The Awakening of Women's Consciousness in the Workplace in China and Korea Through Film and TV Series

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Abstract. In the context of a patriarchal society, men occupy a relatively dominant position in both social life and the workplace. In contrast, women are usually just wives, daughters-in-law, and mothers in the family rather than "women" per se. Based on the awareness of this, the purpose of this paper is to study the process of awakening women's consciousness in the workplace in China and Korea in recent years and the reasons affecting them. The analysis of this article examines the images of women in the film and television works "KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982" and "Fighting Youth" to analyze the changing status of women in the workplace and the main factors affecting the awakening of women's consciousness. The present study acknowledges that the emergence of female consciousness is propelled by intrinsic factors within women themselves. The awakening of female consciousness is driven by women's questioning and thinking, which leads to change.

Keywords: KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982, Fighting Youth, Women's Consciousness.

1. Introduction

After human beings entered a male-dominated society, men have taken the absolute leading position in both social life and the workplace. After the female-dominated matriarchal society ended and was replaced by a male-dominated patriarchal society, the silent women "huddled in the heart of history" [1]. During ancient times, women were severely restricted from venturing outside and revealing their countenances. Moreover, a significant majority of women were disallowed from engaging in economic pursuits or partaking in discussions concerning political matters. In the context of her family, a woman's existence is intricately intertwined and confined within its boundaries. However, within this familial sphere, a woman assumes a role of mere functionality, reduced to the status of an instrument rather than an independent human entity. She assumes the titles of mother, wife, and daughter-in-law, but regrettably, her identity as a woman is eclipsed [1]. In the context of patriarchal society, the beautiful stories celebrated are those of men cultivating and women weaving, but the women in the stories mostly exist only in the family. Whether it's pregnancy or housework, many women's lives are trapped in the family "cage" and even good or bad marriage has become the standard for assessing a woman. In recent years, film and television productions have begun to focus on the stories of women in the workplace, portraying women outside the home [2]. These works are a way for the director to present real life to the public and convey the director's thoughts on life, which is a side effect of life. The embodiment of "female consciousness" in film and series is that the director does not portray women as viewing objects but seeks to present a realistic portrayal of women's real lives and the image of women's values and psychological characteristics.

The whole Asian region is more influenced by ancient times, the problems women face in the workplace are different, and in the face of these realities, the women who are gradually awakening have different approaches[3]. However, their direction and tenacity in the workplace have something in common. "KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982" was released earlier, and there was more analysis on the status of women, the role of women, and the many reasons for the gradual collapse of the heroine

and the real-life problems of the film. "Fighting Youth" was released recently, but it is a good portrayal of the resilience of women's efforts in the workplace.

Gender discrimination in the contemporary workplace is already evident, manifesting in instances where women face rejection during job interviews solely based on gender. Moreover, they may encounter accusations of being less competent than their male counterparts, resulting in slower career advancement. Additionally, women may face termination or demotion due to factors such as marriage or parenthood. To investigate the essence and origins of modern feminism and the rising awareness among women in China and Korea, this study employs comparative analysis and case studies of "Fighting Youth" and "KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982". Through this analysis, the study aims to elucidate the process of women's awakening and identify the primary factors that influence the development of women's consciousness.

The main theme of "Fighting Youth" is the development of Zhang Xiaoyu in the workplace, which is complemented by the development of Lin Rui and other leaders in the workplace and the challenges of women in the workplace. "KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982" highlights the injustice for women in the workplace through the speed of promotion of men and women in the workplace, the change of positions, and the comparison of the treatment of men and women in the work environment. Through the actions and images of these women, this paper will analyze the process of women's consciousness awakening and the actual actions women are doing to fight for their rightful interests and equal status.

2. An Analysis Of The Awakening Of Workplace Women's Consciousness In "KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982"

2.1. Film Background

The opportunity for the rise of the Korean feminist movement in real space is the Gangnam Station homicide in 2016. A woman in her 20s was killed by a strange man in the bathroom of the business street near exit 10 of Gangnam Station because she was a woman. This event brought to the surface the phenomenon of misogyny that had been lurking in cyberspace for a long time. Afterward, posters and messages from citizens calling for a face up to the phenomenon of misogyny were posted in front of exit 10 of Gangnam Station. Feminism also moved from online to the street, spreading from elite discussions to public issues. The novel "KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982" was also published. Three years later, the film adaptation of the same name based on the novel was released, triggering a new round of conflict between the Korean feminist movement and feminists.

2.2. The oppression of women in the workplace reflected in the film

When Kim Ji-Young joined Daehan Planning, she expressed her interest in joining the planning team led by Team Leader Kim, a female employee. However, she discovered that her name was missing from the announced selection list for the team. In response, Kim Ji-Young negotiated with Team Leader Kim, who explained, "The company aims to establish a long-term team for a period exceeding five years, but female employees often face challenges in maintaining long-term commitment due to marriage and maternity leave." Firstly, this represents a stereotypical influence, as not all women in the workplace are expected to marry or take maternity leave. Secondly, it illustrates conscious oppression under the dominance of male discourse. Despite being a female herself and highly valuing Kim Ji-Young, Team Leader Kim was compelled to relinquish the opportunity to accept Kim Ji-Young, who she highly appreciated, to comply with the decisions of the company's leadership.

Before the meeting specifically arranged for Director Liang, he casually made a jesting remark to Team Leader Kim, saying, "Children must stay by their mothers." He added, "No matter how successful their careers are, everything falls apart if their children are ruined." This statement was specifically targeted at Team Leader Kim, who faces the burden of familial and parental responsibilities while striving to be an accomplished professional woman. Team Leader Kim

skillfully navigated the situation using a combination of persuasive and assertive tactics. While Director Liang's words emphasize the importance of child-rearing and family education, it is essential to recognize that mothers are not meant to be subservient to their families and children. This reflects the deep-rooted societal reinforcement of the concept of maternal oppression at a subconscious level. For women in the workplace, achieving a harmonious balance between family and career poses an even greater challenge.

The most serious workplace discrimination against women in the film is the issue of "installing cameras in women's restrooms". A kind-hearted male colleague installed a camera in the female restroom and secretly told a female colleague about the incident where a female employee of the company was secretly filmed while using the restroom and posted online. Thus, several other female colleagues found the camera in the women's restroom and called the police. However, what is even more chilling is that the female colleagues who were secretly photographed later have to go to the police station to identify the private part photos they were secretly photographed which is undoubtedly a secondary injury. A female colleague later found the behavior of Team Leader Zheng (male) even more chilling when communicating with Kim Ji-Young about this matter. At that time, she said that after seeing the photo online and recognizing it as her own company, Team Leader Zheng not only did not go to the police but also shared the photo with other male colleagues. Later on, there was a situation where the kind-hearted male colleague "leaked information" to help. The security guards installed the cameras, but the male leaders who shared the photos towered above them, indicating a class nature of sexual oppression against women in the workplace.

From the perspective of Zheng Daxian (husband of Kim Ji-Young), many male professionals are filled with a sexual orientation towards women. For example, while chatting on the rooftop, we found other male employees openly sharing yellow images and video products.

Overall, the male group in the film has severe labeling and sexualization of workplace women, negatively impacting their daily lives and workplace enthusiasm.

2.3. The awakening of female consciousness in the workplace in the film

In response to Director Liang's "joke" mentioned earlier, Team Leader Kim responded: "It sounds like a good promotional slogan. It's prepared with a mother's care for children who may face issues due to not being raised by their mothers, like vitamins." Director Liang said, "If you say that, you'll get beaten up by working moms in the future." Team Leader Kim calmly replied, "Then you'll have to get beaten up by me as well." This exchange subtly showcases Team Leader Kim's assertive attitude and can be seen as an awakening of consciousness for a typical career-oriented woman like her. However, this awakening only manifests as a resistant attitude, lacking a strong theoretical argument and rebuttal against Director Liang's deliberate labeling of women. Team Leader Kim initially appears in the narrative through the voices of her male colleagues, and despite being a powerful career woman fully dedicated to work shortly after childbirth, she still cannot escape idle gossip and gender-related challenges in the workplace. As the story unfolds, Team Leader Kim also faces similar struggles and suppression in a predominantly male work environment, leading her to leave the company and start her own business eventually. On the other hand, due to her commitment to work, the inevitable consequence is a reduction in family time, diminishing her maternal role. This is evident in Team Leader Kim's admiration for Kim Ji-Young, saying, "It must be delightful to witness your child's growth firsthand."

The solution for several women in the workplace regarding the 'women's restroom cameras' issue is to report the incident to the police. Amidst the unanimous comfort and "open-minded" persuasion from those around them, they can only feel helpless toward the facts. Although it is not wrong for the victim to make accusations against some factual evidence in judicial terms, this behavior actually constitutes secondary psychological harm to the victim woman. Perhaps due to age issues, they cannot express a stronger attitude towards the oppressed reality of women in the workplace, similar to that of Team Leader Kim. It can be said that such workplace women are somewhat awakened but still in a state of confusion.

2.4. Reflection on the performance techniques of the film production section

Except for the final sublimation part of the film, which includes scenes such as Zheng Daxian picking up the child and Kim Ji-Young writing a book on a computer, many dark shots are used in scenes outside of the workplace, such as residences, clinics, and highways. Lenses with higher brightness are used in places, such as company offices, rooftops, and coffee shops. The contrast between light and dark is obvious, and the cross use of warm and cold tones expresses Kim Ji-Young's longing for workplace life and her desire to break away from the oppressive thoughts of traditional women in society and family through lens language. At the same time, it can also demonstrate that there is still darkness and oppression towards women in the so-called shiny "modern society". Show a sense of irony at this level.

The film also uses many reaction shots to reflect the social identity dilemma of women, such as Director Yang's verbal provocation of Team Leader Kim during a company meeting. The film director gave a set of reaction shots to the male colleagues sitting opposite Team Leader Kim, who nodded in disbelief and helped Director Yang criticize Team Leader Kim, highlighting the deep-rooted contempt for women in Korean society and gender differences in the workplace.

At the same time, the entire film revolves around the basic plot of Kim Ji-Young's aversion to the phenomenon of labeling, sexualizing, discriminating, and oppressing women in the surrounding society, wanting to participate in work and fight against this unfair phenomenon in the form of work, and finally reaching a "compromise" with the family. The filming ratio and duration of each part of the film are also controlled. The total length of the film is 118 minutes and 52 seconds, with the main film lasting approximately 111 minutes and 10 seconds. The segment about women in the workforce, which is discussed briefly, spans approximately 14 minutes. This temporal allocation highlights the scarcity of workplaces that embody gender equality, a notion often perceived by numerous Korean women, represented by Kim Ji-young. On the other hand, it also illustrates the enormous resistance to real-life obstacles from families and society, such as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships, child-rearing, and labeling of women, to women's struggle for "equality".

3. Women in the Workplace in "Fighting Youth"

3.1. The awakening of female consciousness in the female workplace

In ancient China, men were the mainstay of farming, and women were the mainstay of weaving, and many women rarely went out, let alone had their careers. Since the 21st century, women have been playing an increasingly important role in the workplace. Perhaps there are reasons why the economic base determines the family's status that drives women to work harder in the workplace, or perhaps there is an awakening of self-awareness.

"Fighting Youth" is a television series released in 2021, with most of its characters being women. Overall, the show provides insights into the status of women in the workplace in recent years. The storyline revolves around Zhang Xiaoyu, a post-90s newcomer in the professional world, who gains recognition from Lin Rui, the sales director of SW, an internationally renowned cosmetics company, due to her exceptional sales talent. This recognition leads to an employment opportunity where Zhang Xiaoyu strives and works hard, ultimately achieving her career aspirations and asserting her self-worth. Lin Rui, portrayed as the sales director of the SW East China region, exudes a fashionable, competent, strong, and decisive persona, posing as the biggest threat to her boss, Shu Wanting (General Manager of Greater China). To counterbalance Lin Rui, Shu Wanting strategically transfers Fang Jing, a competitor who has always been evenly matched with Lin Rui, to work directly under her on an equal footing. Zhang Xiaoyu, a newcomer from an ordinary background, accidentally enters the company and becomes Lin Rui's assistant. Under Lin Rui's guidance, she transforms from a novice to an elite professional. Navigating the thorny and challenging path of career advancement for women, these characters overcome obstacles, emerging as queens in their own lives.

Zhang Xiaoyu's initial entry into the company was merely motivated by her desire to coincidentally encounter and reconcile with her ex-boyfriend, who worked in the same building. In the eyes of her leader, Lin Rui, Zhang Xiaoyu seemed somewhat lazy and lacking determination. However, Lin Rui recalled the first time she saw Zhang Xiaoyu's drive to sell skincare products and called her into the office, where they stood by the floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the entire Shanghai cityscape. This moment ignited Zhang Xiaoyu's ambition and determination. With each completed project and task, she experienced the joy of success in sales and a sense of accomplishment through her relentless efforts, despite the constant provocations and subtle maneuvers by her rival, Ling Xiaoxiao. In her own words, she became stronger in the face of adversity. Throughout this process, she also saw the true nature of her ex-boyfriend, Wu Dongjiang, whom she had been unable to forget, and gradually shifted her focus entirely to her work. In this journey, her hard work attracted the attention of an outstanding young man, leading to a new romance. As Zhang Xiaoyu gradually climbed the ladder to become the Assistant to the CEO of the China region, her friends Justin and Dong Xinran stood by her side, providing mutual support, making her career path smoother. From their assistance to her and her help overcoming their workplace challenges, the mutual support between friends created a harmonious atmosphere during the career advancement process. Lin Rui, her mentor and leader, played a significant role in Zhang Xiaoyu's progression from a small sales role to Assistant to the CEO. Whether it was developing major event proposals, negotiating with other companies, or dealing with internal competition, Lin Rui provided constructive feedback that left a deep impression on Zhang Xiaoyu, ultimately contributing to her professional growth..

Regardless of the ups and downs in love, the support from friends and mentor, all of these gradually awaken Zhang Xiaoyu's sense of perseverance in the workplace. She is determined to achieve a position equivalent to Lin Rui's within the next five years. She does not rely on her pursuer, Wen Zhe, and disregards the olive branch he extends to her, remaining focused on her work. This resilience also captivates her admirers even more deeply. Zhang Xiaoyu is the protagonist of this TV drama and represents many women in the workplace. Through her own efforts, she rises to higher positions, despite not having an outstanding educational background. Her determination and hard work ultimately attract the attention of other prestigious companies, showcasing her true capabilities. It reflects the awakening of women from their former dependence on men to their current self-reliance and self-improvement.

3.2. The current situation of women in the workplace on screen

In "Fighting Youth", Shu Wanting moves the Sales Director of South China Fang Jing to East China region to be on an equal footing with Lin Rui to form a competitive relationship. The two of them became closer because Shu Wanting would privately ask Fang Jing for help with her son Jiahao's life problems.For Shu Wanting, Lin Rui and Fang Jing are competing with each other for the company's benefit and also to refine the division of labor, which is undoubtedly a good choice, but some of the rivalries between the two of them make maximizing benefits seem more and more difficult.

One of the men who appear more frequently throughout the series, Meng Fan, competes with Shu Wanting for the presidency of China. His advantage is that he has strong connections and a background as a male who spent a year at the European headquarters. From this, it can be seen that men have more opportunities in the workplace, while Shu Wanting, the General Manager, has relatively little to show for his performance to compete with. This also reflects an unequal allocation of resources: men are more likely to have access to superior resources.

In one of the episodes, Dong Xinran goes to negotiate a contract with a big boss, but the big boss asks Dong Xinran to accompany him to drink and sign the contract only after he is well attended. This kind of workplace "subterfuge" (sexual harassment in the workplace) is not only found in TV operas but also in real life, but the operas have good outcomes[4]. The supervisor, Lin Rui, reminds Dong Xinran to protect herself, preferring to protect her staff rather than giving up the contract after the incident. Yet in real life, this kind of leadership is rare. It seems to acquiesce to the existence of

"subterfuge". At a later stage, Shu asked more and more help from Fang Jing because of her son's rebellion, and their relationship becomes closer. At the same time, to beat Meng Fan in terms of performance, Shu and Fang Jing falsify the books to achieve their ultimate goal. However, due to Shu's excessive focus on work during her youth and neglect of her children's education, she failed to achieve a proper balance between family and work. As a result, she ultimately chose to resign and, before resigning, exposed all the manipulative tactics she employed to achieve success, ensuring that her career would not be tainted.

The whole series is still a fairly graphic portrayal of the domestic workplace, but there is an undeniable suspicion of over-promotion of female competition. The term "female competition", as opposed to "male competition", originally referred to the phenomenon of same-sex competition in nature for the reproduction of offspring and was later transposed to modern society to describe situations in which women or men compete with each other for resources to survive[5]. As employees of the company, Ling Xiaoxiao and Fang Jing are willing to compromise the interests of other departments to achieve favorable outcomes for their departments. However, in real-life workplace scenarios, the dynamics are more akin to Dong Xinran and Justin supporting Zhang Xiaoyu through sharing information, offering suggestions for improvement, and helping identify weaknesses in proposals, exemplifying the collaborative nature of colleagues and friends supporting one another[6]. The portrayal of female competition in the series may inadvertently reinforce the stereotype of an intensely competitive workplace environment in the country, although it cannot be denied that high levels of competition indeed mark contemporary workplaces[7].

The architecture of the opera is reflecting, sunny, and often bright and vivid in tone. A brilliant light glows immediately behind the protagonists in scenes featuring connections between bosses, subordinates, and coworkers, giving them a type of character glow. The characters' make-up is light and fresh, their gait is steady, and their outfit is simple and airy. The overall appearance of a confident and attractive but not overbearing state, workplace promotion in the tone looks less dark, work is a bright future.

4. Comparison and Insight

Both of these film and television works depict the challenges faced by women in the workplace to a significant extent. In comparison, the South Korean production " KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982" offers a more realistic and dark portrayal of the obstacles women encounter in the workplace, enabling viewers to empathize with the oppression experienced by women deeply. The brutally honest depiction of this reality has sparked a tremendous response and discussion in South Korea. The work "KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982" studied the identity dilemma of women and the spiritual crisis that women suffer from in their lives, and after the release of the film, more women began to search for and think about their value realization [8]. In contrast to "KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982," the drama "Fighting Youth" is more of an uplifting drama, in which the protagonist's advancement and promotion are clear, despite numerous obstacles and undercurrents in the workplace. The protagonist is always positive in his upward efforts, with integrity and a good friend to help him. The drama "Fighting Youth" gives the impression that there is hope for women to advance in the workplace, that if they work hard they will be rewarded, and that the overall style is more positive.

The two dramas' plot design styles are different and reflect the different status quo in the two countries. The darkness is straightforwardly laid out in front of people, allowing the audience to appreciate the reality of despair and tragedy better. While the overall style of the Chinese drama is positive, full of inspirational power and beautification, making people more hopeful about life and making the audience feel the power and more willing to work hard for a better life.

Renowned contemporary scholar Yue Daiyun has proposed three levels of "female consciousness." The first level pertains to the social dimension, which involves observing the oppression and awakening experienced by women within the class structure of society. The second level focuses on the natural dimension, examining women from the perspective of their physiological

characteristics, such as pregnancy, conception, and menstruation. The third level concerns the spiritual dimension, exploring female culture beyond the male-dominated societal norms, including its narrative style and sensibilities [9]. Every woman should be a soldier in the awakening of female consciousness and the pursuit of gender equality, and "KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982" prompts female awakening by putting darkness on the stage. Whereas "Fighting Youth" gives inspiration and encouragement and gives women hope. Both dramas make women more aware of women, and both are more or less instrumental in awakening women in their lives. Women and women's literature share the same fate with the improvement of human nature, the liberation of personality, democracy, freedom, equality, civilization, progress, peace and development, which are values that human beings cherish together, and the full realization of women's Humanism values. [10].

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the awakening of female consciousness can be summarized as women realizing their existence as individuals, as subjects who live and exist not for the sake of others but for themselves, ultimately rejecting the notion of being solely defined by others. Internal forces drive this awakening as women reflect on and undergo changes in their perceptions of themselves and other women. They begin to recognize that their lives are not meant for someone else but for themselves as human beings, which motivates them to pursue independence.

Overall, both work positively impacts the awakening of modern female consciousness. "KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982" raises awareness by exposing the darkness that often goes unnoticed, shedding light on the pain experienced by some women. On the other hand, "Fighting Youth" inspires women by showcasing successful examples of women in the workplace, encouraging them to strive for change through hard work.

Although both dramas depict the challenges faced by women in the workplace, they differ in many aspects. " KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982" primarily focuses on the gender-based injustices and career difficulties encountered by the protagonist as a woman. In contrast, "Fighting Youth" portrays conflicts among women in the workplace and the diverse life choices they make. In terms of filmmaking, " KIM JI-YOUNG, BORN 1982" adopts a darker tone, with the protagonist constantly in need of rescue, while "Fighting Youth" maintains a bright and optimistic overall tone, featuring a protagonist with a simple and stylish demeanor, always moving towards the light.

In summary, this study has explored the survival of women in the workplace in China and South Korea by conducting a comparative analysis of these two works, providing valuable insights into the challenges faced by contemporary female professionals. However, the scope of this research is limited and further investigation is needed to understand the current realities better. Future studies could focus more on examining the discrepancies between on-screen portrayals and real-life experiences, thereby offering more constructive suggestions for addressing the challenges faced by women in the workplace.

Authors Contribution

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

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