## A Study on Female Images in Contemporary Chinese Female TV Dramas: Based on China TV Dramas from 2003 to 2021

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Keywords: Social Gender, TV Dramas, Female Images, Data Statistical Analysis.

Abstract: With the rapid development of the times, economy and society, women's TV dramas in mainland China have made great progress. This paper adopts the content analysis method and invokes the method of scale instrument to study the female drama series. This paper compares more than 600 female drama series released in mainland China between 2000 and 2021 through the statistical method of SPSS. The overall situation of female image construction and its main influencing factors are known through data analysis. The results show that: in contemporary China, the concept of gender has no obvious influence on the producers of media products; TV dramas, as typical representatives of media products, are not diversified and specific enough in presenting female images; they are not scientific and standardized enough in the way of presentation; in addition, most TV dramas do not actively and normally present female images; women are more often in a state of being monitored, consumed, deprived or even Women are more often monitored, consumed, deprived and even exploited.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

In contemporary China, along with rapid economic and social development, culture, social thinking, and other factors related to ideology are also changing rapidly. Gender equality, or equality between men and women, was explicitly stipulated in the 1954 Constitution and was first written into the report of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China as a basic state policy. This move not only marks the recognition of gender equality by China's ruling party, but also means that gender equality has been incorporated into the national-level action agenda. It is reasonable to expect that more "warm" factors will emerge in China's future policy or institutional design.

The term "female TV series" in this study refers to TV series with women as narrative protagonists. The public distribution licenses on the official website of the National Film Bureau of China from 2003 to August 2021 were used as the search scope. TV drama research sample selection: First, female TV dramas were selected; second, data cleaning and processing were performed; finally, 635 research sample TV dramas were obtained. Content analysis was used in this study, and the method of calling scale tools was used for the study of female dramas. The statistical method of SPSS was used to sort out more than 600 female TV dramas released in mainland China from 2000 to 2021. The data analysis was used to know the general situation of female image building and the main influencing factors.

In contemporary China, gender issues are mainly reflected in women's issues. Television drama is a centralized embodiment of ideology and an important carrier. This paper presents two issues that are conducive to responding to issues related to socalled "gender equality".

Q1: whether contemporary Chinese female TV dramas present female images in a scientific and normative sense?

Q2: how many TV dramas in contemporary China present female images positively and normally?

#### Jiang, R.

A Study on Female Images in Contemporary Chinese Female TV Dramas: Based on China TV Dramas from 2003 to 2021 DOI: 10.5220/0011914000003613

In Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on New Media Development and Modernized Education (NMDME 2022), pages 473-480 ISBN: 978-989-758-630-9

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## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 The Concept of Gender

Gender is not the same as sex. Gender is a product of cultural constructs. Gender is socially and culturally constructed, and it is not an accidental result of sex, nor does it have a fixed form of expression. Gender can be considered as a cultural meaning carried by biological functions, but it does not need to be consistent with sex (Butler, 1999).

In 1993, at the workshop on Chinese women and Development issue held by Tianjin Normal University, the concept of "gender" was introduced intensively by members of the Chinese Society for overseas women's studies (CSWS) and became one of the centers of discussion. Since then, "gender" has become a concept and category of women's studies in Chinese Mainland. After the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, the spirit of the two United Nations documents signed by the Chinese government, the Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration, was disseminated in China, and "gender mainstreaming in policy-making" became a familiar topic for women's organizations and researchers at all levels (Wang, 2001). This also proves that the concept of gender does not come from the works of one or several people, but the collective creation of Feminism: we can understand gender as a system or as a social relationship. The concept of gender is meaningful only when it is used for specific analysis under specific conditions (Wang, 1997).

Around 2000, discussions of "gender" became more prevalent within China, but most of them still belong to introductions and initiatives. In 2001, the women's research center of the Party School of the CPC Central Committee hosted a symposium on "gender and public policy". The seminar focused on gender and education policy, gender interests, resource allocation and government responsibilities, gender and family policy, gender and political participation policy, public policy, legislation, and gender equality mechanisms. (Li, Ying, 2001)

At the same time, there are many criticisms. Some studies believe that gender theory reveals the root causes of gender inequality, but feminism falls into the dilemma of eliminating differences or strengthening differences. These viewpoints provide some fresh perspectives for this study. However, if we examine the concept of "gender", we will find that even the so-called "citizenship" is the result of the interaction between state power, social relations, and media discourse, and it still lives in the category of "gender". Although it has been criticized and questioned from the inside and outside of feminism, it has also encountered the challenge and influence of various new trends of thought. Some characteristics of "gender", including full of differences, developability and pluralism make it complex, "gender" is still the central concept of Feminism (Liu, 2001).

The concept of gender was introduced into the research field of Chinese Social Sciences, which quickly triggered an upsurge of research in the academic circles. The developmental, pluralistic, and critical attributes of the concept of "gender" help it quickly enter various research fields and produce a lot of problem-oriented research. At present, there are rich discussions on gender and gender equality, public policies, legal norms, social reality, education and so on.

## 2.2 Research on Gender From the Perspective of Journalism and Communication

The concept of gender is naturally closely related to journalism and communication. Since it was introduced to Chinese Mainland, this concept has been closely combined with the study of Journalism and communication. Scholars in this field include Bu Wei (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), Jiang Hong (Anhui University), Liu Bohong (Women's Research Institute of all China Women's Federation), Cao Jin (Fudan University) and others. News and communication scholars have made fruitful discussions, which not only provides a fresh perspective for China's news and communication research, but also explores powerful critical tools, which expands the vision of news and communication, and increases research topics. To sum up, the combination of Journalism and communication research and gender is probably more obvious in the following studies:

Firstly, media reproduction of female images. Media reproduction is a frequently used and new theoretical tool in journalism and communication, and the correlation between gender and media reproduction will certainly give birth to many investigations related to media reproduction of female images. For example, Liu Bohong, Bu Wei, Liu Xiaohong, Jiang Hong, and others are scholars who carried out the discussion of female image media representation earlier.

Secondly, the concept, behavior, and policy advocacy. Women's programs with a sense of reflection on gender issues can reflect women, the relationship between women and men, social, economic, and political issues from the perspective of gender equality. Starting from the basic laws and current situation of academic research on journalism and communication, it can be inferred that the research in this field will maintain a more positive trend for a long time in the future. Communication activism has gradually become one of the more important research paradigms in Chinese communication research. It encourages scholars to participate in observation and intervene to achieve better research results.

Thirdly, gender, media use and empowerment. The ultimate concern of media and gender research is to reveal the structure and process of media hegemony, which help the audience awaken their self-consciousness, and seek the real equality and solution of mankind. This research field is not the theoretical interpretation of instrumental knowledge, but closely related to the current situation of human social life (Cao, 2005).

In addition, the discussion of gender and TV dramas is also rich. At present, there are many studies related to gender and TV dramas. It shows the following characteristics: first, there are many discussions on specific TV dramas, such as the <Empresses in the Palace><mother, mother><Once Upon a Time in Shanghai>, <Boss & Me>, <May-December Love><Let's get married!> and <Pink Lady: Lover Run >, case studies were fruitful. These studies mostly focus on specific TV dramas and investigate the media representation of women's images in TV dramas; Another kind of research focuses on specific types of TV dramas, such as domestic workplace dramas, imported dramas from Japan and South Korea, family ethics dramas, anti-Japanese War dramas and even rural theme dramas; Additionally, there are a few studies on the benefits of TV dramas on gender concepts.

Unlike most of the results summarized above from high-level journals, most of these studies are master's and doctoral dissertations, especially master's dissertations. In general, such studies usually have some problems and need to be supplemented by further research. First, most of these discussions are based on personal recognition. Although the gender theory has been adopted, it has a strong color of personal speculation and lacks the guarantee of strict and standardized social science research methods. This has been improved in the discussion of genre plays, but there are still great defects; Secondly, most of these studies come from master's and doctoral dissertations. Although the norms of master's and doctoral dissertations are indeed more suitable for this kind of research, the difference between the number of journal documents and dissertations is still worth pondering; Third, the level of journals publishing results is debatable. This is probably one of the important reasons why this topic needs to be carried out and carried out urgently.

## **3** DATA STATISTICAL ANALYSIS RESULTS

This study used Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) statistical method to analyze the 635 selected sample TV series for the study. The overall performance of the image constructs of the female category of TV dramas was derived by statistically analyzing the main indicators of the selected sample dramas, such as age theme, content theme, female age level, occupation, and relationship presentation, to respond to the two questions in the original point of the study.

According to the category construct, the information in this paper was independently coded by the authors and then tested for reliability. Three test coders other than the authors conducted reliability tests according to the Hasty factor without interfering with each other. The results showed that the overall intercoder reliability coefficient was 0.92 and the coders' coding results were highly consistent with the study.

The statistics and analysis are as follows:

#### 3.1 Classification of TV Drama Themes

Table 1: Classification of TV Drama Themes

	freque ncy	Percen tage	Effective percentage	Cumulativ e percentage
Ancien t	54	8.5	8.5	8.5
Moder n times	165	26	26	34.5
Conte mporar y	416	65.5	65.5	100
total	635	100	100	

As one of the important types of media products, TV drama not only provides entertainment, but also undertakes the important functions of conferring social identity and monitoring the environment. It has inherent constraints and expectations on the type of theme. For example, the popular TV drama "In the name of people" which was first broadcasted in Chinese Mainland in 2017, the "Like a Flowing River" in 2018 and the "All is well" in 2019 all focused on the rapidly changing Chinese society.

According to the age of the TV drama construction story, this study roughly divides the TV drama into three types: ancient, Modern times and Contemporary, and the proportion of each type of TV drama is shown in the table above. Among them, drama themes which is contemporary exceeded 65%. Obviously, this is a positive phenomenon. Although more than 60% of TV dramas those themes of contemporary China, cannot directly launch the practical care of these TV dramas, it provides a greater possibility for them at least. Therefore, it is worth affirming.

# 3.2 Classification of Modern and Contemporary TV Dramas

Table 2: Type subdivision of modern and Contemporary TV dramas

	Frequ	Percent	Effective	Cumulative
	ency	age	percentage	percentage
Daily life	219	34.5	34.5	34.5
Emotion	175	27.6	27.6	62
Criminal investigation	2	0.3	0.3	62.4
Military service	3	0.5	0.5	262.8
Business	2	0.3	0.3	63.1
Workplace	11	1.7	1.7	64.9
Family ethics	93	14.6	14.6	79.5
Light comedy	26	4.1	4.1	83.6
Inspirational	90	14.2	14.2	97.8
Rule of law	5	0.8	0.8	98.6
Police and bandits	6	0.9	0.9	99.5
Suspense	3	0.5	0.5	100
total	635	100	100	

Table 1 shows the specific situation of TV dramas divided in different years. This table takes Modern times and contemporary TV dramas as an example to further subdivide them. As can be seen from the table above, more than a quarter of TV dramas focus on the description of emotional life, followed by family ethics drama and inspirational drama, both of which are close to 15%. In addition, the proportion of all other subdivided TV dramas is less than 5%. It shows that in modern and contemporary TV dramas, emotional drama, family ethics drama and inspirational drama constitute the main parts of TV dramas.

Contemporary China's market economy is developing rapidly, and social changes are intensifying. With the help of the concept of gender, we can reasonably infer those women are not "naturally" limited to emotional disputes such as love and family, but "actively" or "forced" to participate in social life and social labor, especially the practice of economic life. Under this premise, the number of social and economic related themes in female TV dramas is too small (such as business, workplace, etc.), which is obviously inappropriate.

# **3.3** Breakdown of the Place Where the Story in the TV Play Takes Place

Table 3: Story area

	freq uenc y	perce ntage	Effective percentage	Cumulative percentage
Cities (larger cities)	383	60.3	60.3	60.3
Towns (small-scale cities)	165	26	26	86.3
Rural areas	71	11.2	11.2	97.5
Difficult to judge	16	2.5	2.5	100
total	635	100	100	

Taking the place of the story as the statistical index, more than 80% of the TV drama stories mainly take place in cities (large cities and small-scale cities), especially in larger cities, and more than 60% of the stories take place in larger cities. In addition, about 11% of TV drama stories take place in rural areas. This figure is obviously inconsistent with China's urbanization rate today. For the data with great difference, at least the following aspects need to be explained or explained:

Firstly, compared with rural areas, cities, and towns themselves have more developed social economy, more diversified and rich life, and more concentrated population. These basic characteristics determine that TV dramas based on urban stories are easier to obtain and simpler; Secondly, for rural audiences (viewers of TV dramas), urban life, including cities and towns, is strange and fresh. From one point of view, it is easy to give birth to each other's desire to peep. Therefore, it is also easy to be captured and used by TV drama producers. Thirdly, it is more likely that in the past decade, the network communication technology has become more and more developed, which has brought a huge impact on the TV drama industry that "relies on" TV. On the contrary, there are still many TV drama viewers in the vast rural areas that are less impacted by media technology, which reasonably explains

why more than 80% of TV dramas are based on cities and towns.

# 3.4 Statistics on the Birth of Heroines in TV Dramas

	frequ ency	percent age	Effective percentage	Cumulative percentage
Cities (larger cities)	201	29.9	29.9	29.9
Towns (small-scale cities)	164	24.4	24.4	54.2
Rural areas	115	17.1	17.1	71.3
Difficult to judge	193	28.7	28.7	100
total	673	100	100	

Table 4: Statistics on the birth of heroines in TV dramas

As can be seen from the above table, more than half of the heroines in female TV dramas during this period were born in cities and towns, about 17.1% of the heroines were born in rural areas, and more than 1 / 4 of the heroines were difficult to judge. This data is consistent with the logic in Table 3. It also takes women of urban origin as the object of viewing, peeping and discussion. Born in rural areas, telling rural stories, or the so-called "entering the city" rising path from rural areas to cities and towns, did not take the initiative in the mainstream narration of female TV dramas. This is debatable.

### 3.5 Statistics on the Number of Female Protagonists

Table 5: the number of female protagonists

	frequen cy	percent age	Effective percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	349	51.9	51.9	51.9
2-3	207	30.8	30.8	82.6
Female group	117	17.4	17.4	100
total	673	100	100	

Discuss the specific number of female protagonists in female TV dramas is very important. In more than half of TV dramas, the number of female protagonists is 1, which means that more than 50% of TV dramas pay more attention to the story construction of presenting female individuals. In addition, about 30% of TV dramas have 2-3 heroines. Such TV dramas may pay more attention to the construction of narration and relationship in female narration. In fact, based on the needs of "storytelling" and the actual situation of women's life, it is reasonable to determine the number of protagonists at 1-3. However, the number of TV dramas with female groups as protagonists is too small, which should also be discussed. People are social animals, and so are women. In terms of media reproduction, it should also be encouraged to present female images with the help of groups in a specific story.

#### 3.6 AgeLevel of TV Drama Heroine

Table 6: Age level of TV drama heroine

	£		Effective	Cumulative
	freque	percent		
	ncy	age	percentage	percentage
Children (aged 18 and below)	12	1.8	1.8	2.1
Young women (19-40 years old)	584	87	87	89
Middle aged women (41-55 years old)	40	6	6	95
Older women (aged 56 and over)	9	1.3	1.3	96.1
Cover multiple age groups	26	3.9	3.9	100
total	671	100	100	

Compared with other indicators, this indicator has more critical value and significance. Statistics show that in 671 TV dramas, more than 85% of the heroines in TV dramas are young women (19-40 years old). Less than 2% of the heroines are children and elderly women, and these groups are obviously neglected. About 6% of the heroines in TV dramas are middle-aged women. These data should be explained as follows:

First, from the physiological and actual situation, young women belong to the best stage of their life (according to the secular concept, women in this stage have strong fertility, energy and beauty are the best), so they are more "important" and easier to be viewed and deprived. This data clearly highlights the current contradiction between men and women. Secondly, nearly 6% of middle-aged women protagonists also serve more grand contemporary Chinese narratives such as age anxiety, gender anxiety, education anxiety and wealth anxiety, rather than showing their own situation. Thirdly, elderly women and children belong to "special groups" that are obviously ignored. In fact, as elderly women who have widely participated in social and economic life and children in the future, they should obviously be the object of TV dramas and public attention.

### 3.7 The Scene of TV Series

	freque ncy	percen tage	Effective percentage	Cumulativ e percentage
Daily life	275	40.9	40.9	40.9
Work	93	13.8	13.8	54.7
Emotion	261	38.8	38.8	93.5
Difficult to judge	44	6.5	6.5	100
total	673	100	100	

Table 7 The scene of the heroine in the TV series

According to the concept of gender, gender is shaped by the day after tomorrow, not determined by "nature". In female TV dramas, more than 40% of TV dramas focus on the heroine's personal life, followed by "emotion", and less than 15% describe the heroine's work-related. In fact, emotion is also a part of life. According to this standard, nearly 80% of TV dramas focus on women's life, and only a little more than 13% of TV dramas are devoted to describing women's working state, which is obviously far from the actual situation and needs criticism and reminder.

# 3.8 The Marital Status of the Heroine in a TV Play

Table 8.7	The marital	etatue	of the	heroine	in a	TV play
Table 6.	i ne maritar	status	or the	nerome	III a	I v play

	freque ncy	percenta ge	Effective percentage	Cumulative percentage
Unmarried without children	289	45.5	45.5	45.5
Unmarried with children	17	2.7	2.7	48.2
Married without children	123	19.4	19.4	67.6
Married with children	160	25.2	25.2	92.8
Divorced without children	11	1.7	1.7	94.5
Divorced with children	19	3	3	97.5
Widowed and childless	4	0.6	0.6	98.1
Widowed with children	12	1.9	1.9	100
total	635	100	100	

Another important indicator is the marriage and love status of female protagonists in female TV dramas. Statistics show that nearly half of the heroines in TV dramas are unmarried and childless. There are projections in the statistics of the age level of the heroine in the previous table, but it still needs to be emphasized here that the state of unmarried women without children is easier to be deprived and contains more "possibilities" of narration and storytelling.

### 3.9 Heroine's Career

Table 9: Heroine's career

freque ncyPercent ageEffective percentageCumulative percentageStudents233.63.63.8Other employees who are inconvenient to be classified9715.315.319.1Others7812.312.331.3Housewives8813.913.945.2Persons in charge of state organs, party and mass organizations, enterprises and institutions6710.610.667.2Professional technicians6710.610.667.256.7Professional technicians345.45.472.6Business and service personnel10015.715.788.3Production personnel1015.715.788.3Production reconservancy101.61.691.5Production and transportation relevant personnel101.65.5100Military personnel548.58.5100	-					
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transportation equipment operators and relevant personnel101.61.691.5Military personnel548.58.5100	personnel in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, fishery and water	10	1.6	1.6	89.9	
personnel 54 8.5 8.5 100	transportation equipment operators and relevant personnel	10	1.6	1.6	91.5	
	2	54	8.5	8.5	100	
	-	635	100	100		

Statistics on the occupations of female protagonists in female TV dramas show that women involved in all kinds of occupations are reflected and evenly distributed. However, the three data at the head are still worthy of vigilance. Firstly, business and service personnel, followed by other employees and housewives who are inconvenient to classify. In contemporary China, business and service personnel mean that those with low education, no core competitiveness, vassal and passive tend to be negative. This is consistent with the situation reflected in the previous table.

# 3.10 The Main Relationship Description of TV Series

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Table 10.	The main	relationshir	n description	n of TV series
14010 10.	I ne mam	relationship	description	

	frequ	perce	Effective	Cumulative
	ency	ntage	percentage	percentage
Personal growth	85	13.4	13.4	13.4
Women and youth campus	7	1.1	1.1	14.5
Women and love	109	17.2	17.2	31.7
Friendship	8	1.3	1.3	32.9
Relationship between mother-in-law and daughter- in-law	18	2.8	2.8	35.7
Relationship between husband and wife	59	9.3	9.3	45
Women and careers	72	11.3	11.3	56.4
Women and daily life	135	21.3	21.3	77.6
Women and theme (National Revolution)	54	8.5	8.5	86.1
Women and children	50	7.9	7.9	94
Women and families	30	4.7	4.7	98.7
Women and crime	8	1.3	1.3	100
total	635	100	100	

In terms of the most important relationship description of TV series, "women and life", "women and love" and "personal growth", those relationships were obviously close to women's life. In the grand narrative and social narrative such as "women and theme", "women and career", "women and crime", women have become the neglected objects. They are not reflected in the process of social development but become a part of people isolated from social development.

## 3.11 Area of TV Drama Production Unit

Table 11: Area of TV drama production unit

	frequency	perce ntage	Effective percentage	Cumulativ e percentage
Eastern China	522	82.2	82.2	82.2
Central China	74	11.7	11.7	93.9
Western China	39	6.1	6.1	100
total	635	100	100	

In the process of sorting out the areas of production units of TV series with female themes, it is found that the production units in eastern China contribute more than 80% of female TV dramas, while the production units in Western China contribute only about 6%. Firstly, this is related to the imbalance of economic, social and media development among regions; Secondly, it is related to the media profit model and topic sensitivity.

## 4 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Conclusion

Through quantitative combing and investigation, the conclusions of this study can be used to respond to the questions raised at the beginning of this paper.

Firstly, as the concentrated embodiment and important carrier of ideology, whether the TV drama presents the image of women in the sense of science and norms. The answer is obvious. In contemporary China, where gender equality is closely and intensively advocated, TV dramas, as typical representatives of media products, and even TV dramas with female themes, are not scientific and standardized in presenting female images. The concept of gender has not had a great impact on the producers of media products.

Secondly, how many TV dramas present female images positively and normally. The answer is cautious negativity. Empirical research shows that traditional Chinese concepts still dominate the production of female TV dramas, so most TV dramas do not present female images positively and normally. Women are still more of a state of being watched, consumed, deprived, or even exploited. Although it is biased, it can still be simply speculated that the public's gender awareness is weak, and even women themselves still lack sufficient consciousness and autonomy.

Finally, the investigation of female TV dramas shows some negative conclusions, but it also releases some positive signals. For example, gender awareness is gradually entering the vision of contemporary Chinese media product producers and the public, and some TV dramas dominated by female narration are slowly emerging. It must be said that this is a good signal worthy of further observation.

#### 4.2 Discussion

This study draws some important conclusions and responds to the two questions raised at the beginning of the study. However, throughout this investigation, there are still some deficiencies. In the follow-up research, avoiding these defects or further in-depth investigation will surely have better results.

Firstly, there are still some improvements in the design of input indicators of content analysis, or it is worth looking forward to discussing and obtaining a more suitable index system for TV drama research, to make this kind of research more convenient.

Secondly, due to the limitations of subjective or objective factors such as time and personal energy, the reliability of this study needs to be further strengthened.

Thirdly, in terms of the depth and breadth of the discussion, this study should also be further developed.

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