

# Analyzing Female Tragedy and Female Consciousness in the TV Series "Empresses in the Palace" from the Female Perspective

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**Abstract.** The TV series "Empresses in the Palace" is a rare boutique in the harem theme category in recent years. The TV series narrates the life of concubine Zhen Huan and her life in the harem from her perspective. Based on the plotting and textual analysis of the drama, this paper analyzes the female tragedy and the awakening of female consciousness in the drama from the female perspective. Three main aspects are analyzed: the microcosm of the harem from the female perspective, the image of women from the modern female perspective, and the overall tragedy of the harem concubines. The research objectives are achieved by studying the influence of Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism on feudal rituals, the embodiment of female self-awareness, and the portrayal of characters in the play. The study concludes that the characterization of Zhen Huan, as an example, contains a sense of independence in modern women's thinking and that the overall tragedy of the harem concubines and the shackles of feudal rituals lead to a clear understanding of the oppression and mutilation of women in feudal society.

**Keywords:** TV series "Empresses in the Palace"; female tragedy; female consciousness; Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism.

## 1. Introduction

In the ancient feudal society of China, women were subordinate and lacked independence under the ethical concept of male superiority and female inferiority. Especially under the prevailing of Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism in the Qing Dynasty, the "Three Congregations and four virtues" bound women to the family and male power, which became a serious spiritual shackle for women, and also made the status of women gradually declined in society, and women's freedom and feelings were restricted. Empresses in the Palace tells the story of concubines fighting in the palace and Zhen Huan's legendary life. Empresses in the Palace not only shows the personal tragedy of Zhen Huan but also includes several female images of many concubines, such as Shen Meizhuang and Consort Hua, in the deformed environment of the feudal harem. The universality of female tragedy is revealed in the fundamental meaning of the feudal imperial autocratic system. The feudal autocratic system led to these scenes of tragedy, and many concubines became the victims of this unreasonable system. As for the plot, it absorbs information about the narrations of Eliza and the narrations in the ancient concubine dramas and illustrates the destinies of the protagonist and the disputes in the harem with twists and turns, full of dramatic tension. Some scholars have discussed the tragedy and feminism in Empresses in the Palace in the past, but there is still a gap in the research on female tragedy and female consciousness from a female perspective. By analyzing the Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism, the embodiment of female self-consciousness and the tragedy of the characters in the drama, this paper aims to analyze the modern female independence consciousness and the destruction of women by the feudal system.

## 2. A miniature of a harem from the female perspective

### 2.1. The influence of the feudal social system on women

The TV drama "Empresses in the Palace" is set in the Yong Zheng period of the Qing Dynasty, a typical feudal dynastic society where "men are superior to women". Throughout history, women have not been valued in the feudal imperial society, but during the Southern Song Dynasty, the status of women declined precipitously, and discrimination against women and oppression of women began to intensify and continued in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. For example, under the influence of the feudal rituals of the ethics and morals of the Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism, the bad practice of foot-binding became popular in the Song Dynasty, causing double oppression and destruction of women's limbs and minds, and was an important reason for the decline of female-oriented dance art [1].

Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism, also known as "Cheng Zhu Taoism", was founded by the brothers, Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, in the Northern Song Dynasty, which belongs to Confucianism and is also one of the schools of neo-Confucianism that has the greatest influence on later generations. Cheng-Zhu's neo-Confucianism does not target women, but the remarks are extremely harsh to women. Among them, "Death by starvation is preferable to the loss of chastity." can be regarded as one of the requirements for women in Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism. At the same time, Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism also proposed that women should observe the "three obediences and four virtues": the three obediences refer to "obeying the father before marriage, obeying the husband after marriage, and obeying the son after the husband's death", and the four virtues are "women's virtue, women's speech, women's appearance, and women's merit". Such a lack of autonomy became one of the moral standards for the restraint and oppression of women by ancient Chinese feudal rites in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, as well as one of the criteria for men to choose their wives. In the play, Zhen Huan is forced to participate in the draft under her father's oppression and the imperial power. Her original heart does not want to enter the palace as a concubine, but in the end, she has to follow her father's wishes, which reflects that a woman's will is not valued and her right to make her own choice is suppressed.

The neo-Confucianism has arisen from the Song Dynasty; Until the Yuan Dynasty became an official school; During the Ming Dynasty, the neo-Confucianism reached a sacred and inviolable academic status, and the culture of "only reading the books of Confucius and Mencius, and only speaking about Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism" emerged. The Qing Dynasty was the world of Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism, and even the emperor of the Qing Dynasty thought that Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism could "transform the people into customs, repair themselves, and correct people". However, the original intent of Cheng and Zhu was to set moral standards for monarchs and scholars and not for women. However, when the rulers turned such moral standards into the will of the state and turned them against the ruled class, women became the target of persecution. The combination of the power of the regime and feudal rites became a shackle on the common people, comparing women's chastity with men's loyalty, where adjectives for women such as chaste pagoda and chaste martyr were the perverted products of such extreme demands. During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, the Cheng-Zhu view of chastity and martyrdom was not only the consciousness of the traditional scholars but also became the consciousness of the common people. In the entire feudal society, women were required to maintain chastity before marriage and not to approach any male other than their fathers; after marriage, they were required to remain faithful and not to associate with any male other than their husbands and sons, and such various unequal requirements made women completely subordinate to men.

During feudal imperial rule, women were required to preserve their chastity and stay out of the house, while beautiful women surrounded men. The prevalence of Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism promoted the exploitation of women's rights by rulers and those with vested interests in a male-dominated society. According to "The Old Book of Tang - Public Opinion and Clothing", "those who rode horses from the palace, all used bearded hats, beautiful makeup, no more shield." Women were

allowed to ride horses in the Tang Dynasty, but in the Song Dynasty period, women were required to stay out of their homes [2]. The concept of the status of men as inferior to women further took root in people's minds, causing the slightly awakened female consciousness in the Tang Dynasty to be knocked back to its original form, leading to the further poisoning of women by the unequal social status, leaving women to lose their freedom and emotions and forced to submit to men.

## **2.2. Hierarchy of concubines under the feudal system**

In the Qing Dynasty, concubines were divided into eight grades. Different dynasties had different names for concubines, and their grades also differed. This strict hierarchical division puts enslaved concubines into artificial antagonism and defense. The harem had a rigid hierarchy and many factions. To obtain a place and have superior power, the women in the harem formed cliques among themselves and formed a power group centered on a certain woman. They fought with other power groups and caused the death of others [3]. In *The Empresses in the Palace*, the promotion of concubines is closely related to their family status. At the beginning of selecting concubines for the palace, Xia Dongchun relies on their family's splendor, making it difficult for An Lingrong, who is of low family status. In addition, daughters of rich families wear more appropriate and gorgeous materials, which naturally increases the probability of being selected in the imperial palace. In addition, the higher the official position of the daughter, after the selection of the corresponding level is likely to be higher; for example, Shen Meizhuang, because her father is Ji Zhou Association leader Shen Zishan, is three parts of the official position so just entered the palace was awarded as a noble and An Lingrong's father An Bihuai is the county magistrate of Songyang County for the seven parts of the official position was awarded as a promise. After entering the palace, the political turmoil in the former dynasty was also closely related to the peace of the harem. For example, the reason why the Nian family remained standing was not only that the emperor deeply loved the beautiful Consort Hua but also that the elder brother of Consort Hua was the emperor's humerus minister, who made great contributions to the stability of the Qing Dynasty in the battles in the former dynasty. Therefore, the emperor had to love the Consort Hua. However, to prevent the Nian family from having too much power, the emperor kept the Consort Hua from having children, so it seems that the ranks of the concubines are the products of the feudal system. Everything serves the centralized power, that is the imperial power. The rank of concubines is not only related to family status, but also an important reason for promotion whether they have children or not, and whether they have children or not is closely related to whether the emperor favors them. For example, Zhen Huan is favored by the emperor quite a lot, and the frequency of natural pregnancies is higher than other concubines. The status of women had nothing to do with knowledge but with whether they had children or not. Concubines who could bear children, especially those with male children, could almost keep the rest of their lives prosperous, and the emperor would also promote their ranks accordingly. Therefore, the concubines in the harem killed each other, and the pregnant concubines were often framed, so the concubines who could give birth to dragon heirs were very valuable. From this point of view, this feudal polygynous system is an extremely corrupt, which is closely related to the closed-door and self-sufficient economy and the ignorant and backward ideology at that time. The most important is the feudal landlords for more than two thousand years, which is the root cause of the tragedy of the concubines in the haves.

## **2.3. The workplace of women in the harem under the feudal system**

To become a popular TV drama, it is necessary to let the audience have a sense of immersion, and *Empresses in the Palace* gives the audience a strong sense of immersion. "Palace" will be the modern workplace retro, similar workplace competition, social struggle factors are easy to let the workplace women empathize. Modern women struggle in the company, and in society; The Qing women competed for favor in the harem, and they had similar pursuits in their respective workplaces: wealth, power, the favor of the superior; At the same time, they also faced similar fertility crisis, hierarchical oppression, worldly sophistication and more [4]. However, the capital these two groups can rely on is quite different. When modern women constantly improve themselves due to the needs of positions,

the concubines in the Qing Palace have to constantly compromise and mold themselves by catering to the needs of their superiors. In the modern workplace, women can use their abilities to make themselves indispensable, even if they fail. However, for the concubines in the Qing palace, their life and death honors were only at the whim of the superior. This cruel contrast reflects the tragedy of women in feudal society.

In the imperial palace, fertility pressure, changes in rank, and social sense are closely related. The classic "sister antagonism" case caused by favor or pregnancy is between Zhen Huan and her original close friend, An Lingrong. She is still unknown after seeing Zhen Huan enter the palace with her, only to be promoted to Concubine Wan in just one year and have a baby. With no anger, An Lingrong constantly traps Zhen Huan and even makes her miscarry. Zhen enters the palace for the first time and is as naive as a career newcomer. Although she was upset because of the rapid changes in the hierarchy, she was still happy because of the emperor's love. She also shared with An Lingrong the joy of being a mother. However, these actions obviously let An Lingrong more and more feel her humble and unfortunate, but aggravate the gap between the two people, finally let two people break. During this period, Zhen's subjective emotions overwhelm her sense of crisis, and her emotional needs mask the jealousy and harm that might be caused. Also, because of favor of the Emperor, another concubine Yu Yinger is more arrogant and domineering; she also obviously corrupts all popularity in the harem workplace and finally dies a tragic death.

On the other hand, when Zhen Huan returns to the palace and sees her enemy An Lingrong being awarded the title of concubine because she is pregnant, she should be resentful and chooses "virtuous". Instead of showing dissatisfaction, she convinces the emperor to appoint six palaces. This strategy makes An's promotion seem ordinary and benefits concubines who are close friends with Zhen, such as Consort Jing and Consort Duan. Moreover, it makes Zhen Huan look generous and worthy of important responsibilities in the eyes of the emperor. Personal feelings of concession in return for the outcome are three birds with one stone. It is Zhen Huan's tragedy, but also her success, that she once put her personality and dignity above her interests and then succumbed to reality. At this time, Zhen Huan can thoroughly understand and skillfully use the rules of the harem palace in the workplace.

### **3. Images of Women in Modern Female Consciousness**

#### **3.1. Qing Dynasty Harem Women in Modern Women's Perspective**

Many articles and videos explaining Empresses in the Palace mention that Legend of Zhen Huan is a power drama different from other popular Qing Palace dramas. This is because, in many Qing Dynasty dramas and even ancient romantic dramas, the image of female characters is not three-dimensional. It seems that family background, a few personality labels, and a spoonful love for a male character can sum up the whole of a woman. In contrast, male characters can dominate many resources, including female characters, and compete for wealth, power, and fame, which is quite a tragic contrast. Words such as "love brain"(Someone whose brain is full of love), "little white flower"(Someone who pretends to be pure), and "mindless sweet drama" are just some of the words that audiences have come up with after getting tired of these unrealistic and even insulting movies and TV series. The great success of Empresses in the Palace, whose anti-routine plot design is closely related to the embodiment of group portraits, especially the main character Zhen Huan, which carries ideas in line with the core values of modern socialism, surprises the audience.

In ancient China, women need to abide by the "Three concords and four virtues". No matter what the purpose of the originator of these ideas were, the "three concords and four virtues" in the Ming and Qing Dynasties had indeed become the accomplices to imprisoning women's nature, suppressing their legitimate demands, and damaging their physical and mental health. This concept is reflected in the Legend of Zhen Huan, which is the blind worship and attachment of most concubines to the emperor. Make public domineering such as Consorts Hua, also regard the emperor's favor as their greatest glory, even in the face of their own status is not equivalent to their own construction of the Song Zhi, will be angry because of the emperor's little preference; The very deep empress, but would

rather lose the child's pain to vent to the innocent elder sister, also refused to blame the culprit emperor. The reasons for "I truly cannot bear it!" include the concubines' love for the emperor, and the constraints and degradation of women in traditional rites. Concubines dare not vent their emotions to the superior emperor, but can only torture women who are also victims, which is the recently controversial "female competition"[5].

No doubt, as a modern educated audience, you can see all the intrigues in the harem. The destruction of the family is caused by the emperor's checks and balances and the temper of his desires. However, as the ruler of the palace, Zhen Huan is not easy to see. Having been used as a surrogate, her family exiled, and her lover given death, she could direct her hatred at the emperor without fear. "If there is a king's death, the whole world will know about it" (Which means Zhen Huan no longer cares about emperor's life.) hides far more than hatred and resentment. Zhen gives up the closeness she has tried to maintain in the past and confronts differences, questioning the hierarchy of injustice and harsh decisions.

After ending her deformed love with the emperor, Zhen Huan does not choose to be as self-deprecated and degenerate as Consort Hua and the Empress. Instead, she grows up. This is the embodiment of her independent self-personality. She will not collapse because of the loss of the pillar, but will become more smooth and firm because of wind and rain grinding.

### **3.2. Zhen Huan's Changing Emotions for the Emperor from a Young girl to an Empress**

Zhen Huan changes from a young girl at the beginning to the final empress dowager. Along the way, Zhen Huan's feelings towards the emperor change from expectation to resentment. This is not only the transformation of Zhen Huan to the empress dowager but also the awakening of Zhen Huan's consciousness as a woman who no longer longs for love but lives to save herself. Zhen Huan's whole life can be said to be a struggle. In the beginning, he fights for freedom. When she learns about the palace talent show, she can wear simple clothes without dressing up in order to avoid entering the heavily guarded prison, but she is still taken by the emperor [6]. Zhen Huan has a deep relationship with the emperor when she is a girl. The emperor loves Zhen Huan alone and gives her more love than ever before. After entering the palace, Zhen Huan realizes that her "husband" is the emperor and the most unable person in the world. Therefore, Zhen stays at peace with the public and does not compete with other concubines to win the emperor's favor. On New Year's Eve in the Plum Garden, Zhen Huan makes a wish that she hopes "only to preserve their own, do not compete with others for a favor". coincidentally, she encountered the emperor, let the emperor never forget the charming women he met at that night. A few months pass, Zhen Huan meets the emperor in the palace garden. However, the emperor calls himself Duke Guo, and Zhen has to keep her distance from him. The concubine Yu Yinger pretends to make a wish in the garden and then bullies the unfavored Zhen Huan. The emperor ends up helping her, thus unveiling the romance between the emperor and Zhen Huan. At this moment, Huan believes she is a special and unique person in the emperor's heart.

In the middle of Zhen Huan's life, he becomes disillusioned with the emperor. He gradually realizes that the emperor must not only consider the imperial harem but also that he cannot spoil her forever. First of all, Zhen Huan realizes that the emperor is not his only partner when his sister Shen Meizhuang is framed for false pregnancy. Afterward, Zhen Huan caught and framed Shen Meizhuang's false pregnancy Liu Ben, with ironclad evidence, framed the point of Consort Hua, but the emperor is not felony punishment for Consort Hua; this undoubtedly led Zhen Huan to chill. Zhen Huan gets pregnant and is forced to kneel by Consort Hua at noon, leading to a miscarriage. However, at this time, the court is hiring people, and Consort Hua's brother, Nian Gengyao, is one of the humeri of the court. The emperor does not take sides with Zhen Huan and punishes Consort Hua severely, which makes Zhen Huan even more disappointed.

In the later stage, Zhen Huan loses her original innocence and kindness but becomes cold and vicious [7]. When she was in and out of favor, she knew all too well how thin and unreliable the Emperor could be. Her sense of female independence gradually awakens, and she does not rely on men to live but to protect herself. Zhen Huan understands that it is difficult to survive in the harem

without the emperor's favor. In the later stage, Zhen Huan wins the emperor's trust by considering the overall situation instead of being attached to love, which makes the emperor more and more dependent.

The change in Zhen Huan's emotional attitude toward the emperor is very painful. It is the passion that is killed little by little by disappointment and suspicion. It is the ruthlessness and numbness that is cultivated after expectation is disappointed, and it is also the helplessness that is forced by life. In this process, there are signs of age and time, the backward feudal system of the Qing Dynasty, and the sadness of polygamy. They say it's not you who move. It's the crowd that pushes you. In the harem, every woman lives like this. Zhen Huan, the woman who had a beautiful dream at the beginning, is left alone in the end, lying on the sleeping bed, recalling the past little things, which makes people sigh at the helplessness and sadness of fate [8]. The portraits in *Empresses in the Palace* portray thousands of imperial concubines in ancient China. In the later period of Zhen Huan, she places her hopes on herself instead of the emperor. It also embodies the fight against the feudal monarchy and the modern writer's expectation of awakening female consciousness.

## **4. The Tragedy of Harem Concubines from the Perspective of Modern Women**

### **4.1. The Overall Tragic Fate of Harem Women**

As one of the concubines in the harem, Zhen Huan experiences the life of a concubine firsthand. The play shows not only the personal tragedy of Zhen Huan, but also the cruel life of the concubines and their common tragic fate from Zhen Huan's perspective. The main concubines close to Zhen Huan are Consort Hua, the Empress, and Shen Meizhuang, all three of whom are the link between the family and the imperial power, but each of them has a different fate and tragedy [9].

Consort Hua is a typical infatuation with women, but also the most outgoing and unique character of the entire harem's existence, but her fate is sad. When her brother, Nian Gengyao, was an important minister, and the Nian family was one of the top families in the capital, Consort Hua was the envy of the high noblewoman. In Zhen Huan, ready to participate in the draft, the palace sisters went to the Zhen family and said, "The leading Han army flag, all the women in the eight banners of Manchuria and Mongolia, are less beautiful than Consort Hua." It can be seen that the appearance and family background of Consort Hua is at the top harem, but even so, she can not escape becoming a pawn in the exchange of power between the family and the imperial power. As the pivot between maintaining the emperor and the family, Consort Hua was not free to control her pregnancy. Because of the fear of Nian Gengyao's merits and foreign relatives' dictatorship, the emperor and the Empress Dowager have been drugging Consort Hua. The "Huan Yi Xiang", which was prized by Consort Hua, was the drug that prevented her from getting pregnant. Consort Hua is in love with the emperor, eager to get exclusive love to have been favored to do all kinds of cruel things to fight the persecution of other concubines, and even use murder to cover up the truth. However, the emperor's love for Consort Hua is mixed with calculations and precautions. He treats Consort Hua to stabilize Nian Gengyao so that Nian family can continue to fight for him. However, the emperor also secretly collects evidence to eradicate the family. To consolidate her position and the prestige of the family, Consort Hua's glory was closely linked to the position of the former dynasty, Nian Gengyao. Knowing that the emperor would be suspicious when the Nian family was in trouble, she also had to defend her family. The tragedy of Consort Hua is the pursuit of love that does not exist in the harem but also has to disobey the emperor for the sake of the family. Her happiness, anger, sadness, and personal freedom were never hers, and from a modern female point of view, she lacked subjectivity and autonomy.

Empress as the lord of the Palace, was required to have a dignified atmosphere, gentle and virtuous, but the Empress is also infatuated with the same Consort Hua. Empress is also the power between the imperial power and the lineage replacement goods; she must maintain the honor of the Ulanara. To consolidate her position as Empress, she used her power to trap concubines and mutilate children, but she could not even express her emotions and had to suppress them constantly. The Empress uses various methods to suppress and draw in other concubines, typical of the female competition in the

harem. She is abominable and pathetic; there is no one to talk to in the large harem. The Empress loves the emperor deeply, but the emperor has no love for her, and only gives due respect; the emperor needs a virtuous, kind empress, and many dainty concubines. The tragedy of the Empress is that she gained status but lost her emotions, becoming cruel and ruthless in constant repression and jealousy, also bowing to the imperial power in order to maintain the interests of the family; she was also gentle and kind but eventually lost in this deformed harem system. From the perspective of modern women, Empress uses all her intelligence and wisdom in the female competition represented by hooking up, flattering and inviting favor, and fighting others, and eventually loses her sense of autonomy and falls victim to the interests.

Shen Meizhuang is a calm, gentle, and dignified woman who was raised by a noble family at the time and was strictly taught by her family from a young age; from her behavior to her speech and manner, she is the standard of a "perfect concubine". Unlike Zhen Huan's stubbornness, Shen Meizhuang is competitive but will bow down to feudal rituals. In the show's first episode, Shen Meizhuang's mother trains her for the court election and asks her not to show her talent in front of the emperor and the empress dowager. Because the emperor is selecting concubines and not examining scholarly literature, Shen Meizhuang is not allowed to tell the truth even though she has read famous books such as "Mencius" and "Zuo Zhuan". Because of the influence of the Qing Dynasty system, people generally believed that a woman without talent is a virtue, so when the Empress Dowager asked Shen Meizhuang what books she had read during the temple election, she only answered "Women's Rules" and "Women's Discipline", and slightly know a few words. With her good upbringing and talent, Shen Meizhuang was the first to be favored among the concubines of the same period but also the first to be framed by other concubines. She was discouraged by the emperor's indifferent attitude and no longer had any illusions about his love and took the initiative to distance herself from him, retiring to serve the Empress Dowager for self-preservation.

Shen Meizhuang also has the author's modern mind. She knows how to retreat and has a rebellious mentality and an incomplete female consciousness, unlike Consort Hua and the Empress, who only know how to obey the rituals and laws. However, she is condescending and self-imposed and puts the Emperor's favor and emotions first. Shen Meizhuang finally took a brave step, like a moth to a flame, falling in love with doctor Wen Shichu, getting pregnant, giving birth to a daughter, and pursuing her heart's desire at the cost of her life. The essence of Shen Meizhuang's entry into the palace is also an exchange of power between the family and the emperor, but she is different from Consort Hua and the empress who adhere to the rules. In the interest of not touching the family and imperial power, she will choose to follow her heart. The tragedy of Shen Meizhuang lies in her inability to break free from the shackles of feudal rituals, and the social system of male superiority over women buries her talent. Although Shen Meizhuang's feminine consciousness awakened, she ultimately pinned her hopes on men. Moreover, the realization of that brief love affair is her determination and resistance to her inability to escape her status as a consort [10].

#### **4.2. An Unequal System Creates Tragedy**

As feudal centralization peaked in the Qing Dynasty, its imprisonment and suppression of women had peaked. No matter how beautiful the face, how amazing the talent, how noble the character, these advantages are hardly to the woman's own advantage. Because in feudal society, women's bodies and minds belong to the family, belong to the superior man. In the process of growing up, everyone around a woman will teach her by example, just as Shen Meizhuang's elders told her before she entered the palace that she should be obedient and humble and that "a woman without talent is virtuous". Under this kind of education, it is difficult for women to break through the limitations of thought and knowledge and can only accept a life of self-destruction for the family.

Zhen Huan's appearance may not be as good as Consort Hua's; her background is not as good as the tide of the expensive female, such as queen; even as Chunyuan queen decoy, she is not as good as sister Zhen Yurao. From beginning to end, Zhen Huan's biggest advantage is "confidence", her own value and ability is a clear cognition. They will not look down on themselves because they face

the imperial concubine, the empress, or even the emperor. Therefore, even in the face of seemingly desperate situations (Duke Guo was granted death, the emperor did not trust her, her best sister died), she would calm down, use her own advantages and the emperor's guilt, and use the "winter butterfly" to renew the old dream with the emperor. In the face of competition and confrontation, other concubines will more or less degrade themselves, give up their own advantages and resources, and attach themselves to a man. Even if it is stubborn such as Ye Lanyi, in palace life, her psychological pillar is still Duke Guo.

Zhen Huan has an obvious modern female brand of "self-improvement, confidence, and self-appreciation". She can clearly see the helplessness of everyone in the hierarchical society and use the rebellious desire for "revenge on the emperor" as her motivation to move forward. However, she was in feudal society, so she could not jump out of the limitations of The Times, only with their own resources and abilities in exchange for the favor of men. From the beginning of a pure yuan double backlash, to take the initiative to meet, this is Zhen Huan's self-personality and objective environment as the result of the compromise also lowers the bottom line of the tragedy of women throughout the palace.

## 5. Conclusion

The concubines in the *Empresses in the Palace* are the daughters of various officials. They are the best among the concubines in terms of their cultural attainment, appearance, and talent. Compared with ordinary women in ordinary families, they should be able to achieve happiness easier. However, due to the restriction of feudal ethics by the "Three congregations and four virtues" in the Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism, both women of high families and women of common people lost their autonomy and freedom. These women were forced to be selected into the palace to serve the emperor for life. Such an extremely unequal gender ratio inevitably distorted emotions, resulting in the misfortune and tragedy of most concubines, who were unable to extricate themselves from the mire of power, emotion, and status. Zhen Huan, as the representative figure among them, finally joins hands with Ye Lanyi to kill the king, which is a symbol of Zhen Huan's awakening of female consciousness, and also a reflection of her fighting against the feudal autocratic imperial power system with her own strength, showing the author's expectation for the pursuit of the awakening of female consciousness and the development of the era of ideological progress. However, due to the feudal system at that time, all the concubines in the drama did not get happy endings, and these concubines were all victims of the circumstances at that time. This thesis analyzes the independence consciousness of Zhen Huan and the modern female consciousness contained in Zhen Huan by discussing the tragedies of the *Empresses in the Palace* and recognizing the destruction of women caused by the feudal system. Due to limited reference materials, this study cannot analyze the characters of all the concubines in the drama, nor can it deeply and systematically analyze the psychological activities and time limitations behind the characters' behaviors. It is expected that more professional scholars can have more in-depth research and analysis of the historical background.

## Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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