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# *The Revolution of Keai* (づ。●\_●。)づ

*Living with Keai: Unpacking the conflicts Between the Feminist Gaze and My Way of Living*

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***Thank You*** ٭ (= · ω · =) o

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## *Abstract* (◡ ▽ ◡) ◡

The thesis explores how the ‘*Keai*’ (cute) culture is being perceived from a mainstream feminist point of view in China and how it is being experienced as an everyday lifestyle, and how the frictions between the perceived and experienced. For many people who grew up with the *Keai* culture, *Keai* represents a mood or lifestyle. However, the genesis of the culture may trace back to as a byproduct of the Asian patriarchy, which has been heavily critiqued by the ever-growing feminist movement in China culture. The thesis uses the first-hand experience of the me — who considered herself as a feminist but living in a *Keai* lifestyle — to unpack the intersecting issues of feminist representation.

By exploring the social perspectives of the word ‘*Keai*’, especially the issue of gender criticism, the project represents different meanings or stereotypes of *Keai*. Some feminists in China support the ‘strong and independent feminism’, but ‘cute’ is considered primarily childish and in need of protection in some contexts. Based on the *Keai* lifestyle that these people choose to live with, then the conflicts arise, for the girly aesthetic was used to please men in the patriarchal society. It shows that *Keai* as a way of living is just an aesthetic preference and chosen lifestyle, *Keai* can also be a form of power in feminism. Through this, the thesis hopes to extend the meaning of ‘cute’ to reduce stereotypes about *Keai* culture and ‘Asian *Keai* women’, everyone can live the way they like. It is time to start ‘free and happy feminism’.

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## *Introduction* $\phi (\cong \omega \leq *) \text{♪}$

I grew up with a living style of ‘*Keai*’. *Keai* (可爱) can be translated as ‘Cute’ or ‘Lovely’, using Chinese Pinyin instead of ‘Cute’ because ‘*Keai*’ has different meanings in different contexts.

Cute things always accompanied me until now and give me warm and reassured. There are many people who has their own unique lifestyles, they pride themselves on living the way they love and not being compromised by society. I love this comfortable, happy and free living style. But gradually some less friendly voices appeared, such as “I’m interested in Asian girls like you”, “Why do you dress up to satisfy men?” “You look weak and antifeminism.” The conflicts between some feminist views and my lifestyle are they believe *Keai* looks too girly and weak, women need to look strong and independent; but I want to live my comfort life.

Therefore, the project departs from a strong personal need to unpack these conflicts between my own world and the world I care about: the feminist discourses that had been empowered myself being a woman in a patriarchy world, and yet seems fixated on a one-dimensional presentation of feminist practice. It started from my own experience to ask society about the current internal conflict between feminism and *Keai* lifestyle: living their lives or to be strong and independent exterior; the conflicts are closely related to my personal life and affects me. By showing myself transparently and honestly about the experiences of why I become who I am today and the mainstream feminist discourses in China, the project explore the context and reasons behind the conflicts and reflect on the future of feminist practice — all the feminist views have in common been that they both think from the perspective of women, to improve the quality of women’s life, but why are there still many conflicts between these two points based on *Keai* lifestyle? There are certain difficulties in completing this project because there is no precedent before, it is not in line with the mainstream values of feminism. I overcome these difficulties and proceed with determination due to I also represent the status quo of some women. We need to “women help women” instead of “women criticize women”. My audience includes people who also enjoy the *Keai* lifestyle, Chinese feminists and people who hold stereotypes about *Keai* Asian women. This project is dedicated to *Keai*, independent identities, free souls, and me.

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## *How Did Keai Become My Everyday Lifestyle* ♪ (๑>๐<๑) ♪

### #1 *Keai* as a Subculture

Subcultures<sup>1</sup> are usually not understood by the public. Some people have always enjoyed non-mainstream things since they were kids, and this is the beginning of cognitive dislocation and incomprehension between people.

*Keai* as a way of life is a part of the subcultures, it is also some people's everyday lifestyle. For example, some popular *Keai* fashion styles such as *Lolita* fashion<sup>2</sup>, sailor dress fashion<sup>3</sup>, traditional Chinese element fashion like *Hanfu*<sup>4</sup>, these fashion styles are very normal in their daily life.



Fig.1-4 My daily photos about fashion styles: sailor dress fashion/Hanfu/Lolita fashion/my collecting of bowknots

However, they are not in the mainstream, many people cannot understand it. For instance, some cosplayers who love anime would restore themselves to anime characters, they would be criticized as they should not wear strange clothes in public places. The *Punk* style looks rebellious and often being judged due to their appearance. For me, I feel uncomfortable being stared at by strangers when I dress up in *Keai* style. Therefore, these people are no different from ordinary people, and these lifestyles are 'mainstream' and 'daily' for them. They also aspire to be treated as ordinary people rather than outliers.

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<sup>1</sup> [Youth subcultures: what are they now?](#)

<sup>2</sup> *Lolita* fashion is a subculture from Japan and influenced by *Victoria* clothing and *Rococo* style, usually with large skirts, complicated patterns and rich laces. This style is typical of cuteness aesthetic.

<sup>3</sup> Sailor dress originated in the US, it used to have some negative comments like '*makes women dressing like a child*'. Sailor dress was first used in Japan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century for junior high school uniforms, also considered cute. Now it also becomes a popular fashion style in China.

<sup>4</sup> *Hanfu* is the traditional clothes worn by ancient Chinese. Now more and more Chinese people wear *Hanfu* again and add modern fashion elements on it.



Fig.5-7 Subcultures in China: Sailor dress fashion/Chinese elements Lolita dress/Cosplayers in anime expo

## Exactitudes®

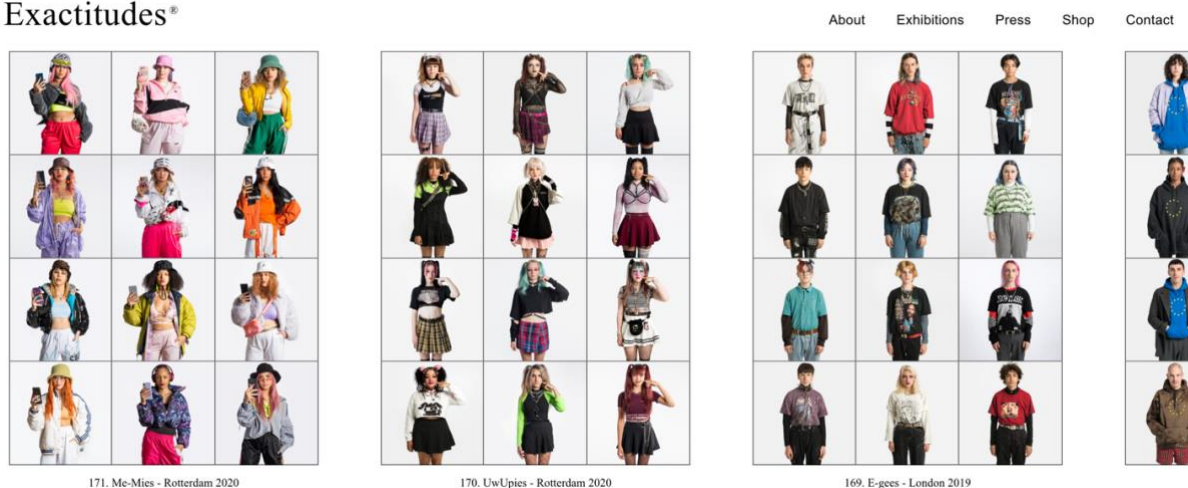


Fig.8 A website about subculture fashion style collection: [Tribal Cathering – Tribalising Fashion: The Art of Exactitudes](#)

## #2 Keai as a Tool for Expressions: Expanding Keai

### *Childhood and Expression Needs*

Childhood experiences have had a big impact on my way of living.

I was born in 1997 when China was developing rapidly<sup>5</sup> and lived in a military family community. Even though my parents divorced a long time ago, I still receive lots of love from my father — to a certain extent, I was a happy and being protected child. However, father's love is always given silently<sup>6</sup>, too much unexpressed love and lack of mother's love has had a huge impact on me: most of the thoughts I hold in my mind rather than speaking out, I yearn for physical touch like hugs but dare not ask for it. Therefore, people who have the similar experiences or

<sup>5</sup> The 1980s and 1990s was a very important period for China's economic development. The rapid economic development at that time brought many opportunities for farmers to come to cities to develop, people born in the 80s/90s will have a big difference in cognition and life from those who came before, like me and my father.

<sup>6</sup> This has a lot to do with my father's parents passed away when he was young, he almost never felt his parents' love. So he does not know how to express love.

identities like me need expressions. *Keai* as an expression of identity and lifestyle had become popular during the 90s and early 2000s as J-POP was introduced to the Chinese market. Since then, it has become a way of living and expressing for many people, including myself.



Fig.9-11 My childhood

### ***Selfie and Idealization***

In *Keai* culture, selfies and take photos to record life is also a part of some people's grew up lifestyle. The rise of selfie culture has a lot to do with self-appreciation, selfie is also a way to express inner feeling. If the unconscious capture is to record life, then the conscious selfie is a fantasy or an idealized representation of oneself<sup>7</sup>.



Fig.12-15 My daily selfies

A long time ago, the reconstruction of self-image was expressed by painters: *Van Gogh* painted self-portraits to express his imaginations, the selfie is the same. In *Cindy Sherman's* work *Untitled Film Stills*<sup>8</sup> she used female stereotypes as the theme, assumed different female characters and shoots herself in a specific environment. *Cindy Sherman* said:

<sup>7</sup> Inspiration from 'Self-reconstruction': Restoration of a person or thing by himself, herself, or itself to a former state or condition, especially after damage or destruction; specifically rebuilding of one's personality, relationships, etc., after trauma or analysis (UK Dictionary). In this word, people return to their original normal (happy) appearance after being traumatized, selfies can be considered to satisfy one's fantasy of a different (pursuit) appearance of oneself, the purpose is to pursue what one think is better 'me'.

<sup>8</sup> [Modern Classics: Cindy Sherman – Untitled Film Stills, 1977-1980](#)



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*'I wish I could treat every day as Halloween, and get dressed up and go out into the world as some eccentric character' ('A Conversation with Cindy Sherman', John Waters, 2012)*



Fig.16-17 Cindy Sherman – *Untitled Film Stills* #03, 1977 / #28, 1979

### ***Animal and Empathy***

The definition of *Keai* can expand the meaning of empathy and emotional. Some people like cute animals and furry things because they cause empathy and have a healing effect, they can clearly feel from animals that it loves them through touching without suspicion.

As little children, my father had raised many kinds of animals at home — except for cats or dogs, he raised injured crows that rescued from the roadside, the baby parrot by feeding with a straw, and the bullfrogs bought in the seafood market. So, I grew up surrounded by cute animals. At this time, my desire for physical touch was mostly come from animals.



Fig.18-21 My daily photos of animals

The kind of feeling or mood of the love people got from animals can also be called '*Keai*'. Some people think animals and children need love and care, so they want to adopt stray animals instead of buying a breed dog or cat.

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This sense of saving and being needed is important to them, including me. In *The Happy Prince*<sup>9</sup>, the two most precious things are the dead swallow and prince's broken lead heart, because of their pure feelings (or love) and compassion for all beings. Two key words 'purity' and 'empathy' have connections to the expanded definition of *Keai*. *New York Times* reporter *Nicholas Kristof*'s argument against the 'Empathy Gap'<sup>10</sup> that empathy can bring more happiness to society and is also a form of healing while ensuring economic standards. This is the unnoticed positive effect that *Keai* can have: *Keai* can arouse empathy, it could be a healing method to improve societal happiness.

### ***Lifestyle and Healing***

*Keai* lifestyle also can be healing and having the sense of security for some people.

Back to my story, perhaps because the backlog of expression was not released, I began to want to express myself too much after entering high school and college. However, my desire to express at this stage was only on the surface<sup>11</sup> and then I gradually have many sailor dresses, lace dresses, furry coats, hairpins... It was only later that I realized I was unconsciously making up for something missing from my childhood through external things — to search for a sense of security, self-confidence, and attention. Although the satisfaction was only on a very superficial external level, this was the first step to accept myself.

When I can self-satisfied and fully recognize myself instead of needing the attention and confidence from the outside world, I still love my existence as a *Keai* person. The dolls scattered in the corners were still comforting the childish part of my body, I enjoy the pure joy, happiness, the stable and comfortable sense of security that *Keai* brings me. *Keai* was no longer a tool for me, it has become my living habit. Different experiences can make people have strong contrast between the outside and the inside: the appearance and dress style are 'childish' but have a strong self-view and way of thinking. These "paradoxes" allow different individuals to have different dualities — everyone is unique and interesting.



Fig.22 A 69-year-old Japanese man has spent 30 years collecting Hello Kitty dolls for hobby



Fig.23 The healing power of cuteness: cartoon characters deliver supplies after Japan earthquake

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<sup>9</sup> Oscar Wilde - *The Happy Prince*

<sup>10</sup> [Kristof implores grads to 'bridge the empathy gap'](#)

<sup>11</sup> I had not fully accepted my past at the time (family situation/not being confident in myself), so I did not want to open my heart to others.

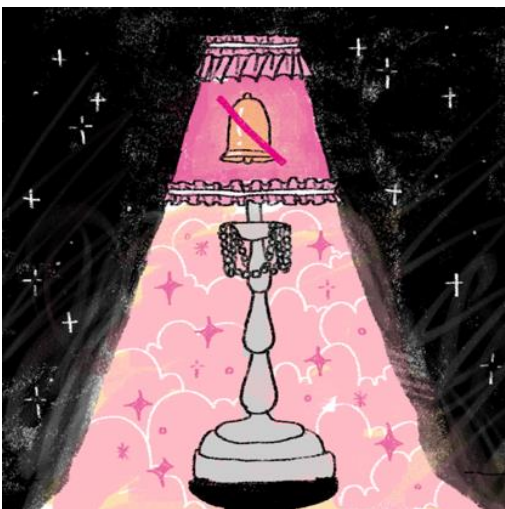


Fig.24-27 Reality in photos & imagination in illustrations: *Silent Securities*



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## *Feminism And Lifestyle Begin to Blend* (\*° Δ °\*)

### #1 The Raise of Feminism in China

The development of feminism in China is important for many Chinese people. My first exposure to feminism-related topics was about four years ago, at that time had a topic of ‘women’s *Freedom of Dress*<sup>12</sup> — some women who wore sexy or ‘strange’ clothes would be judged on the street. For instance, a Chinese actress appeared at the airport wearing a low-cut suspender<sup>13</sup>, she was criticized by many netizens for wearing too revealing as well as to attract attention.

Under the male gaze of the male-dominated society, wearing less is shameless. Since ancient times, Chinese culture had focused on being dignified, most of women were said to be disrespectful when they dress up sexy for outdoor, as well some fat women also would be judged by wearing short skirts. Sometimes they even should dress themselves according to male aesthetics. Similarly with men, who dress up feminine or have long hair would be judged as ‘*Sissy*’; they would be called ‘*Straight man*’<sup>14</sup> if they did not dress up well. In this patriarchal contextual logic, both men and women are deprived of the autonomy: they are tightly bound by ‘sex’. Men are dominated by physiological desires, while women are kidnapped by fertility and chastity.<sup>15</sup> Everyone is a victim of this society. Even if all the Chinese do not have the freedom to dress, it cannot erase the unique sexually shameful dressing dilemma to Chinese women. It is because the sexism and gender hegemony. Therefore, if feminists wanted to change this patriarchal logic, they need to advocate women to abandon the influence of male gaze on themselves: to encourage them to have the freedom to dress and keep their styles.

I was also a beneficiary of this feminist topic since my *Keai* dressing style was very minority and being judged as ‘strange’ clothes. I used to care much about what others thought of me, so I performed myself to make others like me. In addition, I felt uneasy when wearing *Keai* style clothes for afraid that others will look at me differently. Feminism then made me realize that I need to live for myself. Furthermore, the *Gyaru*<sup>16</sup> culture had gradually changed from sexual objectification to these women who want to pursue their own fashionable appearance under the influence of feminism.



Fig.28 *Gyaru* fashion style in Japan

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<sup>12</sup> *Freedom of Dress* (穿衣自由), which is highly connected with *Right to Clothing*.

<sup>13</sup> [Reyizha is really fighting! The wearing of suspenders and hot pants is controversial, and many actresses dare not wear them now](#) (in Chinese)

<sup>14</sup> Internet buzzwords in China, “*Straight Man* (直男)” not only means heterosexual but also refers to men that have no emotional quotient, simple and rude, have no aesthetics.

<sup>15</sup> [Do We Really Have the Freedom of Dress?](#) (in Chinese)

<sup>16</sup> *Gyaru* fashion is a street culture that originated in the late 1970s as a style that rebelled against the female standards of the time (women were expected to be housewives with dark hair and fair skin), characterized by tanned skin, dyed hair and sexy outfits.

While the discourse of women's rights has risen, the status of women has declined. According to the '2020 *Global Gender Difference Report*', since 2006, China's gender equality ranking has dropped 43 places in the world<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, I assumed here that current feminism is not the right direction and needs some improvement.

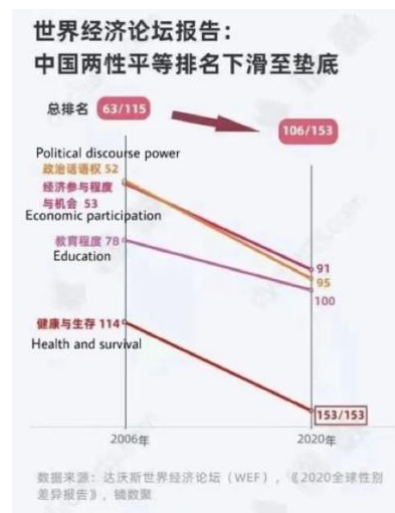


Fig.29 China's gender equality ranking has dropped 43 places in the world

## #2 Strong and Independent Feminism: The Current Mainstream Feminism Point in China

In China, the current mainstream feminist view is to support the 'strong and independent feminism'. This is the most direct way to fight patriarchy, since patriarchal society requires men to be strong and women to be weak.

As the influence of patriarchy, a few words of dressing style or make up style have indeed affected some people, such as 'Easy to Marry style' (*Appealing style/ 好嫁风*), 'Green Tea style' (*绿茶风*), 'Kill Male style' (*斩男风*)<sup>18</sup>, these words are generated from the perspective of men's aesthetics. They often appear in Chinese makeup and outfit bloggers' videos, teaching women how to dress themselves the way to appeal men. Afterwards, some women tend to lose their original appearance.



Fig.30 Kill Male style make up videos

The mainstream feminism in China hopes women to be independent<sup>19</sup>, not attached to anyone but themselves. Women need not to change their original appearance to please men, they would have their own pursuits, ideals, and life. Therefore, several feminists hope to blur gender characteristics and advocate women to avoid these men's aesthetic fashion style. Now more and more women's independent consciousness is awakened because of feminism, which is a big process of gradual improvement.

<sup>17</sup> [China's world ranking for gender equality has fallen 43 places, and the Philippine's world's top five rankings in Asia](#)

<sup>18</sup> 'Easy to Marry style' (translate by myself) originated from the Japanese *Mote Kei* style, which means a style that attracts the opposite sex. "Green Tea Bitch" is a Chinese Internet buzzword which describes a person who looks innocent but scheming and good at playing with other's feelings.

<sup>19</sup> [Feminism's emphasis on women's economic independence - is it wrong?](#) (In Chinese)

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## *When Daily Life Is Being Gazed* ◦((◉\_\_◉))◦

### **#1 Conflicts and Misunderstandings Between *Keai* and The Mainstream Feminism Point**

Based on strong and independent feminism and my *Keai* lifestyle, conflicts and misunderstandings appeared. Next, the thesis will discuss the reasons for these conflicts.

Some articles talked about the relationship between cuteness and sexism on the Internet, for instance, the article ‘*Sexism and Culture: Japan’s Obsession with Kawaii*’ wrote down that “*females are perceived as cute only if they revert back to their childish identities — both physically and mentally*<sup>20</sup>.” However, such an article fails to distinguish the roots of a kind of aesthetic and the people who practice it, and assuming the people who choose such aesthetics to have no agency in reinterpreting the aesthetic. Ironically, such assumptions could have been considered childish and superficial if the judgment of the standpoint is only from the appearance. Sometimes I also felt disrespected by judging my personality or nationality only from my look. Cute is always associated with childish, shallow, unintelligent, etc. For example, the heroine of *Legally Blonde* is set as a superficial girl who only loves fashion and has no desire to improve herself, so the costume designer dressed her all in pink and cute. As a result, ‘Cute’ is a heavily labelled word.



Fig.31 *Legally Blonde*, 2001

The article above is the embodiment of the conflict between ‘strong and independent feminism’ and *Keai*. From my points of view the reason is of its explicit gender characteristics, such as pink elements, feminine behavior, etc.

Sianne Ngai explained this point very well in her book *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*:

To be sure, cuteness can be a powerful and even demanding response to our perception of vulnerability in an object; according to the scientists Angier interviews, the pleasure that images of puppies or babies arouse can be intense as those “aroused by sex, a good meal, or psychoactive drugs like cocaine,” acts or substances shown to stimulate the same regions of the brain. Yet because the aesthetic experience of cuteness is a pleasure routinely overridden by secondary feelings of suspicion, there is arguably something weak about it anyway. It is this weakness that allows and even seems to invite what Denis Dutton calls “the sense of cheapness... and the feeling of being manipulated or taken for a sucker that leads many to reject cuteness as low or shallow.”

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<sup>20</sup> [Sexism and Culture: Japan’s Obsession with Kawaii](#)

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When *Keai* is a pleasurable emotion, people mix up similar emotions which leads many to think that cuteness is as shallow and cheap as sex and drugs. This is why this ‘emotional’ visual style is so polarized. Indeed, *Keai* has the similar feeling with sex and drug — the joy they bring is direct and pure.

The phenomenon is common in China, where some self-proclaimed feminists see women in sailor dresses, bunches or other cute outfits, they would think this is catering to the male aesthetic. At this point there had the conflict between the feminist view “women have the right to pursue freedom and choose life” and “women should be independent and strong and do not dependent on men”. Furthermore, it may not be a compliment to describe a woman as cute in western contexts (it more feels like ‘small and cute’, looks like a child). But in Asian contexts, mostly *Keai* is a compliment, which may not be visual, but be complimenting the other person for bringing a pleasant or comfortable feeling.



Fig.32 [University students wearing JK uniforms \(sailor dresses\) for their graduation photos have been criticized for being immoral](#) (in Chinese)

In addition, because of sexual attraction, which is the instinct of animals to reproduce, this female characteristic will be more likely to attract males; when the female characteristic is too obvious, it will be suspected of flattering males. Part of people like this girly style, but in reality, it has nothing to do with appealing men for most of them. If they dress themselves up as a strong and independent style to avoid this situation, it will go back to the original point: they still changed their original selves for feminism and did not pursue the life they like either. In consequence, I think the reason is the cognitive impact of the patriarchal society on the public and the eager resistance by feminism.

## #2 Free and Happy Feminism

My current viewpoint is — the best way to change the status quo so far is to shift the focus of feminism to ‘free and happy feminism’. Meanwhile, I also want to use this to oppose that *Keai* is weak and shallow.

I am in my twenties, enjoying *Keai* style seems unreasonable according to the common perception, for those are the things that children like. From the experience of some of my peers, our parents’ generation spent their whole lives working hard for their families, besides their children were the first batch of only children in China, so they had high expectations and put a lot of sustenance on their children (just transitioned from a poorer life). Therefore, the younger generation always want to escape the control of parents and live on our own, they do desire for independence and freedom. To sum up, appearance and dressing are just their way of pursuing freedom and self.

For me, I am a *Keai* person that dares to fight against the injustice. Why *Keai* cannot be strong and independent? What the drag queen *RuPaul* said can also prove it:

“We’re born naked, and the rest is drag.”



Fig.33-34 A passer-by in Lolita dress/A granny who loves comics

The way people dress and look is just how they choose to please and express ourselves, it can relate to the previous section ‘*Self and Idealization*’. Everyone has the right to choose their appearance. Hence, feminism at its core also need to look at the inside, not only on the outside. The feminism should not only be angry and negative, it need to be free, beautiful and happy.



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## *Role-Playing Keai as Methodology ♡(❀'V'❀) /*

### **#1 Reconstructing Semantic**

Removing stereotypes or prejudices can requires reconstructing *Keai*'s semantics in an easy-to-understand way. In my practices, I represent why *Keai* became a lifestyle by my daily photos and use visualizations to expand the semantics of *Keai*. The role of reconstructing semantics is mentioned in *Gordon Allport*'s book '*The Nature of Prejudice*':

The label is an intrinsic part of any monopolistic category. Hence to liberate a person from ethnic or political prejudice it is necessary at the same time to liberate him from word fetishism. This fact is well known to students of general semantics who tell us that prejudice is due in large part to verbal realism and to symbol phobia. Therefore any program for the reduction of prejudice must include a large measure of semantic therapy.

Therefore, semantic therapy is a helpful method in my project.

### ***Furry Shouts***

My practice '*Furry Shouts*' explains the semantics of *Keai*, and I made some representative words into physical "shouts", so that the audience can directly understand other meanings of cuteness through eye-catching visuals.



Fig.35 *Furry Shouts*

The audience would like to take a photo of the work and post it on the internet; in this way, the "inadvertent" visual means by the naked eye are easier to remember than the auditory, and milder. The expression is not didactic, it is easier for people to accept it through a non-aggressive and pleasant visual experience.

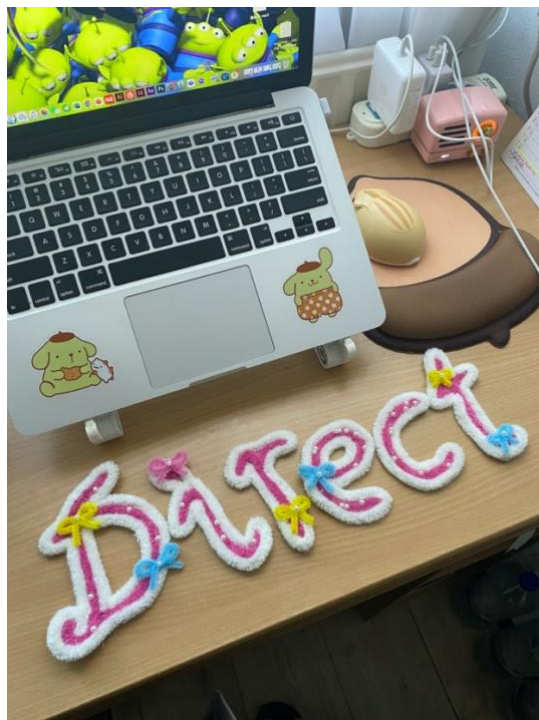


Fig.36-37 *Furry Shouts* – Subjective/Direct



Fig.38-39 *Furry Shouts* – Free/Healing



Fig.40 *Furry Shouts* – Subjective/Empathetic/Attractive/Emotional

Besides, a word is more powerful than a sentence, it is short and clear. Installation artist *Bruce Nauman* often appears in the works of many words<sup>21</sup>, giving people a shocking visual impact.



Fig.41 Bruce Nauman, *One Hundred Live and Die*, 1984

<sup>21</sup> [The spirit and the damage done: On Bruce Nauman's 100 Live and Die by Paul Chan](#)



## #2 Rethinking Performativity

*Keai* is feminine, just like pink, almost everyone thinks it belongs to women. This section is proving that *Keai* and pink can be unisex and de-gendered by the viewpoint of performativity. Now a part of feminists are chasing ‘de-gendering’ on themselves. However, from my point of view, this kind of ‘de-gendering’ is not about erasing the behavioral characteristics of a certain gender, but rather that those behavioral characteristics are no longer classified as male or female. Human beings are role-playing in their lives every day: She believes she is a woman, therefore her role is a woman; His job is a teacher, so at school his role is teacher and students are performing students. This view comes from *Judith Butler’s ‘Gender Trouble’*:

Because there is neither an ‘essence’ that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis. The tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of its own production. The authors of gender become entranced by their own fictions whereby the construction compels one’s belief in its necessity and naturalness.

Through Butler’s view, the categories such as gender, occupation, personality, etc., do not exist, but different behaviors create these words to distinguish different people. *Keai* and pink are just a portion of the things some people choose to perform.

### *Everyday Keai Lifestyle*

In my practice ‘*Everyday Keai Lifestyle*’ shows how I performed *Keai* in daily life. The previous sections mentioned that I will show my daily life to explain *Keai* lifestyle, I want to represent it in the most everyday and unadorned way. Instagram is an app commonly used by young people to share their daily life and then I chose Instagram as the medium to storytelling through photos from childhood to now. It includes the selfies, animals, fashion styles, and more mentioned in the previous chapters.



Fig.42-45 *Everyday Keai Lifestyle*



Fig.46-49 *Everyday Keai Lifestyle*

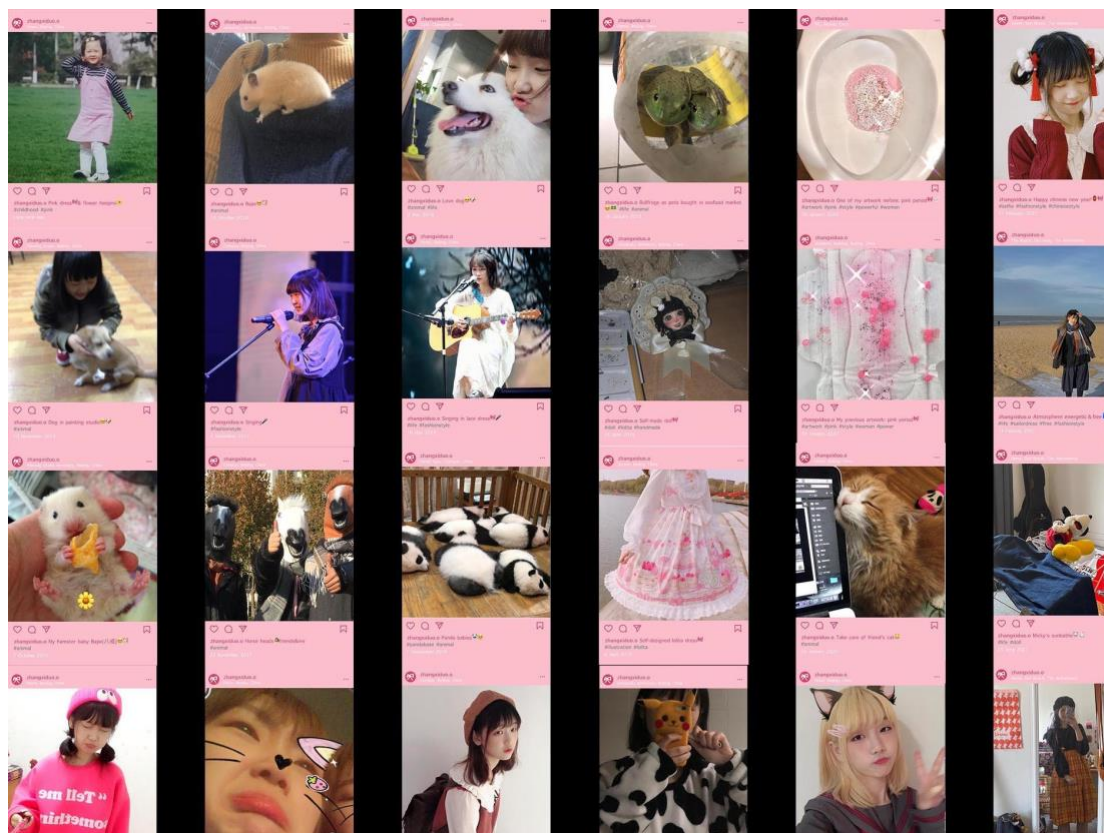


Fig.50 *Everyday Keai Lifestyle*

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### #3 Pink and Gender

Pink is recognized as a cute and gendered color. Here I would like to give an example of pink to show the importance of not rebelling against pink and girly in feminism: no need to hide from feminine things; nothing is actually feminine because all the labels of one thing are given by people — pink used to mean completely different things in different countries. For example, in Japan pink was a sad and masculine color (representing the slain samurai), and in Korea it represented positive energy and trustworthiness, in Germany it was considered a soft and sweet color.<sup>22</sup> In addition to this, pink was once a masculine color and was recommended as the best bedroom color for gentlemen but not women in the late 18th century. In 1898, with the rise of the feminism movement, some women began to avoid pink.

Switzerland used to have some pink prisons in the 1980s. This view was first put forward by *Alexander G. Schauss* because he found that pink can inhibit the aggressive behavior of prisoners. The *Cool Down Pink*<sup>23</sup> chosen by *Daniela Späth* came to the fore in the following continuous experiments, and it turned out that this method really worked. However, the prisoners were unhappy with it. *The Telegraph* interviewed a former inmate in Swiss prison said being held in a cell that looked like a little girl's bedroom was so frustrating that some male inmates felt humiliated. Therefore, it can be considered that is due to people's psychological cognition of the labels of pink rather than pink itself.



Fig.51 Interviewing a former inmate in Swiss prison

From the above examples, we can find that pink is being gendered heavily. Pink is one of the *Keai* things, and it does have a very similar experience of *Keai*. *Keai* and pink need to be de-gendered and remove labels, just as pink is not only soft, but it also represents strength and dignity<sup>24</sup>. It is great that male's *Keai* items have also begun to appear. In China, some men's clothes also have cute patterns, who do not care about other people's eyes will try cute-style women's clothes too. This situation is very common in anime expos.

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<sup>22</sup> *Pink: The Exposed Color in Contemporary Art and Culture*, Barbara Nemetz, Hideto Fuse, 2006

<sup>23</sup> *Cool Down Pink* can demonstrate the suppression of blood pressure and the anti-corrosive. If applied appropriately, hostile or aggressive behavior can be calmed down by the colour within about 15 minutes. (*Pink Sells*, 2013-2017)

<sup>24</sup> [14 Artworks That Prove Pink Is Tough](#)



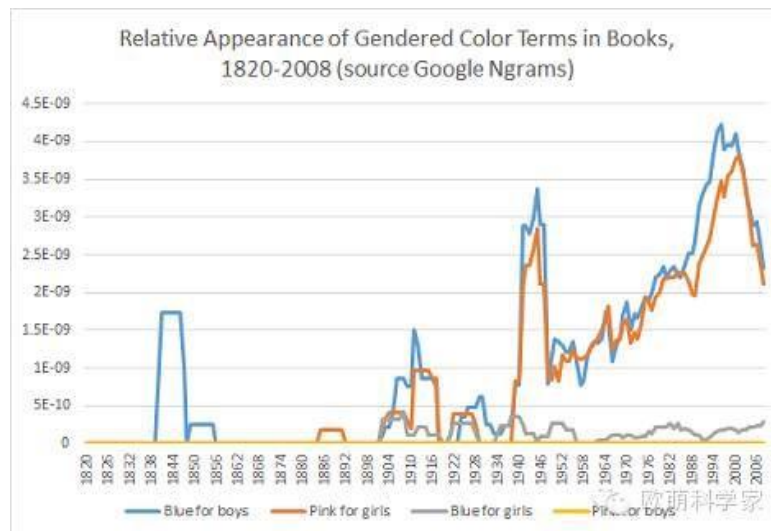


Fig.52 Pink used to be a color without gender labels

Above all, if I want to justify *Keai* and remove labels, I have to show it positively. The works of the two experimental videos below both include elements of pink and gender to redefine *Keai*.

#### ***Not Your Stereotype* (00:46)**

***'Not Your Stereotype'*** is an experimental short film that focuses on gender and the stereotypes. Asians are born in a face that looks more '*Keai*' than other races, so these prejudices go hand in hand with *Keai*. I use the most common money in people's daily life as a medium. Money can not only show the phenomenon of objectification, but also show the meaning of exchange and circulation. First, I designed this '*Keai*' currency with my portrait but removed the face, taking me as an example to represent most of the *Keai* Asian women. The illustration on the back is a huddled girl, expressing how powerless and sad I feel about it. I objectified myself as cute-looking currency, the high price represented a high level of stereotypes.



Fig.53 "*Keai*" Currency

In the experimental film, I personally burned all these ‘stereotyped me’ to express my protest and break up these stereotypes. Burning money to express protest is also seen in many performing artworks.<sup>25</sup> The stereotypes in the film are mainly from the Internet<sup>26</sup> and represent the unfair treatment that most people think are because of ‘cute Asian face’. I chose the current white noise for the background music, when the subtitles appear the noise become louder, it shows that we want to shout but we cannot, and we cannot do anything about it.



Fig.54 *Not Your Stereotype*: Title



Fig.55 Online meme about the stereotype of cute Asian women

<sup>25</sup> [Money burning - Wikipedia](#)

<sup>26</sup> [9 Asian Femal Stereotypes That Need To Die](#), [Asian American Women's Experiences of Discrimination](#)





Fig.56 *Not Your Stereotype: I am not your transaction currency*

*I am not your transaction currency:* currency in circulation means an accessory to a person that can be carried around and exchanged. This also has something to do with historically Asian women were considered to have special sexual desires<sup>27</sup>.



Fig.57-58 *Not Your Stereotype: I am not your materialistic gold digger/I am not your service worker*

*I am not your materialistic gold digger:* “Contrary to how some Asian women are portrayed in the media, I don’t desire a man to spend thousands and thousands of dollars at the drop of hat for me nor would that be something I would brag about. I don’t look at a man’s bank account to determine whether he’s worthy of my time. I cannot be bought with a Chanel purse, a Benz or a pair of Louboutins.” —Katharine Chan

<sup>27</sup> [The Deadly Consequences of Hypersexualizing Asian Women](#)

*I am not your service worker:* Cute Asian women are often seen as submissive. The article ‘*Asian American Journal of Psychology*’ said “Assumptions that the participant works at a low-level gendered job, such as being a maid or working in a nail salon, which are stereotypically associated with Asian American women.”<sup>28</sup>



Fig.59-60 **Not Your Stereotype:** *I am not your imagination/I am not your object*

*I am not your imagination:* Rebelling against some people’s superficial assumptions of ‘Keai faces’ only through appearances.

*I am not your object:* Protesting objectification.



Fig.61-62 **Not Your Stereotype**

<sup>28</sup> [Asian American Journal of Psychology](#), Mukkamala, S., & Suyemoto, K. L. (2018)





Fig.63 *Not Your Stereotype*

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### ***Strong and Independent Cuteness*** (01:14)

The previous experimental film was about 'that is not me', this film is about 'this is me'. They have a strong visual contrast: '***Not Your Stereotype***' is dark and angry, while '***Strong and Independent Cuteness***' is bright, cheerful, and warm. It also uses semantic reconstruction methods.

I use sanitary pads as a medium to express the power of women and cuteness. I do not think menstruation is the burden of women, so I made this unique feature of women into a *Keai* style, it became both *Keai* and powerful. A pearl takes years of hard work from the shell to appear, which is why pearls are so precious. Pearls in my work are in the same way: some of the things we are born with are unique and most precious. Therefore, this *Keai* sanitary pad can represent many things, it can be a unique feature, it can be the power of *Keai*, it can be the freedom of women. Different people can understand it differently.



Fig.64 ***Strong and Independent Cuteness***: Title

In the film, I recorded myself walking in different places with my 'power' from the first point of view. Wherever I am, I can gain strength from *Keai* all the time.

Subtitles:

*I am a woman / A powerful woman / Cuteness is the source of my strength / It's the happy lifestyle that I love / It is free and direct / It is pleasant, comfortable and empathetic / It's warm and lively / That is what makes me unique / I love being a woman / A cute but independent, energetic and mature woman*





Fig.65-72 *Strong and Independent Cuteness*

## Conclusion 333'—'555

By summing up my views: the solution to the conflict between *Keai* and mainstream Chinese feminism point is to shift the mainstream view towards 'free and happy feminism'. In this process, it is necessary for me to show the meaning of *Keai* through semantic reconstruction, so as to de-label *Keai* and reduce the stereotype of *Keai* (female) by certain feminists and people who do not understand *Keai* culture.

I want to rebuild *Keai*, therefore I start a *Keai* ‘revolution’ in my works. Of course, ‘revolution’ is just an exaggerated tone, and all I can do is continuing to live the life I choose, and not shrink back from the outside world. By admitting that everything has two sides, *Keai* needs ‘revolution’ and grow, but does not mean it should disappear. I used to be reluctant to communicate with the world because it was helpless. Now I sincerely open my heart to the world, not asking for approval, only for understand. Meanwhile, I also want to use myself as an example to encourage those who like *Keai* but dare not be *Keai*. Only if we continue to insist on ourselves, will others feel that we have a reason to continue.

Researching the topic of “*Keai*” has brought me a lot. It helped me understand myself better and explore why I like *Keai* from the role and feelings of cuteness, also made me realize the important role cuteness played in my inner remodeling of myself. This whole research has helped me to face myself, to accept my duality, to identify with my hobbies and lifestyles that are not mainstream, to prove that I have the courage to offer different opinions to the outside world. In the meantime, it is very meaningful for me to do a project about Asian contexts in a European country, this enables more diverse individuals to hear my voice. Someone needs to stand up and speak for this part of the group, and there are many people in this free and open country who are willing to listen and understand you.

Besides, I thoroughly enjoyed my working process, being a relatively introverted person working alone in an unobserved room was very energizing. These practices are a very important and comfortable part for me, to create without being observed and let the outside world observe through the medium of vision.

Finally, I hope my project can make more people understand the meaning of *Keai* and the way of life of different people. The empathy and understanding are the most beautiful thing. I hope feminism in China can continue to progress, with more help and less criticism.

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