

The Construction of Female Media Images in the Rise of "Her Culture": A Case Study of The Story of Rose

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Abstract: This paper, under the perspective of "Her Culture," takes the TV series *The Story of Rose* as the research object to explore the construction of contemporary female media images. By analyzing from two dimensions—language expression and visual symbols—this study examines how elements such as speech, tone, vocabulary, music, images, color, costumes, and artwork contribute to shaping female media images through the dual relationship of "signifier" and "signified" from a semiotic perspective. Utilizing cultivation theory, the paper investigates the significance of *The Story of Rose* in constructing female media images, emphasizing its crucial role in awakening female consciousness, breaking traditional stereotypes, and promoting the de-labeling of female images. Represented by *The Story of the Rose*, the rise of television dramas from the perspective of "her culture" is not only a revolution in female media images, but also a powerful impact on social and cultural concepts, providing valuable inspiration and reference for building a more equal and inclusive gender discourse system, reflecting the diversified trend of female media image construction.

Keywords: "Her Culture," female media image, *The Story of Rose*.

1. Introduction

With the rise of "Her Culture," the status and influence of women in various fields of society have become increasingly prominent, and the construction of female media images has become a focal point in both the media and academic circles. Against this backdrop, media works such as films and television, which reflect social reality and shape cultural identity, bear rich cultural connotations and significance in their portrayal of women. *The Story of Rose*, adapted from the novel of the same name by Yi Shu, has garnered widespread attention since its broadcast due to its profound themes, complex character relationships, and unique female perspective. Through the protagonist Huang Yimei's journey of personal growth, the series depicts the modern woman's exploration and struggles in love, marriage, career, and self-realization. This paper chooses *The Story of Rose* as the research subject and explores how this popular TV drama constructs the contemporary female media image by examining two dimensions—language expression and visual symbols. It reflects on the significance of constructing female media images and the value of these constructions in the broader cultural context. The portrayal of women in *The Story of Rose* reflects the continuous awakening of women's independence in China and the increasing improvement of women's social status. To some extent, it reshapes the roles and value pursuits of contemporary women in society and provides valuable reference points for the construction of female media images.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research Status of "Her Culture"

The term "Her Culture" emerged as a result of changes in social and economic structures and relationships[1]. The advancement of economic sciences has increasingly empowered women to step into the broader world, highlighting their unique value in society. In recent years, academia has shown significant interest in the rise of female consciousness. Scholars argue that "in contemporary Chinese society, women have achieved unprecedented higher social status and greater spiritual freedom, and they are beginning to focus on their own lives and emotions"[2]. The awakening of female consciousness forms a crucial foundation for the creation of "Her Culture," where women are breaking free from traditional constraints and actively constructing identities that align with their own desires and values. Another prominent feature of "Her Culture" is the diversification of female images. As one scholar notes, "Under traditional gender narrative strategies, women who were once 'invisible' are now 'visible,' and under female narrative strategies, female images are becoming richer and more diverse"[3]. Female representations have traditionally been confined to specific stereotypes, such as being gentle, virtuous, and dependent. However, in modern society, the image of women has become more varied. Women can be elite professionals, talented artists, pioneers in the field of technology, or nurturing mothers in the family. As the influence of "Her Culture" gradually expands into various social domains, the scope of related research has become more diversified, characterized by interdisciplinary, innovative, and forward-looking approaches. In the digital age, social media has become a key channel for the dissemination of "Her Culture," further amplifying its impact. This has created a new dynamic where "the empowerment of women through consumption and media has led to the shift in discourse power from elite groups to the general public, thereby promoting the diversification of social culture. This is a form of innovation in traditional cultural value structures and a reappropriation of social power"[4].

2.2. Research Status on Female Media Representation

The study of female media representation originated from the international field of "media and gender" research. In 1978, American scholar Gaye Tuchman edited and published *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, exploring how mass media shapes the image of women. Since then, "feminist media studies officially became a branch of communication studies, and female media representation became an important area of research"[5]. With the development of mass media, research on female media representation gradually gained momentum in China during the 1980s, becoming a focal point for scholars. They focus on interpreting the role positioning, identity characteristics, and social status of women in media texts, aiming to explore the role of media in constructing social gender cognition, while deeply exploring the cultural connotations and values contained in female images, and constantly summarizing the impact of female media images on the general public, especially female groups. The evolution of media has continually provided more avenues for the expression of female media representations. In recent years, research on female media images has become increasingly refined, expanding into more specific groups, media types, and platforms. For example, studies have examined "the marginalized representation of elderly women"[6] and "the representation of women fitting the definition of 'new farmers' in short videos focused on agricultural production and rural development"[7]. There is growing attention to the media representation of specific groups of women, exploring their portrayal and the factors influencing it in both traditional and new media. Additionally, there is an increasing interest in analyzing how different types of media and platforms shape female representation in varying ways.

3. Dimensions of Female Media Representation Construction

3.1. Language Expression

The Story of Rose successfully portrays the characters' rich inner worlds and emotional entanglements through the use of voice and vocabulary. Each character's vocal characteristics and word choices are closely tied to their personality and life experiences. Voice and tone serve as key ways to convey information, create new meanings, and embody values. The protagonist, Huang Yimei, speaks with a moderate tone and firm voice, expressing her willingness to assert herself. For instance, in the line "Time is precious, love to the fullest first," the courage and resolve in her voice and tone further illustrate her passionate and persistent approach to love. Regarding vocabulary choice, words affirming a woman's self-worth, such as "I," "myself," and "love," frequently appear. Lines like "I am happiness itself, fully and completely in control of myself," "My love is single-threaded, I can only love one person at a time," and "Persevering in love is what love is about" express her independence and clarity through both internal monologues and dialogues, highlighting her self-awareness.

Music and imagery fusion also play a crucial role in shaping female media representation. The qualities of music—its expansiveness and continuity—allow it to transcend narrative and scene boundaries, weaving through various auditory and visual dimensions, while also resonating through time. For instance, the theme song *Faraway Flower* aligns with the characters' moods, the story's trajectory, and even their motivations and reflections. Through the empowerment of music, the series achieves a poetic effect, infusing the visuals with emotional depth and cultural significance, reinforcing Huang Yimei's media image as a strong, independent woman. In addition to these features, the soundtrack also enhances emotional expression, with songs that carry both melodic significance and lyrical reinforcement. The recurring track *Shine Brighter*, for example, plays during each of Huang Yimei's moments of transformation and growth, conveying through vibrant music the strength of women breaking through barriers, emerging from darkness, and freeing themselves from limitations.

3.2. Visual Symbols

Visual symbols are considered one of the fundamental elements of narration in film and television works, with color being the most commonly used tool to convey the creator's intent. "Color affects humans both physiologically and psychologically. In film, it is not merely a reproduction of reality but carries the expressive intent of the creators. They use the emotional and psychological responses that different colors evoke to express thoughts, emotions, and moods, rather than stating them directly. This gives color its subtlety." [8] In the visual symbol system of *The Story of Rose*, the self-worth of the female protagonist is profoundly conveyed through a series of visual designs. The colors of Huang Yimei's clothing, as an important medium of self-expression, emphasize both detail and texture. The frequent appearance of rose motifs and yellow tones in her wardrobe not only echoes the title of the series but also reinforces the vividness of her character, portraying Huang Yimei as an independent, confident, and bold modern woman. These choices reflect her vibrant, radiant inner qualities. The blue scarf worn by Su Gengsheng, paired with simple designs and a palette of neutral tones like black, white, and gray, symbolizes her calm, melancholic, and kind personality. This also aligns with her role as a high-level executive, further enhancing her media representation as a professional and authoritative woman in the workplace. The use of clothing as a language becomes a powerful form of self-expression in constructing the media image of women.

From a semiotic perspective, Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure posited that a symbol consists of a binary relationship between the "signifier" and the "signified." The "signifier" refers to the

tangible form of a linguistic symbol, while the "signified" refers to the concept it represents. In *The Story of Rose*, artworks serve as a highly condensed and multifaceted visual symbol system, representing an external expression and deep metaphor of the protagonist's inner world. The transformation of a stain on the wall into a rose is, at the level of the signifier, a physical transformation—an artistic reimagining of a stain as a blooming rose. At the level of the signified, it points to Huang Yimei's psychological transformation and rebirth at a critical juncture in her life. The rose, as a symbol, with its blooming form, signifies resilience and vitality, while the thorns and the blemishes represent her unyielding spirit and perseverance in the face of life's challenges. The seascape that Huang Yimei paints after her divorce transcends a simple depiction of nature, symbolizing her personal journey of breaking free from the confines of marriage and pursuing freedom and independence. Her artwork portrayed sunset and sunrise presents, at the signifier level, the natural passage of time and the play of light and shadow, while at the signified level, it reflects a deep contemplation of life and a hope for the future. Through the process of encoding and decoding these symbols, not only is Huang Yimei's profound insight into the essence of life revealed, but her transcendence and optimism following life's upheavals are also vividly portrayed.

4. The Value of Constructing Female Media Representations

4.1. Representation of Female Consciousness

The cultivation theory, proposed by George Gerbner, emphasizes how mass media gradually shapes the worldview of its audience and highlights the significant influence of the "symbolic reality" conveyed by media in shaping people's understanding of the real world. As society evolves and education becomes more widespread, more women are actively participating in various sectors, demonstrating unprecedented vitality and contributions. "Their pursuit of gender equality has moved beyond the mere balance of social rights and duties to deeper engagement in media. Women actively advocate for more equitable, diverse, and authentic representations of themselves in media, striving to break traditional stereotypes and portray women in a more comprehensive and nuanced manner. The character arc of Huang Yimei in *The Story of Rose* reflects a profound shift in female self-awareness, transcending simple self-discovery to embrace self-identity and self-realization. In this drama, through diverse portrayals of women, it is shown that women can achieve professional success while also leading fulfilling emotional lives. The relationships between women are no longer depicted as merely competitive or antagonistic, but rather supportive, fostering mutual growth. As female consciousness awakens and rises, media representations of women are continuously redefined. Women are no longer passive bearers of societal roles but are active agents, exploring their potential, defining their value, and seeking self-fulfillment, rather than being viewed merely through the lens of others. "Gender consciousness is an interactive and multilayered process, constituting a major part of the institutionalized system of gender as a social practice and it is also a result of specific structural positions." [9] In the new era, female gender consciousness presents fluid and diverse characteristics, encompassing not only the modern pursuit of gender equality but also deconstructing "hegemonic masculinity" and establishing new postmodern gender consciousness. *The Story of Rose* depicts not only the personal growth and transformation of individual women but also explores the development trends and challenges of feminism in contemporary society. It reflects on how to promote gender equality and female empowerment in various fields, including education, the workplace, and media.

4.2. De-Labeling of Female Images

In *The Story of Rose*, the portrayal of female characters transcends traditional frameworks, effectively contributing to the de-labeling of female media images. After experiencing three romances and a marriage, Huang Yimei ultimately chooses to face life with an attitude of independence and freedom,

reflecting contemporary women's new understanding of love and marriage. This new perspective emphasizes that love should be based on equality and mutual respect, rather than one-sided sacrifice or dependence. It underscores the importance of women's financial independence and emotional equality. This narrative is not only a nuanced depiction of personal growth but also a profound reflection and reconstruction of gender roles, social structures, and cultural perceptions. Labeling is a convenient way of summarizing and associating concepts in communication[10] Within the context of "her culture," when women's behavioral patterns overly conform to traditional societal expectations, it often reinforces gender stereotypes, making it difficult for women to break free from the constraints and labels imposed by traditional culture. Conversely, if a woman does not meet the common expectations of what constitutes a "standard woman," she may be stigmatized with negative gender labels. These biased and misconstrued labels further limit the diversity and authenticity of female representations. Thus, labeling women can lead to skewed self-perception, causing them to overly focus on external appearances or conforming to societal expectations, while neglecting their inner growth and development. It also restricts women's roles and choices in society, subjecting them to greater limitations and pressures in both their professional and personal lives. De-labeling women is a societal issue that requires collective attention. As an important medium for information dissemination, media should actively showcase women's achievements and contributions in various fields, fostering a diverse and multifaceted portrayal of women. By shaping new female media images, advocating for pluralistic values, and promoting media self-regulation, the process of de-labeling can be accelerated. This, in turn, will enhance women's self-identity and create more opportunities and space for their development.

5. Conclusion

Through a review of literature on "her culture" and female media images, this paper emphasizes the growing influence and status of women in various sectors of society and the continuous awakening of female consciousness. By selecting *The Story of Rose* as a case study, the paper analyzes the construction of female media images from two dimensions: linguistic expression and visual symbols. At the linguistic level, the study explores how the characters' vocal tone, speech patterns, word choices, and the integration of music and visual elements shape the inner world and emotional complexities of female characters. From the perspective of visual symbols, it examines how color, clothing, and artwork convey the self-worth, personality traits, and psychological transformation of women. The May Fourth Movement brought about the liberation of ideas, especially the awakening of women's consciousness, from the ancient subordinate idea of "marrying a chicken and following the chicken, marrying a dog and following the dog" to the new era of independence, women are no longer the product of a male-dominated society, but are completely independent individuals.[11]Based on the cultivation theory, it is evident that the construction of female media images is influenced by media communication. Television series emerging under the lens of "her culture" subtly influence the awakening of female subjectivity, the reclamation of gender power, the "self-affirmation" of societal roles, and identity recognition. The close intertwining of the filmic world and real life leads viewers to unconsciously immerse themselves in the narratives presented, and these mediated worldviews gradually infiltrate their self-consciousness, becoming part of their "superego" and coexisting with their real-life identities. In future research, the study of female media images is expected to diversify, focusing on the integration of media forms and technological advancements, the enhancement of women's media literacy and participation, the interaction between social culture and the media environment, and the expansion of interdisciplinary research and international collaboration.

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