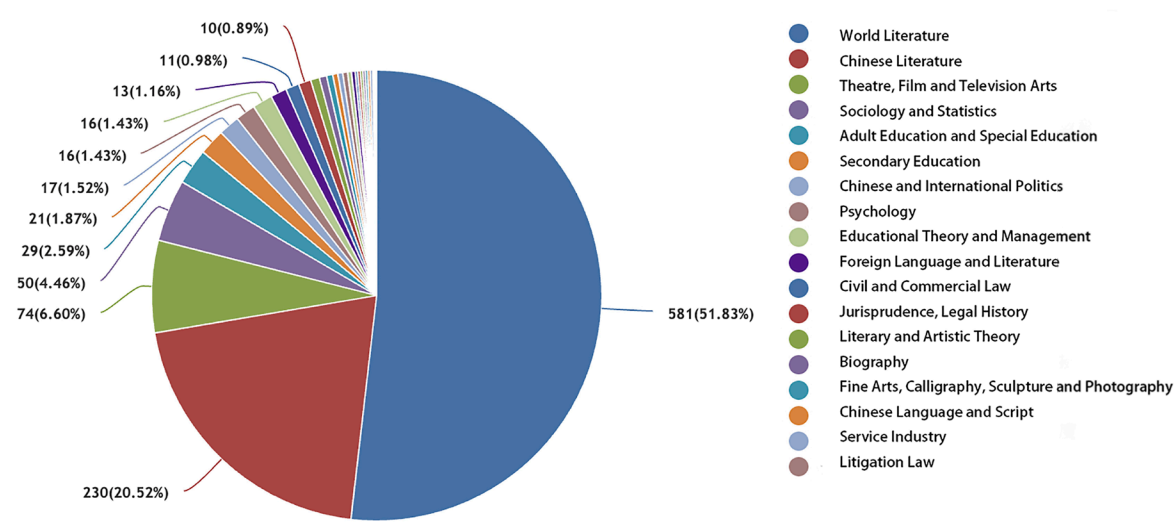
These documentaries about women’s lives demolish the “maternal myth,” with no mention of “maternal love,” “dedication,” “filial piety,” or “ideal women.” They emphasize realism and immerse us in the real world of women, allowing us to see real-life female difficulties and get up close and personal with the complex feelings that exist between mother and daughter. These works have a strong quality in that they are introspective. “Their strength is reflected not only in their ability to transform individual emotions into collective experiences, but also in their self-reflective honesty and courage.” (Zhang, 2021)

Such films have not achieved high box office results in the mainstream market, but they have been recognized by a certain group of fans. The relationship between the mother and her children in these films projects such a contrast that the audience outside the film can easily relate to the characters. Therefore, this kind of film art naturally has the power of making the audience strongly empathize and resonate with the characters. According to this research, the advantage of cinema is that it can discuss several issues in greater depth, reach a larger audience, and have a strong influence. Despite one-way communication with and no interaction, it can also make the audience empathic.

The count of articles, on the topic of mother-daughter relationships or articles mentioning mother-daughter relationships in the title and came up with the following data referred in this study, is automatically generated on the CKNi website, a Chinese literature database.

Among the 1,096 Chinese articles (including 502 academic journal articles, 271 dissertations, and 10 others), world literature accounted for 51.83%, Chinese literature accounted for 20.52%, drama, film, and television art accounted for 6.6%, sociology accounted for 4.46%, education accounted for 2.59% and others 14%. Of these, zero were art, zero were from design, zero were sculpture, and two were photography.

### Subject Distribution



**Figure 6** Pie chart of discipline distribution of articles related to mother-daughter relationships

Note: From © Bei Liu 10/03/2021

The “mother-daughter relationship” has been intensively studied in sociological, psychological, and feminist writings. In Chinese academic research papers, the keywords “mother-daughter relationship” is mainly found in literary descriptions and reviews. Fine arts research is yet to explore the “mother-daughter relationship”.

“The mother-daughter relationship” has been explored more often in realistic and ethical films leading to an increase in public discussion. According to the research, cinema has its advantages in that it can discuss topics in great depth through stories, has a wide audience, and is very influential. The limitation of cinema is that it is a flat, one-way output system that does not allow audience interaction and participation.

The image of motherhood in Chinese paintings and sculptures is presented as a symbolic role, and the artistic expression of “maternal myth” has largely obscured the role of a mother and ignored the richness and complexity of the relationship between mother and daughter. Compared to the in-depth exploration of cinema, the art and fine art disciplines are far behind in their depiction of the mother-daughter relationship. In the history of art in the East and the West, mother-daughter relationships are explored far less than male-female relationships, father-daughter relationships, father-son relationships, and mother-son relationships, there are historical reasons and social structures behind this.

Writer Nancy Friday writes that to understand ourselves, we must first understand our relationship with our mothers. The same thought appears in the slogan of the film “Spring Tide” that says your relationship with your mother decides your relationship with the world. “The mother-daughter relationship”, is a special yet universal relationship between women and can be taken as an important entry point to women’s discourse. In this backdrop, this study investigates the real-life mother-daughter relationships of real ordinary women and expresses them in the installation art.

### **Objective and questions**

The type of research in this project falls under the category of practice-based participatory action research, which aims to respond to participants and stakeholders by describing the findings of a survey on mother-daughter relationships in China through the creation of installation art and by validating the research findings through audience participation and feedback in the installation art exhibition. It is applied research that uses art as a tool to describe and to investigate.

As shown in the figure 7, the research questions in this project focus on the investigation of mother-daughter relationships in China, the representation of art on the topic of mother-daughter relationships in China, the experimentation with installation art to depict mother-daughter relationships, and stakeholder participation and feedback on the installation art and exhibition. The research questions in this project correspond to the research objectives and the research methodology based on the research questions.

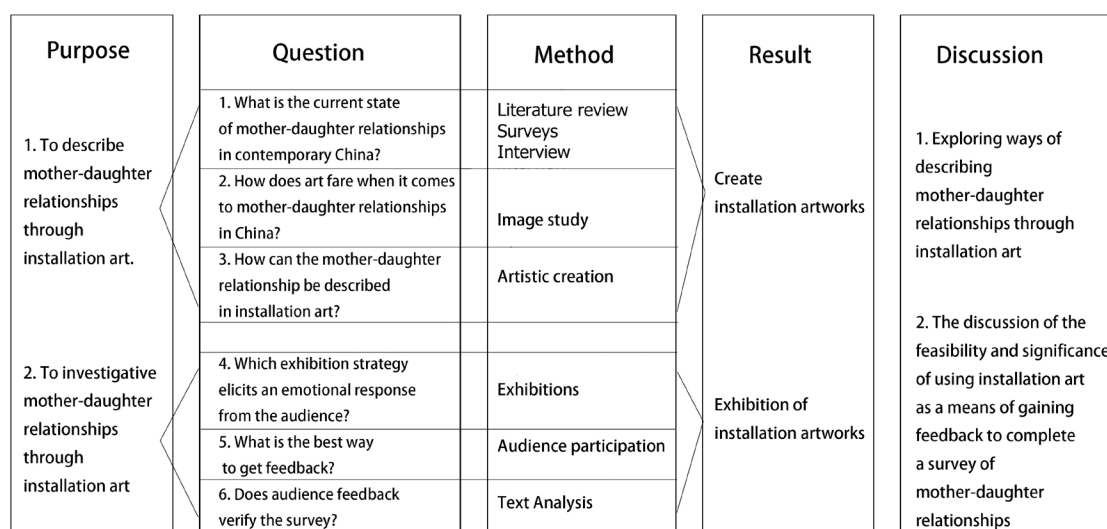


Figure 7 Structure chart of the research framework

Note: From © Bei Liu 08/01/2023

## Method

A qualitative research approach was used for this topic. The research path is shown in figure 8.

The first phase of data collection methods includes literature reviews, web data analysis, unstructured interviews, and sample case studies. The researcher obtained data from real stories extracted from Chinese question-and-answer websites and social media, as well as interviews with two classic cases of four-generation mother-daughter families in Henan Province. In the second phase of this study, the researcher extracted elements from the information and used practical reasoning to translate the design elements and material qualities into an installation artwork that depicts Chinese mother-daughter relationships. In the third phase of this study, the researcher designed the exhibition approach to attract audience participation, designed the participation approach to obtain audience message card feedback, did text analysis and word frequency analysis on the audience message cards through quantitative statistical methods, and the results verified the research hypothesis.

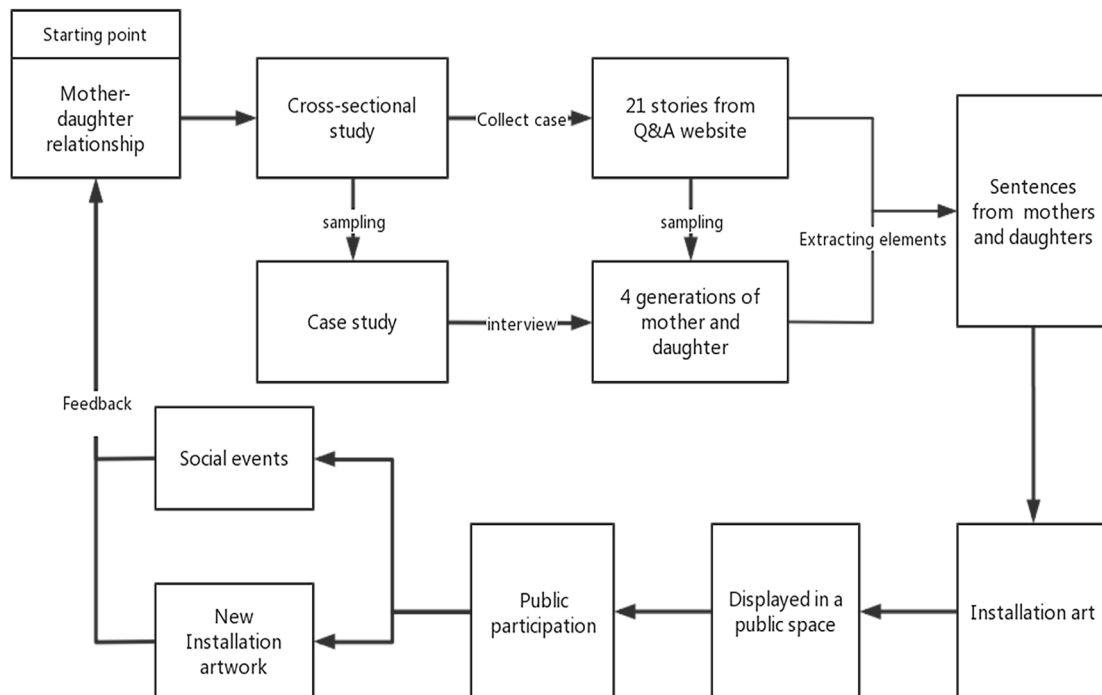


Figure 8 Pathway map of the research process

Note: From © Bei Liu 10/03/2021

The survey site for this study set in Zhengzhou, Henan Province, China. The inclusion criteria for participants were women born between 1979 and 1990 who were themselves the only child in their family and the mother of an only child.

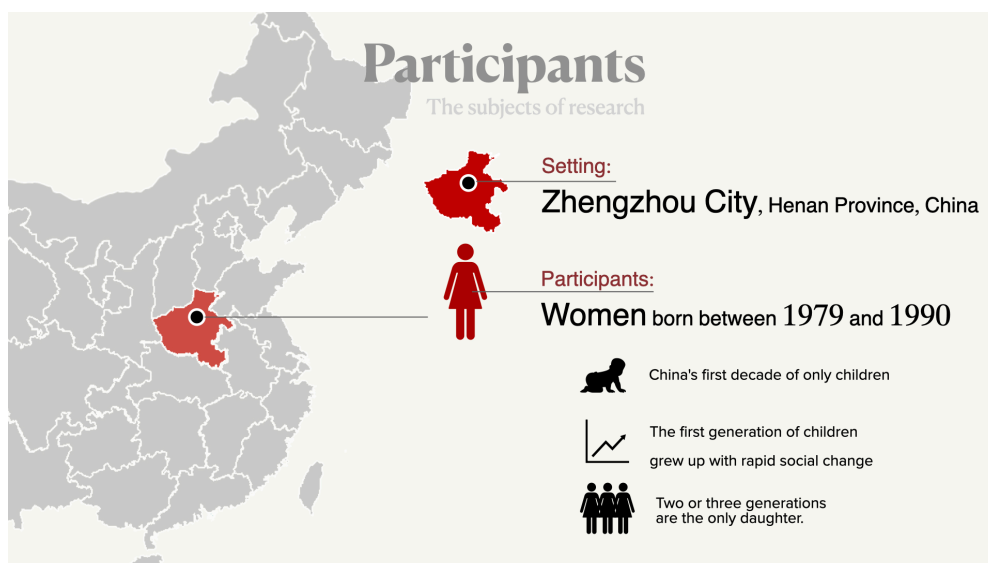


Figure 9 Location of survey and range of participants

Note: From © Bei Liu 10/03/2021



## Transformation of Language: Depicting mother-daughter relationships through installation art

### 1. Surveys: Cross-sectional Study and Sample Case Study

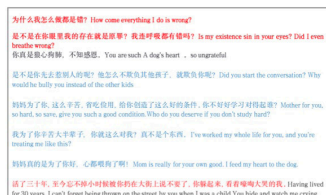
In the preliminary cross-sectional study, this research collected basic data from Chinese Q&A websites and social media, including the Q&A website “Zhihu”, the review website “Douban”, and the social media platform “Weibo”. Real-life experiences and comments about parent-child issues were collected, and 21 stories about mother-daughter relationships were extracted. The existence of words uttered as a daughter to her mother or as a mother to her daughter in the text of the stories, as well as the fact that these stories were told by the protagonists themselves between 2020 and 2021 and were the inclusion criteria for study subjects. Of the 21 anecdotes or comments, 18 were told by daughters, while three were told by mothers. The bulk of internet articles regarding mother-daughter interactions were told by daughters who complained to their mothers, and were all anonymous or referred to by nicknames, according to the study. This research gathered some texts about mother-daughter relationships in a preliminary cross-sectional survey.

By leveraging personal relationships and friend referrals, this study acquired seven representative cases of families comprising three or four generations of mothers and daughters. These cases encompassed three instances from Zhengzhou, two from Zhoukou City, one from Shangqiu City, and one from Pingdingshan City, all located in Henan Province, China. Two four-generation mother-daughter households were selected for a typical case study, each characterized by a lineage of solely daughters spanning more than two generations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by this study with the mothers and daughters of the sampled families over several months. The interviews took place through various means, including online interviews facilitated by the social media app WeChat and face-to-face conversations. The conversations centered on “mother-daughter relationships” and included, but were not limited to, the following questions: What is their relationship with their mother? How do they feel about their mothers? Have they had any conflicts with their mothers or daughters? What they would like to say to their mothers and what they would like to say to their daughters. In the first family, the four-generation mother-daughter family comprised of an 86-year-old grandmother, a 58-year-old mother, a 34-year-old daughter, and a 2-year-old girl, and the actual interviewed members were: the 58-year-old mother and the 34-year-old daughter. In the second family, the four-generation mother-daughter members included

a 93-year-old grandmother, a 61-year-old mother, a 58-year-old maternal aunt, 34-year-old daughter, and a 2-year-old girl, and the actual members interviewed were: the 61-year-old mother, the 58-year-old maternal aunt, and the 34 years old daughter. Due to the age of the respondents, the descriptions of the senior grandmother and the little girl in both groups were based on the descriptions of other family members.

## 2. Elemental transformation

### Elements



Words or Sentences  
from Mothers and Daughters



Embroidery, as a craft  
is a highly underestimated "art created by women"  
And using a **needle** and **thread**  
is often considered a female activity

Figure 10 Design elements

Note: From © Bei Liu 10/03/2021

Based on the words or sentences expressed by mothers and daughters in both the cross-sectional and sample studies, specific pain points between mothers and daughters in contemporary China have been identified. Language was selected as an important element for this research work because it resonates easily. Moreover, language is also the source of many conflicts between mothers and daughters; therefore, it is bound to directly touch the hearts of the participants and the audience. The choice of textual content is a key point in this study, which determines whether the audience can empathize with it, consequently also determining their willingness to participate.

Embroidery is a highly underrated "art created by women", and Chinese embroidery is also known as "women's red". It is believed that during the Eastern Han Dynasty, embroidery was at par with painting. Later, as most embroiderers were women and painting was controlled by the male elite, the former was reduced to a technique "passed down among women",

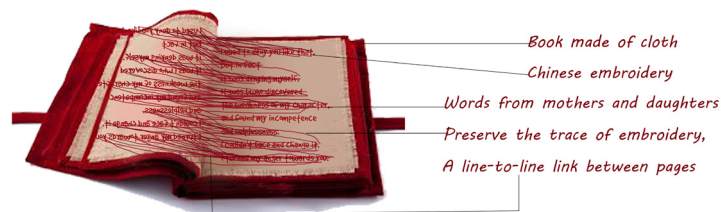
while painting, which had been at par with it, rose to become a refined art. Despite ancient painting manuals and treatises available for study, the first theoretical work on embroidery appeared only during the late Qing dynasty, and subsequently, the cultural connotations attached to embroidery and needles were gradually forgotten.

The use of needles and thread is often considered to be a feminine act. In traditional societies, the mother is the most emotionally charged identity of women, and women occupied with sewing reiterates this caring role ascribed to mothers. There is a long and stable association between needle and thread and the mother, as illustrated by a Chinese poem: “Thread in the hands of a loving mother is the clothing of a wandering son. When one is about to travel, one is afraid of being late in returning.” In traditional societies, girls learn the skills of using needle and thread under the guidance of their mothers, and the transmission of skills between mother and daughter establishes a category of female production that rests outside of male society, which consolidates the trust and emotional ties between the married daughter and her mother. This mode of emotional transmission is carried over to the married daughter after she becomes a mother. “Through the textiles they manufactured and the patterns they embroidered, this Widespread form of communication under the women’s fingertips conveyed an emotion that could not be described in words, creating a network of women’s relationships within the high walls of the inner gate. (Liu, 2019, p. 81) The inter-generational transmission of this skill between mothers and daughters shares characteristics with the mother-daughter relationship itself, symbolizing continuity and circulation, replication, and breakthrough.

In summary, this research acquired keywords associated with the design elements of the installation artwork, namely language, text, embroidery, and red thread. Utilizing the medium of embroidery with needle and thread, textural components were created to depict and convey the intricate relationship between mother and daughter, as well as the dilemmas and pain points within this relationship.

### 3. Sketching and prototyping

Sketches illustrating the design elements based on the keywords are presented in Figure 3 and Figure 4.



Material: Cloth, Needle and Thread

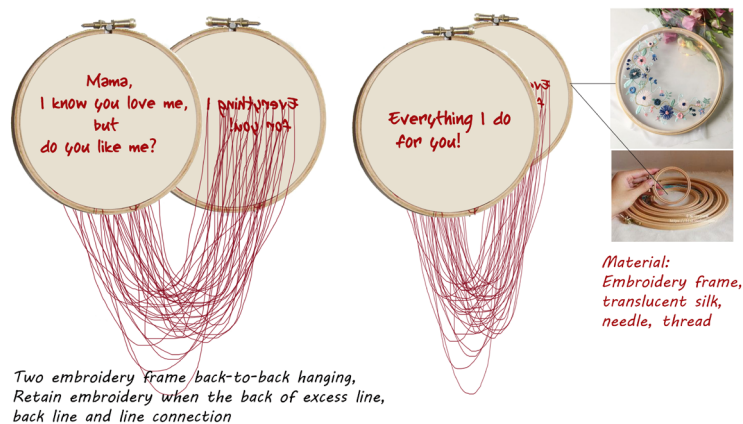
The words on the page:

From surveys, questionnaires, interviews, what mothers and daughters say to each other



Figure 11 Scheme A of Installation art design

Note: From © Bei Liu 10/03/2021



The words on the page:

From surveys, questionnaires, interviews, what mothers and daughters say to each other

Figure 12 Scheme B of Installation art design

Note: From © Bei Liu 10/03/2021

As in Figure 11, Scheme A is a book made of red and white cloth and red thread. This research plans to make a cloth book by embroidering some sentences extracted from the survey and interviews conducted with mothers and daughters. This research will preserve the traces of the embroidery, such as the trajectory of the needle and the connection and tugging of the threads, which will link the threads between every two pages of the book, just like the “tangled” or complex relationship between mother and daughter. It will be a soft, readable, and touching book.

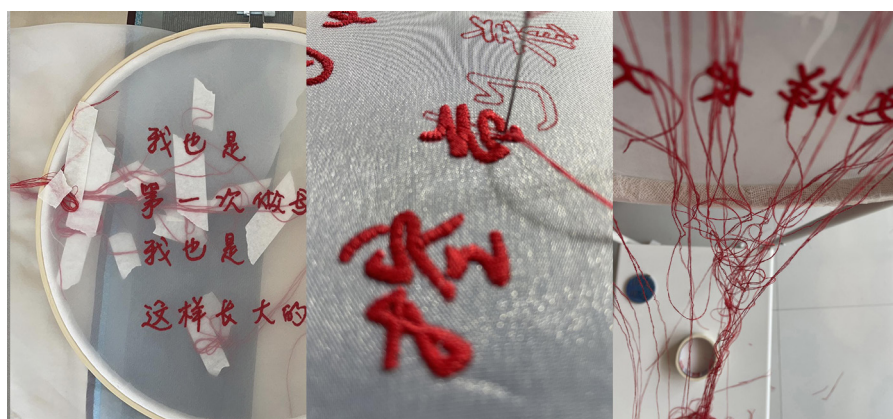
As in Figure 12, Scheme B shows some embroidery frames that appear in pairs, using materials such as embroidered frame, translucent silk, and red thread. This research plans to embroider some sentences extracted from the survey and interviews on translucent silk cloth and use the embroidery hoops as picture frames. For the display, the words on each pair of frames are hung back-to-back, and behind the frame, they are linked by long threads, which is a deliberately preserved embroidery track. This also symbolizes the relationship between mother and daughter, “separate and dependent, confrontational and intimate”.

Both pieces of art employ materials typically associated with femininity, such as cloth and needle and thread, and are distinguished by their dominant red and white hues. While creating the prototype, collaboration with mothers was sought to acquire embroidery techniques, which resonate with the theme of the mother-daughter relationship.



**Figure 13** The production process of Scheme A

Note: From © Bei Liu 10/03/2021



**Figure 14** The production process of Scheme B

Note: From © Bei Liu 10/03/2021





Figure 15 Outcome of work A  
Note: From © Bei Liu 10/03/2021

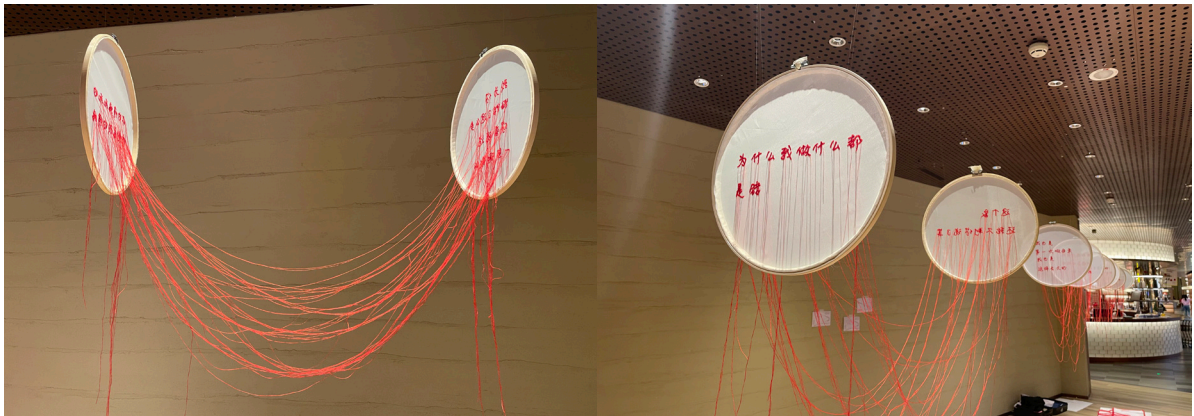


Figure 16 Outcome of work B  
Note: From © Bei Liu 10/03/2021



Figure 17 Translation of the embroidery text in Outcome B  
Note: From © Bei Liu 10/03/2021



## Art as a means: Investigating mother-daughter relationships through an exhibition of installation artworks

### 1. Exhibition in Public

The first step is to create a showcase that empathizes with the audience. This research exhibited the works of the two projects at “Yanjiyou Bookstore” in Kaixuan Shopping Mall in Zhengzhou on Mother’s Day. As in Figure 20. The researcher chose this place for two reasons: people of different ages and education levels visit the shopping mall, and the bookstore also sets up the environment and atmosphere for the exhibition of the works. Presenting the exhibition on mother-daughter relationships on Mother’s Day can better resonate with the audience and spread to social media and arouse social thinking and feedback to stakeholders.



**Figure 18** The scene of the exhibition

Note: From © Bei Liu 08/05/2021

The second step is to design ways of getting feedback that protect participants’ feelings of security and desire to express themselves. During the exhibition, this research set up a message desk to collect feedback from the audience. As show in Figure 21, the message card was designed with four types of situations, “the mother says daughter listens”, “the daughter says mother listens”, “the mother says daughter says”, “mother listens daughter listens”, to guide the audience about the kind of messages that they could leave, also to facilitate the later statistics. In the cloth book of Scheme A, blank pages were intentionally included to encourage audience participation in embroidery.

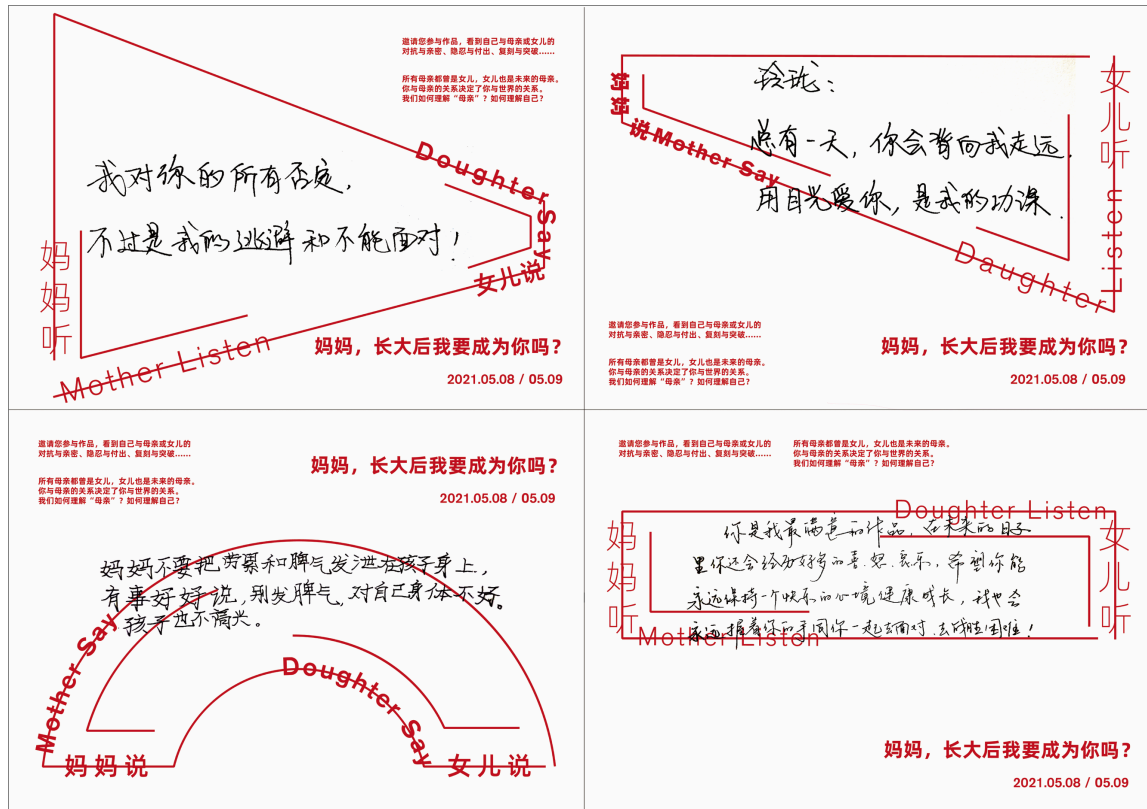


Figure 19 Design of the message card

Note: From © Bei Liu 02/05/2021



Figure 20 Audience writing message cards at the exhibition

Note: From © Bei Liu 08/05/2021



**Figure 21** Audience participation in the work

Note: From © Bei Liu 08/05/2021

## 2. Analysis of audience feedback

During the exhibition, this research received many sincere comments. It was observed that in areas where cameras were present, the audience typically departed after visiting and photographing the artwork, and feedback was received when there were fewer or no individuals in the camera-free zones. Additionally, the audience's reactions were carefully noted by maintaining a certain distance. There was a young mother accompanied by her little girl who, after watching the full exhibition, looked at an embroidered frame and stood silently for a long time. She wrote a message card, then took several deep breaths, folded the card in her bag, and pulled her daughter away from the scene. When she passed by the researcher, the researcher noticed that the young mother had tears in her eyes but a smile on her lips. This moment proved deeply shocking for the researcher. The researcher moved by "reality" attempts to translate the "touch" into the work, which gets conveyed to the audience. Then the audience is touched by the work, and the author is touched by the "reality" of the audience. It's a beautiful chain of interaction between the audience and the work, and the author. The young mother's message card was taken by her, and there remained no feedback information for the researcher. This happened a lot in the whole exhibition; hence there were only 125 valid feedback that could be collected out of 300 blank message cards. Researchers chose to respect the emotions of the audience and did not stop them as they left without submitting their cards or taking pictures of the card content. The women could have taken the cards with them because they did not want to reveal the words they had written about their mothers or daughters, and it could also be that they were taking the message back to their mother or daughter.



Whatever the reason, the act of “taking away” proved that the audience was touched by the work. This aspect is in line with the research’s objective of evoking an emotional response and prompting reflection among the audience.

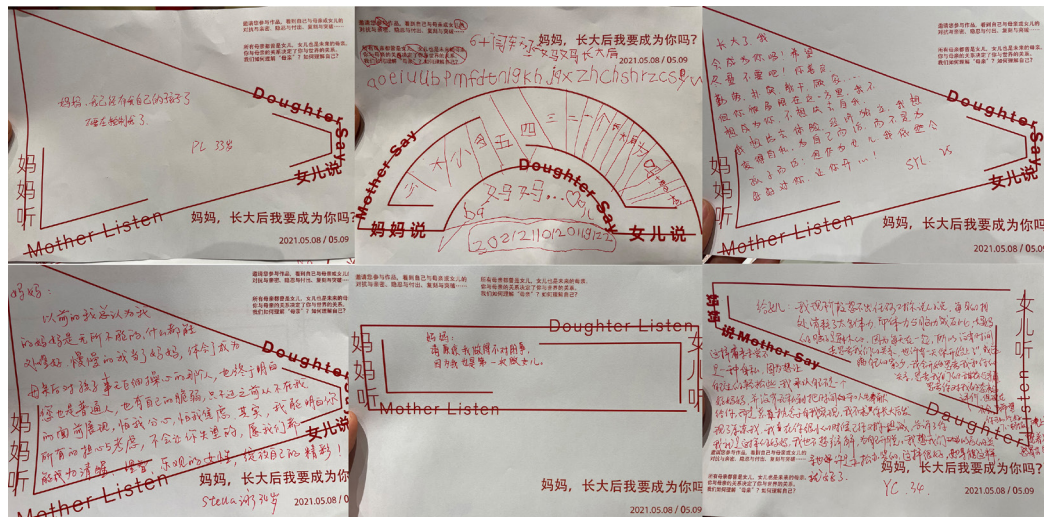


Figure 22 Message cards at the exhibition

Note: From © Bei Liu 08/05/2021

There was a lack of guidance about details to be included in the message cards at the exhibition site, which led to the absence of age in the messages of some audience members, thereby affecting the statistics and categorization of audience feedback at the later stage. These regrets provide lessons for subsequent research, a basis for improvement and guidance to avoid similar problems in the future.

This research was designed to facilitate anonymous, handwritten messages from the audience, thereby preventing longitudinal follow-up investigations within the scope of this research. Nevertheless, the decision to incorporate handwritten, anonymous message cards was upheld for the following reasons: firstly, digital messages cannot replace handwritten messages, because, in addition to the message of the words, handwritten texts also reveal the owner’s font, traces, and characteristics. The Chinese have a saying “the style is the man”, implying that a person’s characteristics become his/her identity. The researcher wanted the words to capture these traces along with the content of the messages. Secondly, writing anonymous messages in a room without cameras also gave the audience a sense of security to open their hearts, although it made impossible for the researcher to follow up the investigation at a later period.

### 3. Word frequency analysis of message cards

The content of 125 authentic message cards was analyzed in this research, with the signature, date, and number removed. The data analyzed are shown in Figure 25. As shown in Figure 26 in the effective 125 cards, 101 copies were written by daughters to their moms (81%), 20 by mothers to their daughters (16%), and 4 by mothers and daughters to each other on the same card (3%). In the word frequency analysis, the keyword “mother” (including mom) appeared 141 times in 88 cards. The keyword “daughter” appears 18 times in 18 cards, the situation of the cards at the exhibition shows that the audience’s desire to express themselves is greater for mothers than for daughters. As shown in Figure 27, the positive words that appear more frequently in adjectives and verbs are “happy”, “good”, “healthy” and “love”. This is because the work was exhibited on Mother’s Day, and most of the messages contained holiday wishes. Negative words are low in frequency but high in number, such as “hard”, “selfish”, “numb”, “denial”, “don’t” and so on. The lexical analysis of the message cards shows a mixture of blessings, accusations, and hopes in the messages, suggesting a relationship dilemma between mothers and daughters that is both confrontational and intimate, rehearsed and broken.

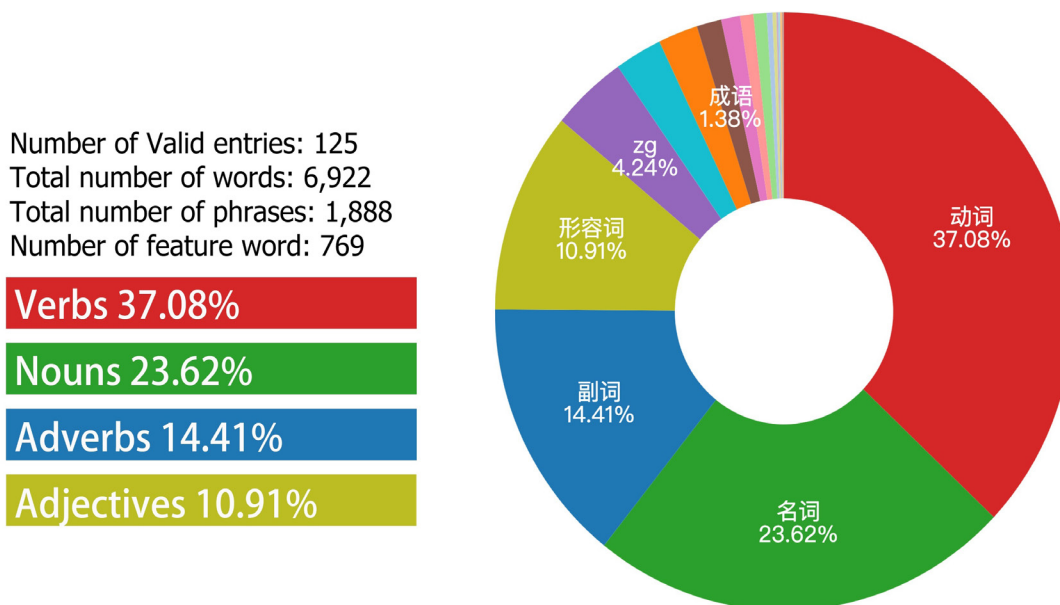


Figure 23 Basic information of Message cards

Note: From © Bei Liu 08/01/2023

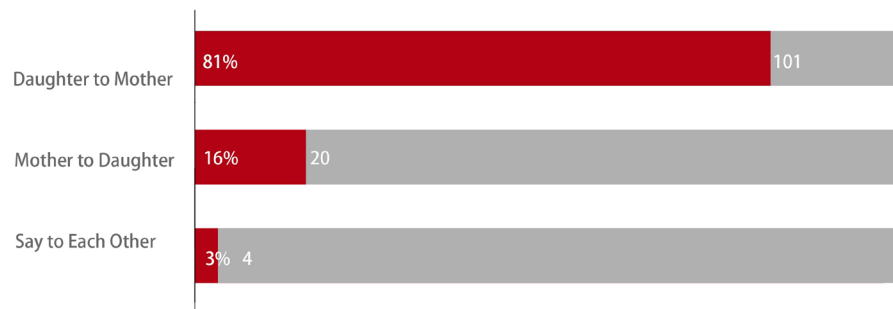


Figure 24 Statistics about Message card roles

Note: From © Bei Liu 08/01/2023

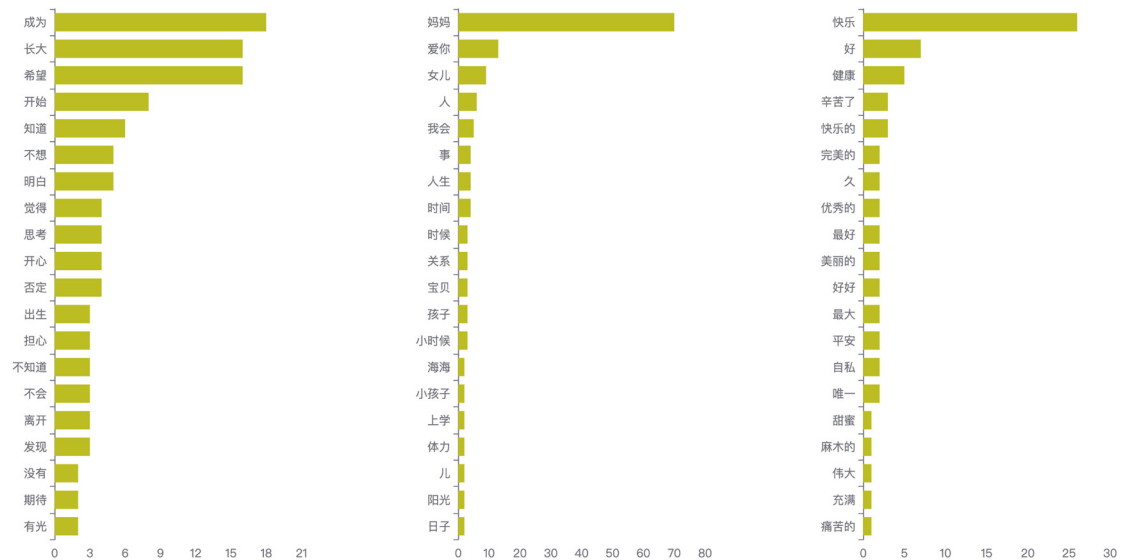


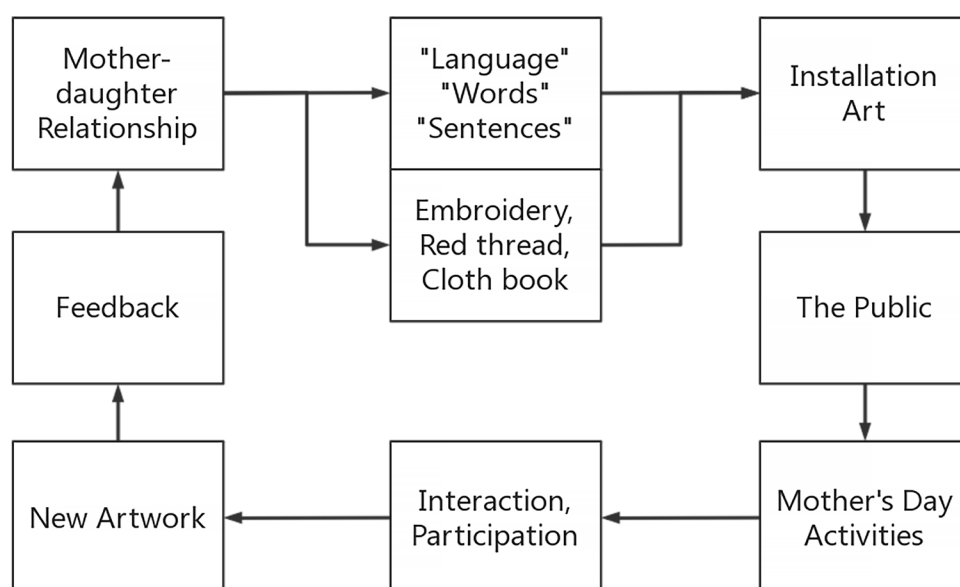
Figure 25 Words frequency analysis of message cards

Note: From © Bei Liu 08/01/2023



## Conclusion

### 1. The feasibility and meaning of depicting mother-daughter relationships through installation art



**Figure 26** The closed loop of the research process

Note: From © Bei Liu 08/01/2023

This study uses “mother-daughter relationship” as its starting point to draw responses from mothers and daughters, create installation art using those responses and then invite feedback from other women. This research ultimately helped stakeholders engage with feedback from the audience. The whole process forms a closed loop from the beginning to the end of the study.

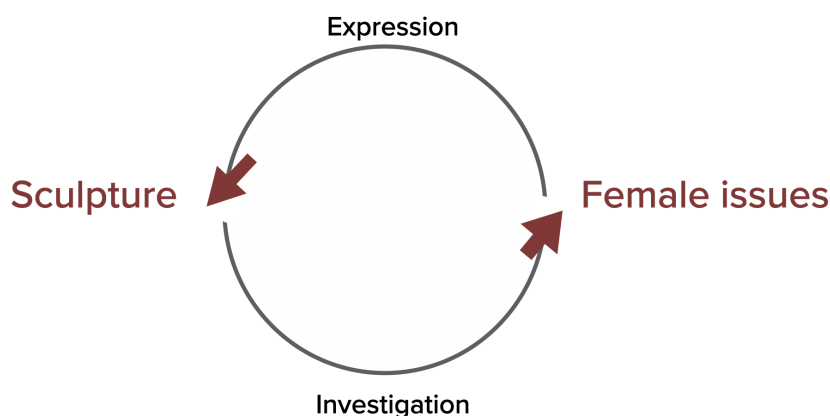
The findings of this study reveal a “relationship dilemma” between mothers and daughters in contemporary China. This research makes the “hidden” relationship between women “visible”, “Art does not reproduce the visible; it makes visible”, German artist Paul Klee once stated. (Bonhams, 2015) The world of women is not given enough attention, nor is there enough self reflection. Ordinary women, real mothers, deserve to be “seen” and “understood”. “Being seen” is the most basic human need, according to psychologist Abraham Maslow’s “Hierarchy of needs” hypothesis, and “Being seen” is linked to basic human senses of security, belonging, and respect. The need to be seen is related to basic feelings of safety, belonging, and respect. Understanding, reflection, and change all begin with seeing.

The result of this research is a set of installation artworks that experiment with the process of extracting key elements from abstract concepts to transform the “relationship” and “dilemma” between a mother and daughter into a viewable, participatory, and interactive art series. This research uses art to express relationships and describe dilemmas. Art, which is a type of portrayal, is also a language. A work of art, in contrast to “the way of telling” and “the way of theory,” is concrete and observable and responds to social problems through visual imagery.

## 2. The feasibility and significance of investigation through installation art

The outcome of this research is an exhibition where the installation artworks get feedback and audience participation. The technique applied in creating the artworks and the way of the exhibition experimented with how art reached the audience and attempted to shorten the aesthetic distance between people and art. In the book “What Is Art?”, the Russian writer Les Tolstoy writes, “The perceiver merges with the artist to such a degree that it seems to him that the perceived object has been made, not by someone else, but by himself, and that everything expressed by the object is exactly what he has long been wanting to express.” (Tolstoy, 1995, p. 210) The Chinese writer Lu Xun wrote, “Is it a luthier who plays the lute, others may have strings in their hearts to make a sound; is it a vocalist? Others must also be vocalizers to resonate.” (Lu, 2005, p. 373) There is a resonance of feelings, once the audience and the work of art have communicated and connected in terms of thoughts and emotions. Due to full sensation and comprehension, the viewer’s subjective world develops deep aesthetic communication with the artistic world of the artwork and uses the artwork as an intermediary to form a deep aesthetic communication with the subjective world of the artwork’s creator. This is supported by the “wonderful chain of interaction” noted in the “audience feedback” section above between the young mother, the work, and the author. This study attempts to bring art closer to the audience and to give art the power to engage in public welfare. “Art is the highest form of hope,” declared Gerhard Richter (Phaidon, 2016), a modern German painter. Art has the power to affect and make us cry, and the heartwarming feelings of “experience” and “empathy” may inspire people to act.

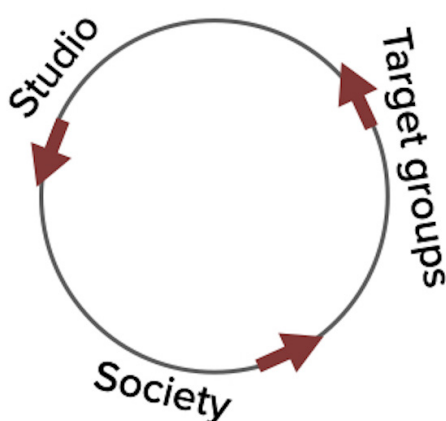
3. The pathway required an artist to achieve the aim of accurately expressing and provoking social reflection through art



**Figure 27** A model of circular sustainability of investigation and expressions  
Note: From © Bei Liu 08/01/2023

This research has the potential to transcend a closed loop and become a sustainable cycle, serving as an ongoing study of the variable’s “investigation” and “expression”.

This group of works about mother-daughter relationships could be exhibited again, with audience participation bringing the work up to date again and leading to a more in-depth investigation. As depicted in Figure 29, this cycle can perpetuate in this manner.



**Figure 28** The path to a virtuous circle of artistic creation  
Note: From © Bei Liu 08/01/2023

#### 4. Strength and Limitations

The use of art as a terminal to extend the social survey is one of the study's strengths. Following the sociological survey, the researcher's studio work enabled the data to be turned into installation art, which served as the foundation for an audience survey at the art exhibition site. The conclusion is based on the results of the pre-interview survey as well as the audience's participation message at the art exhibition venue.

There are some methodological limitations and shortcomings in this study: the researcher's on-site instructions for feedback from the audience are inadequate, and the ability to follow-up with participants who provided feedback needs to be optimized by the researcher for future study.

#### **Acknowledgement**

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