

Exploring the Development Path of Female Leading Characters in Film and Television Works

- Taking the Image Shaping of Female Characters as an Example

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Abstract: In recent years, people have been paying more and more attention to the development direction of the "women" group, and the image of women in society has become increasingly diverse. In today's society, film and television media are important channels that can quickly disseminate information, attract social attention, and disseminate value orientation. This paper explores the development path of female protagonists by examining the image shaping of female characters in film and television works. By analyzing the evolution of female characters in various types of film and television productions, one can see that female roles are no longer confined to traditional archetypes such as the virtuous wife and loving mother or tragic figures. Instead, they increasingly exhibit qualities of independence, bravery, confidence, and intelligence. These changes enrich the content of film and television works and provide audiences with more diverse values and role models. The study finds that the diversification of female character portrayals not only enhances the artistic quality and appeal of the works but also exerts a positive influence on society. The image of women in film and television is gradually becoming an important force in guiding social trends and promoting gender equality. Therefore, in-depth exploration and research into the development path of female characters in film and television works are of great significance for understanding social and cultural changes and promoting gender equality.

Keywords: Television works, women's growth, spiritual independence

1. Introduction

In recent years, people have been paying more attention to the development direction of the "women" group, and the image of women in society has become increasingly diverse. In today's society, film and television media serve as important channels that can quickly disseminate information, attract social attention, and disseminate value orientations. With the progress of society and changes in perceptions, the portrayal of female characters in film and television works has also been constantly evolving. This evolution has shifted from past single, stereotypical depictions to more diverse and multidimensional representations. This change not only reflects society's renewed understanding and acceptance of female roles but also promotes the enhancement of women's self-awareness and social status.

This study focuses on female themed film and television works both domestically and internationally, with a particular emphasis on female images in Chinese domestic TV dramas. The research is conducted through literature analysis and case studies. The author focuses on analyzing the typical female character portrayal in several domestic TV dramas, also is committed to researching their rationality and modifiability. The author analyzes the contemporary film and television industry's portrayal of female characters and deeply understands the guidance this form brings to society. At the same time, the author is also committed to exploring the feasibility of the diversity of female characters in future film and television works and bringing benefits to gender equality and the liberation of women.

2. Background

In recent years, there have been numerous films and TV shows with a focus on women both domestically and internationally, many of which have achieved good ratings and reputations. Taking the movie *Barbie* as an example, its global box office has proven that it breaks people's conventional definition of Barbie - Barbie is no longer perfect. Entering the real world from an ideal pink paradise, one faces various challenges that do not exist in the Barbie world, such as appearance anxiety and gender inequality [1]. The movie truly echoes the problems that modern women encounter in their daily lives, causing mainland Chinese audiences to think about what women should be and what the challenges this group faces in contemporary times [2].

The Disney movie *Mulan* is based on a Chinese story and tells the heroic deeds of Mulan who joined the army on behalf of her father, proving that "who says women are not as good as men". Mulan's outstanding performance in the military not only reflects his personal abilities, but also showcases the power and beauty of women to the public, allowing more people to understand the charm of Chinese women [3]. Movies such as *Beauty and the Beast*, *Brave Legend*, and *Frozen* are also different from Disney's early princess movies. The protagonists in these movies are no longer passive waiting for the prince to save them, but brave women with independent personalities [4].

Taking the large-scale Chinese ancient costume drama *Empress Zhen Huan* as an example, it tells the story of the female protagonist Zhen Huan who is selected to enter the palace. In the midst of various forces such as the Empress and Empress Hua, she grows from an inexperienced girl in the palace to a powerful Empress Dowager. At the same time, she gradually moves away from her first love for Emperor Yongzheng on her rising path, Emperor Yongzheng, in his plays, is not angry or arrogant, representing an unshakable image of feudal patriarchy [5]. He stubbornly adheres to the concept of male superiority and female inferiority, demanding absolute obedience from women. Although Zhen Huan was born in ancient times, she had the ideological consciousness of modern women. She wanted equal love, which is why she resonated with the fruit princess who longed for freedom and pure love. She had hidden feelings, but ultimately their love ended tragically due to their untimely birth.

Unlike the conventional scenarios in ancient times or fairy tales, popular TV dramas in mainland China such as *My First Half of Life*, *Thirty Years Only*, and *Chenghuan Ji*, all depict the plot of housewives encountering their husbands cheating, criticizing women for not being dependent on men and entering society to support themselves. The female protagonist in domestic TV dramas does not live in the Disney doll world or has no ancient identity, giving modern women more choices. For example, the lines in *Chenghuan Ji* suggest that women should have a far-sighted perspective, and being confined to a family environment will only reduce their value. This article will explore the process of shaping female characters in film and television works, and discuss the development path of female protagonists in film and television works.

2.1. Case Analysis

This study selects multiple domestic TV dramas for research, analyzing how the female characters in their works are shaped. The female protagonist Luo Zijun in the domestic TV drama *My First Half of Life* was originally a wealthy and idle housewife, and she firmly believed that her husband would never be moved to another relationship. But her husband's unexpected infidelity forced her to divorce, and her son was also awarded to the man. After her divorce, Luo Zijun had nothing but to re-enter the workplace. At the beginning of her career, her family life experience of not being exposed to the sunshine and spring water caused her to encounter numerous difficulties. With the help of her good friends and her consciousness, she overcame each hurdle and found a suitable job, becoming an independent career woman.

In *Thirty Years Only*, Gu Jia is a beautiful and virtuous wife and mother. She is capable and can not only assist her husband in running a fireworks company in business but also take care of her family and children. However, her husband cheated on a female employee of the company. Moreover, the fireworks company was on the brink of bankruptcy due to her husband's mistake. Gu Jia resolutely chooses to divorce, runs a tea factory, and starts a new life. Mai Chenghuan's series of transformations were recognized by her stepgrandmother, who entrusted her with the most important task of hotel management. Yao Zhiming, the stepgrandmother's biological grandson and professional hotel manager, gradually understood and recognized Mai Chenghuan through their cooperation, and the two became work partners, working hand in hand. In daily life, Yao Zhiming is surrounded by the true emotions of the Mai family's fireworks, and his relationship with Mai Chenghuan gradually heats up. From "under the knee of Chenghuan" to "achieving oneself", Mai Chenghuan has embarked on an extraordinary path of growth that is unique to herself.

From the above three film and television works, it can be seen that the commonality of female protagonists in domestic film and television works is that they do not have economic independence and rely on male support when they appear, and then they experience being abandoned (scum) and suddenly wake up, entering the workplace. Although they also encounter various hardships, their indomitable spirit enables them to achieve career success, and they also become an independent woman who do not need men, or fall in love with a domineering CEO and have a beautiful ending. This common plot direction will mislead female audiences to always prioritize their careers, and that relying on men is shameful [5]. However, this viewpoint overlooks the possibility of female personality diversity. Women with strong and courageous personalities and an independent spirit can naturally enter the workplace alone and become independent career women [6]. However, readers cannot ignore that there are also some girls who are gentle and homely, virtuous wives and mothers. They also have independent personalities and clear minds. If they are housewives, they can also use their strengths to manage their small families well. It should be noted that not all men will cheat or abandon their wives. Therefore, the main point of this article is that women need to have independent personalities, and regardless of the lifestyle they choose, there is a possibility of pursuing happiness. Choosing the path that best suits them is the wisest choice for women.

3. Discussion

My First Half of Life premiered in 2017, eight years ago [7]. The female protagonist in the drama faces the dilemma of her husband's infidelity, but she accounts for a large proportion of the factors that lead to his infidelity. As a housewife, Luo Zijun doesn't touch the water of spring with her fingers. She eats and uses her husband's food, and occasionally goes to luxury goods stores for shopping. It should be noted that Luo Zijun's husband is not a billionaire, but a millionaire who earns a million yuan per year and can't afford such extravagance. Luo Zijun often has doubts and worries about his husband's infidelity with a beautiful female subordinate. All kinds of signs indicate that Luo Zijun

and his husband have a disagreement and their souls do not match, so the man's infidelity can also be traced. The female character Luo Zijun in this drama criticizes the wealthy ladies who only spend their husbands' money but do not contribute to their families, with the intention of reminding them not to think they can lie down for a lifetime and to have their own pursuits (even if it is to establish a hobby), while also paying attention to their husbands and establishing a common language with them. On the other hand, encouraging women to step out of their families and into the workplace, it is best to focus on both family and career.

The image of Gu Jia as a housewife in *Thirty Years Only* is different from that of Luo Zijun in *My First Half of Life*. She is not only beautiful, but also has strong online and commercial abilities, managing her small family and her husband's company in an orderly manner [8]. However, it is precisely this excessive pursuit of perfection that puts pressure on her husband and leads to infidelity with ordinary graduates. The plot aims to tell the audience that men are not trustworthy, and women need to have the confidence to live well on their own. Although this theme reveals that men are curious animals and there is a possibility of infidelity, it also denies the possibility of loyal men, which inevitably makes some housewives resentful. It should be noted that not all women are suitable for the workplace. Perhaps some women can also excel in the profession of housewife, and their husbands may be loyal and recognize their value, grateful for their contributions to the family.

In *Chenghuan Ji*, Mai Chenghuan rejected the fierce pursuit of her wealthy second generation boyfriend, mainly because her boyfriend's family looked down upon her and believed that women should be attached to men. Mai Chenghuan also awakened to the belief that relying on herself was the most reliable, and she devoted herself to work and met a good relationship.

My First Half of Life, *Thirty Years Only*, and *Chenghuan Ji* premiered in 2017, 2020, and 2024, respectively. In the first two TV dramas, women were initially portrayed as housewives. However, in *My First Half of Life*, a negative housewife image is portrayed as spoiled and reckless, disregarding home. In *Thirty Years Only*, the image of housewives was beautified, with the upper part being the living room and the lower part being the kitchen. It can be seen that housewives have been increasingly accepted by society in recent years. But in the drama, she still encountered the problem of her husband cheating. Therefore, this article believes that in future film and television works, some themes of happy housewives with virtuous wives and good mothers can be portrayed, shifting the conflict of husband's infidelity to the conflict of marital reconciliation. This may have a positive impact on the rise of marriage and fertility rates in Chinese society. *Chenghuan Ji* depicts a career woman who faces the choice of getting married, becoming a housewife, or continuing to struggle in her career. The protagonist in *Chenghuan Ji* chose his career and achieved some success. However, this may mislead some fragile women who lack their own abilities but are comfortable living in IKEA. It should be noted that the success of the protagonist Mai Chenghuan cannot be separated from her stepgrandmother entrusting the hotel to her management, and these scenes are all artistically processed and somewhat disconnected from reality. Therefore, in future film and television dramas, female protagonists with different personalities and characteristics can be added. They can choose to continue working hard in the workplace or give up their career and retire behind the scenes for a loved one. However, they can all achieve a satisfactory outcome, which will also be helpful for China's marriage rate and policy of having three children.

4. Conclusion

The author wrote this article based on the female character images in several popular film and television works in recent years, exploring the characteristics and shining points of women with different personalities, criticizing the one-sided tendency of female characters nowadays, aiming to reinforce this view through case analysis and literature analysis, revealing the fact that women with different personalities and life trajectories can pursue happiness, and encouraging women to have

diversity and the right to choose different lives. In summary, it is hoped that this article can provide a reference for shaping different female images in the film and television industry and contribute to promoting women's liberation and gender equality. At the same time, this article hopes to bring some spiritual encouragement and positive value orientation to women and to promote the diverse perspectives on female images for men who read this article. Finally, considering the large number of film and television works, this article lacks sufficient case studies in the case analysis module. It is hoped that the author who is interested in research in the future can continue to improve it.

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