Development of Women's Image and Women's Consciousness Awakening in Media Perspective

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Abstract. The awakening of contemporary women's consciousness has gradually emerged as a mainstream development factor and has influenced the direction, aesthetics, and values of literary and artistic creation. With the advancement of information technology and media communication, Western feminist theories have gradually diffused into China since the 1980s and 1990s, and the women's consciousness awakening in China has had a profound impact on the creation of Chinese films and literature from its inception to its gradual development under the backdrop of reform and opening up and has undergone empirical verification. This paper employs the case study method to analyze the alterations in the image of women in the three mainstream media, namely film, television, and new media, by vertically sorting out the characteristics of media development, to explore the influencing factors of women's consciousness awakening. It has been discovered that women-themed literary creations can effectively stimulate the awakening consciousness of the audience, and through the wide dissemination of media platforms, an increasing number of audiences are inspired, making the awakening of women's consciousness a hot topic of discussion. This study hopes that analyzing the transformation of women's images can assist contemporary literary workers in providing feasible reference significance based on the value orientation, audience positioning, and dissemination concepts of women's theme creation.

Keywords: Film, new media, women's consciousness awakening, media image.

1. Introduction

This paper centers on the hot topic of "women's consciousness awakening" in contemporary society and aims to explore the changes in the mass media, such as films, television, and new media, that work with women as the core of their creation has on the contemporary women audience's change of values, social background factors, ideological and aesthetic dissemination, and other aspects. Through the analysis of the three works, namely *Send Me to the Clouds*, *The Queen of News and Lure Her In*, it is discovered that different media, due to their unique creative logic and communication channels, will influence the social public's perception of women to varying degrees and also create an interactive relationship between women's identity perception and awakening of consciousness. However, there are still limitations in the role of media communication in promoting gender equality, which requires all sectors of society to undertake feasible measures to support gender equality and policy implementation. The purpose of this paper is to attempt to guide contemporary literary workers to pay attention to the creative strategies in this field through the transformation of the portrayal of women in film and television and to provide a reference for the creation of contemporary women's themes.

2. Transformation of Women's Image in the Film

Since its advent in 1895, the film has gained popularity, and this new form of entertainment has gradually transformed into an art form. The first artistic creation of Chinese cinema was in 1905 – when the first Chinese film, *Dingjunshan*, was released. André Bazin emphasized that the distinctive ability of cinema lies in its capacity to capture and reproduce reality, and he believed that the realist nature of cinema was at the core of its artistic value [1]. Canudo regarded cinema as a new art form comparable to the six major art forms – architecture, sculpture, painting, music, poetry, and dance [2]. It is evident that cinema is an important and more accessible medium for contemporary art

creation, and women's films will disseminate the values of contemporary women's awakening under the realism of cinema.

Film can be regarded as the earliest popular art to enter people's lives. In the early days of New China, when the economy was still underdeveloped and the cultural level of the people was limited, film served as the primary carrier of Chinese literature and art, and it was also an important medium for women's consciousness awakening to break free from the oppression of male domination through cultural works.

In early Chinese films, women were portrayed as "highly humiliated" and "self-sacrificing" images [3]. In early Chinese films, most of the films about women's consciousness awakening were based on what kind of persecution women suffered in society or family life, and what kind of painful life they lived. Those films showed the persecuted side of women in society to the audience and conveyed the pitiful living environment of women. However, the gender issue is still almost completely overshadowed by the class issue, gender differences are weakened, and the women on the screen in this period just turn from the domestic space to participate in the social space [3]. Against this background, it only exposes women's deep "quagmire" side and does not convey any spirit to the audience. It is intended to stimulate women's consciousness awakening by making people sympathize with them or make them feel the same way, however, this approach has little effect, and the relationship between women's social status and women's consciousness is not a positive correlation. The relationship between women's social status and women's consciousness is not positively correlated, and women are still in a state of "marginalization". The field theory proposed by Bourdieu refers to a relatively autonomous social space composed of social actors such as individuals, groups, and organizations, which compete and struggle according to their positions and resources in a particular field. In early societies, men dominated social production, so women's economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital in the social space were all weaker than men's, which led to women being on the very weak side of the competition for positions and resources in the social field and made women's development prospects in the struggle for capital and the promotion of their positions extremely compressed.

With the process of urbanization, Chinese women's literature and art works with urban women's lives as the backdrop have gradually become mainstream. In contemporary society, women have a higher but unequal social status with men, and the field position has been greatly improved. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex I*, puts forward a position that is also applicable when defining urban feminist cinema as an object of study: "In order to clarify the situation of women, it is still appropriate to refer to certain women" [4]. This is because men always "express their concern for women's issues by depicting the differences between different women, whose value lies only in solving the basic problem of detaching women's issues from male discourse, whereas women, on the other hand, explore the more hidden struggles of the women's inner world with a deeper development from the surface to the inner layers" [5]. The film *Send Me to the Clouds* tells the story of a women reporter, Shengnan, who had to accept a job she didn't like after she was accidentally checked for cancer and embarked on a journey to find herself and reconcile herself. This film, directed by women director Teng Congcong, is a film about women's growth from a women's perspective. The film shapes and spreads the values of women's consciousness awakening.

2.1. Facing Women's Desire Needs

In the film *Send Me to the Clouds*, the doctor said that Shengnan will face the risk of after-effects even after the successful surgery - losing the experience of gaining sexual pleasure. Shengnan, as a woman who had always been single didn't want to lose her chance before she had experienced this experience, so this job was also a process for Shengnan to pursue her love desire.

In contemporary society, although women have achieved a high social status, the expectations of women in their career aspirations and development prospects are still not met. Women's desires and needs are a rare subject in literary creation, and this kind of theme is trapped in front of the audience by the shackles of traditional thinking, which is the reason why part of the spiritual kernel is missing

in the women's consciousness awakening. Even in contemporary society, which talks about openness and freedom, sex is still a topic that people avoid talking about. In traditional thinking, sex is dirty, and sordid, even when talking about this topic, but also from the male perspective, to meet male sexual needs is normal. However, the social development of women's needs is often covered up. When a woman talks about sex, people think that she is dirty and shameless, and even give the woman who talks about sex a bad name. Under such oppression, women's sexual needs are gradually marginalized and become passive.

In the film, although Shengnan finally succeeded in having sex with her friend, he didn't manage to make her reach orgasm. This sequence subverts the audience's expected outcome and breaks the male perspective's conception of the consequences of the act of sex, showing the audience an image of a woman who is brave enough to express such a natural need as the need for love and desire, a real emotion normally revealed by an adult, independent woman.

2.2. Reconstruction of the Women's Subjective Consciousness

Compared to previous films, *Send Me to the Clouds* re-examines the status and image of women in society from a new perspective. The women in this film are the protagonists and are no longer dependent on men as stereotyped, but instead portray a dimension of independence, confidence, openness, and diversity.

Women in contemporary society are easily influenced by traditional thinking and unconsciously fall into a passive position, gradually losing their sense of subjectivity. Jacques Lacan's theory of mirroring mentions that a child enters the "mirroring stage" at 6 and 18 months, in which the child develops a sense of self by recognizing and identifying the self in expectation. The child first sees his or her image in the mirror and then gradually identifies with that image through interactions with the mother or other primary caregiver. This process involves not only the perception of oneself in the mirror but more importantly the perception of oneself about others. The mirror image does not just play the role of infancy; he has been carrying out the act of molding people into his person. Due to the lack of essence, he needs external constant enrichment and constant self-confirmation of himself [6]. The people he comes into contact with within society and the "mirror self", that is, the imagined self, are the "Small Other" in the mirror theory, while the social context is the "Big Other". The image of the Small Other in the film spreads the women's consciousness awakening and encourages women to dare to become themselves, to face up to their demands, and to shape a more subjective image of women [7]. Viewers gradually find themselves and understand themselves under the influence of the Small Other, break the constraints of the Big Other, establish subjective consciousness and self-will, and move from the edge to the center of social status.

To sum up, the image of women in the film is to find themselves in the process of self-identification, and become independent, autonomous, and not dependent. In this process, women use the "mirror image" to understand the things around them, gradually build up their self-awareness, realize and understand that they should control their destiny, and find their true selves.

3. Transformation of Women's Image in Television

American inventor Philo Farnsworth invented the first all-electronic television system in 1927, and his invention marked the official birth of modern television technology. China's first TV series was *A Bite of Vegetable Cake*, released in 1958. Although it lasted only twenty minutes or so, it was the first Chinese TV drama.

Raymond Williams believed that television was an important part of modern culture, capable of widely disseminating cultural values and lifestyles and promoting cultural exchange and understanding [8]. Marshall McLuhan believed that television, as a powerful medium, could profoundly influence people's perception and behavior patterns [9]. Since the reform and opening up, television has become a necessity for well-off families, and this medium has become the main entertainment in people's daily lives, women-themed television literature and art creations have

become more widespread in people's lives, and the values conveyed by the television literature and art creations subconsciously influenced the audiences who watch the television programs.

Most of the women-themed TV literary creations in contemporary society are set in urban areas, focusing on women's growth, self-redemption, and the awakening of self-consciousness [10]. Since China resumed the college entrance examination system in 1977, the education level of the people has gradually increased, and with the popularization of nine-year compulsory education, the cultural literacy of the people has become higher and higher, and the women-themed literature and art creations on television have evolved from shallow and easy-to-understand to deeper and deeper analysis of the contemporary hot topics in the context of women's consciousness awakening. The medium of television has surpassed the medium of film, becoming the first medium for promoting the values of women's consciousness awakening.

In early Chinese TV dramas, women were portrayed as "gentle, kind" and "tolerant". The role of women in TV dramas was characterized as a supporting role, and the portrayal of women was often developed silently as a dark line under the bright line of the male protagonist's life. In the urban genre, both male and women characters are faced with both professional and family challenges, and in order to meet the needs of the ups and downs of the plot, conflicts between the two sexes will break out, and then reunite in the end, creating a harmonious and happy family atmosphere. The ending seems to be satisfactory, but the peacemakers are all men, and the problem can only be solved by the male characters' subjective desire to take action to resolve the conflict, leaving the women characters in a passive situation. In the development of society, women are often neglected, and the values spread by early TV dramas that men and women have equal family status and enjoy the same social status do not resonate with viewers. This male perspective storytelling largely cuts down on the values of women-themed literature that are intended to inspire women viewers to awaken their sense of independence and autonomy.

With the continuous improvement of women's economic income and family and social status as well as the rise of feminist thinking, women's dramas have directed their core pointers to focus on women's destinies and reshape women's value. Women's dramas have fully escaped from the old triad of competing for men, mutual hostility, and mother-in-law and daughter-in-law struggles, and have moved to face the broader playing field of the workplace, society, and friendship [11]. The drama Queen of News follows the challenges and growth experienced by veteran news anchor Moon Hye-sim in her professional and personal life. Instead of narrating from the perspective of male characters, this drama is a "big women lead" drama with women characters as the primary roles. The drama spreads the values of women's awakening.

3.1. Emphasizing the Power of Women Characters

In the TV series *The Queen of News*, the women protagonist has a high degree of social and economic capital in the social field, and the power of discourse is in the hands of women. The power of speech means that the values and audiences of the work are dominated by women audiences. The work emphasizes the portrayal of the power contributed by women characters in the workplace work, depicting images of women characters providing supportive help in the workplace.

In traditional stereotypical images, women were expected to have a family. Women who had not married by a certain age were labeled as "older women". This name is derogatory and refers to women who are old enough to be left behind without being selected by a man for marriage. The contributions and achievements of women in society are overshadowed by their families. Under the suppression of this social culture, women's construction of self-consciousness will form a wrong concept, and the process of women's consciousness awakening will be largely prevented. Women's power is indispensable to support the functioning of society. In the development of society, women can form their self-values through their life, work, social life, and other environments, break the traditional stereotypes, gradually pursue the same social discourse as men, break away from the shackles of the family, and realize their self-worth through continuous self-improvement, emphasizing the existence of "self" in the women as an individual and a person of a certain gender. Emphasizing women's

experience of "self" as individual, gendered people, they gradually begin to detach themselves from the traditional Chinese culture's requirement for women to be good wives and mothers, and highlight women's subjectivity, express women's consciousness, reveal women's life experience [10].

3.2. Moving Away from Women's Passivity

The Queen of News is a drama that focuses on the challenges women face in the workplace, where the heroine finds her old self after a lot of difficulties and finds her way back from being lost.

Such episodes, unlike earlier TV dramas that portrayed women's roles in terms of the family, allowed women to step out of the family space and participate in the social space. Stereotypically, women's social capital was given to them by men, women's roles were pleasurable from a male perspective, most of the pleasurable entertainment was undertaken by women, and women were dressed in revealing clothes in contrast to the male hieroglyph of the suit. Women were in a passive scene that existed in dependence on men. In the development of contemporary society, the independence that women seek is not a complete detachment from men, but rather an attempt to take the right to speak and take the initiative in socializing with men to detach themselves from the "other" state and to become independent individuals.

In summary, women in modern dramas have broken free from the confines of "male redemption" and realized self-redemption. Although both dramas are about workplace and family, professional crisis and moral dilemma, and self-growth and reconciliation, the early dramas were told from a male perspective and did not really focus on women, and the disparity between the status of men and that of women in the field still resulted in the lack of women's awareness and the redemption of women by men. Modern dramas, on the other hand, focus more on the portrayal of women's self-growth, and de-attachment to masculinity, and promote the concepts of independence, self-reconciliation, and finding oneself.

4. Transformation of Women's Image in New Media Skits

In the era of Internet+, social media and video sharing platforms have been rapidly developed with the support of Internet technology. Although the concept of new media skits did not exist at the beginning, short and storytelling videos appeared on video sharing platforms such as YouTube, which is the first prototype of new media skits. The birth of new media skits represents the formation of a new form of entertainment, and new media skits can quickly spread to the world through the Internet, playing a role in cultural exchange and information dissemination.

With the popularization of smartphones, people are beginning to use fragmented time to find entertainment, and new media short dramas have rapidly developed into the first medium for the public to seek entertainment in contemporary society by virtue of their short duration, rich content, and vertical screen shooting suitable for viewing on cell phones. Creators of women-themed literature and art have seized this opportunity, and women-themed new media short dramas are also abundant on video sharing platforms.

Contemporary society advocates equality between men and women, but it is still influenced by traditional thinking to varying degrees in literary creation. Early new media dramas attracted a large number of self-media workers with their powerful interactivity and low-threshold participation. Among them, many creators seized the commerciality of new media dramas and mass-produced low-quality, value-free "cool dramas" that met the audience's preferences by combining the assembly line method with big data analysis. In the era of fragmented fast food, drama with a certain surreal color has become a breakthrough for viewers to relieve the pressure of reality. Relying on the stacked experiences of the protagonist's breakthrough growth, viewers can obtain a short self-immersion in the accumulation of cathartic pleasure [12].

However, the perspective in many short dramas is from a male perspective, which makes the portrayal of women characters seem single and repetitive, coupled with the high efficiency of communication giving women characters a mechanized and uniform image. It was not until women-

themed literature and art creators paid attention and drew attention to it that the cultural creation of new media skits gradually became deeper and more meaningful.

Today's women-themed short dramas focus on women's self-development, holding power over their own selves and not being shaken by the intervention of male will. *Lure Her In* is a short drama that premiered on July 16, 2024 on Jitterbug, it tells the story of the women protagonist, Zheng Celia, who discovered that her husband was cheating on her, and she joined forces with her nanny and the point of awakening the mistress of the bride after the three of them joined forces to make sure that her husband received the legal punishment he deserved. This short drama spreads the concept of women's consciousness awakening.

4.1. Building Women Friendships to Help Each Other

In people's previous conception, people will think that the development of the plot is the woman leading and the mistress of the conflict, in the end fighting to the death after returning to the family. However, this concept ignores the fact that the woman lead is the victim, and the mistress may also be misguided before choosing to interfere with other people's marriages, and the faults committed by the male as the initiator are diluted by the women's single image of the conflict, which leads to the formation of the misconception that the male is not guilty by pointing the finger at the women. This short drama takes a new perspective on the dilemma faced by women in the conflict. Women have a deeper understanding and connection with each other, and when both of them are in a difficult situation, they can deeply understand the thing itself, and in the face of the strong voice of men, they can unite to help each other and build up complete and correct values for each other, which can help both of them to overcome the difficulties together and to understand their selves. Women are inherently sensitive and meticulous, and women may cause strong conflicts because of certain things that cause dissatisfaction among other individuals in the women's group, which makes women, who are already suffering from inequality with men, form internal and external problems in the process of awakening of their consciousness. Women's friendship is a refuge for them to solve their problems and resist sexism. This sisterhood of mutual help and support has a feminist stance behind it, emphasizing the theme of women's "self" growth [10].

4.2. Building a Diverse Image of Women

The skit takes three women with different identities and personalities as its theme and portrays a variety of elements of women's images. In contemporary society, women play different roles in different fields, and each of them is an independent individual with diverse images. Contemporary society is influenced by the traditional thought that women are expected to remain introverted and gentle, which imprisons women's souls to pursue freedom to build their selves. Under the background of contemporary society's encouragement of the all-round development of human beings, women should follow their consciousness to develop into diversified individuals, emphasize their strengths, and show their charms.

To summarize, although modern society advocates equality between men and women, it seems that it is difficult to break the narrative of male perspective in artistic creation, and it is easy for women to fall into the limitation of "otherness" in short drama works, and this limitation is difficult to be detected under the package of women's presence which is dominant in the field.

5. Conclusion

Since the appearance of women's images on the screen, there has been a gradual increase in the number of literary creations on women's themes, from homogenization and stereotypical influences on rebellion and awakening to the diversification and complexity of women and the present day's egalitarianism and multiculturalism. The image of women nowadays breaks the stereotypes from the male perspective and realizes the liberation of women's thoughts and behaviors. From passive to active, from single to multiple, this journey reflects the gradual development of women's awakening

consciousness. In the future, with the continuous evolution of social concepts and the development of technology, the image of women will continue to develop in a more diversified and complex direction, until the absolute power of male discourse is broken, and gender equality is realized in the true sense of the word.

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