The Influence of Feminist Movements on the Change of Female Images in Film and Television Dramas: Based on the Theory of Semiotics

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Abstract: Semiotics mainly studies the role of symbols in signals, language, culture, human behavior, and social mechanisms. Based on the semiotic theory of female images, this article explores the relationship between feminist ideas and female appearance, behavior, and self-choice in film and television dramas, the reasons for the prevalence of feminism, and the reasons why feminism influences female images in film and television dramas.

Semiotics, a branch of linguistics, explores how signs and symbols convey meaning in various cultural and social contexts. It studies the use of signs and symbols to represent and communicate ideas, concepts, and values. The study of semiotics has been applied to various fields, including literature, art, and media, to analyze the meaning and function of symbols and their influence on social behavior and cultural norms.

In the context of feminist theory, semiotics has been used to analyze female images in various media, including film and television dramas. Feminist scholars argue that female images in the media are often constructed through symbolic representations, which reflect and reinforce gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms. Through the use of symbols, such as clothing, makeup, and body language, female characters in film and television dramas are often portrayed in ways that emphasize their femininity, beauty, and submissiveness.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of the media industry, female images in movies and TV shows have a profound impact on the expression of female behavior and the shaping of social ideology. In today's Chinese society, people's understanding of female images has gradually become diversified and enriched, shaping the spirit of independent and confident modern women. However, some movies and TV shows still adhere to traditional female images and symbols, and female images are also stereotyped and singular to some extent, such as over-emphasizing the spirit of female self-improvement, which is difficult to help women express themselves and develop in society.

On the contrary, the feminist movement emphasizes the status of women, autonomy, independence, diversity, and equality of women, as well as the self-identification of female directors, screenwriters, and producers, creating a new female image in movies and TV shows, promoting the diversification and enrichment of female images in movies and TV shows, and presenting unusual female images and character traits.

According to scholars, communication is essentially the circulation of information, and the content of communication is information, but most of the information is expressed in the form of symbols [1]. The theory of semiotics can be understood as the interpretation of cultural symbols or codes under the influence of a common cultural background, including social context, cultural experience, and cognitive habits. Therefore, semiotics theory provides a tool for interpreting cultural symbols or codes. In TV dramas and movies, women are often portrayed as housewives, the weak, and sexual objects. By using the theory of semiotics, the cultural meanings, and historical backgrounds behind the forms of symbol making and interpretation can be revealed, providing an important philosophical basis for the exploration and in-depth study of feminism. Zhao Yiheng believes that semiotics not only studies human culture but also studies all activities related to meaning, including individual cognitive activities, mental activities, and even the cognitive and mental activities of "living" organisms [2]. Scholar Li Siqiu points out that the basic logic of communication semiotics is that communication cannot be separated from symbols, the meaning of symbols is generated in communication, and the laws of their generation and change constitute the basic rules of human meaning production and cultural construction [3].

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Therefore, it can be inferred that semiotics has a certain impact on the changes in female images in movies and TV shows.

2. Literature Review

Currently, many Chinese scholars have also studied the relationship between feminist ideologies and the portrayal of female appearance, behavior, and self-choice in film and television dramas. The research results of scholars such as Yu Kedong (2022) indicate that women's self-awareness does not depend on their sex characteristics but on the socio-economic environment and the level of technological development behind it [4]. Huang Heting (2023) argues that the female characters currently depicted on screen mostly embody real-life women, and the female symbols presented in TV dramas also represent the situation of women in the new era [5]. Wang Shuo (2022) suggests that the current plight of women is often overlooked due to the traditional male-dominated social norms. However, the surge in women-themed films in the past decade not only reflects the expression of women's individual predicaments but also reflects various social symptoms in the current era at a higher level [6]. The research results of Zhang Yin et al. (2021) indicate that if various types of female styles and their struggle stories are to be diversified, and female characters with diverse and independent personalities and distinct characteristics are to be constructed, then TV drama creators need to delve deeper into the real lives of women, understand women, and listen to their voices [7]. Zhao Cong's (2021) research results suggest that if women-themed dramas are to be further cultivated, they must break free from the control of the "she economy" and reverse the logic of creating dramas derived from user demands to promote film and television creation from a female perspective and surpass the traditional family narrative structure [8]. The research results of Li Huawei et al. (2018) indicate that the media presentation of current female professionals is not only the result of typification after labeling but also a product of the struggle and compromise between female consciousness and male-dominated thinking within the media field, and they suggest that the portrayal of professional women in TV dramas may have a significant impact on the audience [9]. However, the research results of Dan Min et al. (2022) suggest that the market determines the female roles. From the 1990s to the present, the pursuit of values associated with men has shifted to the pursuit of women's complete independence and self-worth. The most important reason for this is the changes in the socio-economic structure, as women can now engage in more jobs, have independent consumption power, and constitute many female viewers, which greatly influences the changing portrayal of female characters in film and television dramas and promotes the diversification of female roles [10].

3. The Impact of Feminist Movements on the Portrayal of Women in Film and Television

Currently, in a society that spans history and culture, women are in an unequal position to men in various fields such as politics, economics, culture, thought, cognition, ideas, and ethics, even in private domains such as families, and the core of feminism is to eliminate inequality in society. With rapid economic development, China's family structure, women's status, and ideological concepts are undergoing tremendous changes, and feminist issues such as anti-objectification, anti-patriarchy, and gender discrimination are gradually moving from the "margins" to the "mainstream," from "behind the scenes" to "center stage," and more and more scholars are presenting them and expressing the female perspective through visual media [4].

The portrayal of women on screen often reflects the real-life situation of women, and the female symbols presented in movies and TV dramas also represent the situation of women in the new era [5]. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, women's accusations against the old society became the strongest voice in history. Women's films almost disappeared in the 1960s and 1970s until they began to recover in 1974. In the 1980s and 1990s, women's films flourished, such as Xie Jin's "Legend of Tianyun Mountain." Women's films in the 1990s highlighted women's experiences, emotions, and desires, enabling women to find their "selves" in life and achieve personality liberation. This period was also the heyday of women's films. With the advent of the 21st century, women's films entered the "era of her." At this time, women's consciousness, women's rights, women's desires, and women's liberation began to be reflected in movies and TV dramas, and traditional male thinking has been abandoned. Chinese women have entered a truly female era [6]. Women are constantly pursuing independence, personality equality, and the image of the "great female lead" is no longer bound by male constraints. The advocacy of feminism to achieve gender equality in human society is also presented in these dramas.

The claims advocated by feminism do not require people to belittle men to highlight the value of women. The underlying connotation behind these claims is to emphasize the equality of women's and men's values [7]. This includes enjoying equal rights and opportunities with men, opposing various forms of discrimination and inequality encountered in the social sphere, and having the autonomy of decision-making and control. Throughout the recent urban life dramas, we can see more and more works that go beyond the traditional family narrative pattern from a female perspective [8]. Feminists encourage creators to shape diverse and active female characters to present women's autonomy and independence. Some researchers also pointed out that in recent years, the female image in many popular TV dramas has surpassed the traditional portrayal of the virtuous wife and mother and the loyal and brave female hero, and the female image has become more diverse [9]. At the same time, due to the preference for hot topics, extreme emotions, gender bias,
and narrative reversals in many film and TV works, feminists criticize the gender discrimination in movies and call for more works with gender equality consciousness. Feminists also promote female directors and screenwriters because they believe that female directors and screenwriters can bring more flexibility and richness to perspectives to the film industry, which has historically been dominated by male voices.

In addition to the film industry, feminist movements have also had a significant impact on other aspects of Chinese society, including politics and education. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of women participating in politics and holding public office, with some even rising to high-level positions in the government. This is partly due to the efforts of feminist groups who have been advocating for women's rights and gender equality in the political sphere.

Similarly, feminist ideas have also been introduced into the education system, with efforts to promote gender equality and combat gender stereotypes. For example, some schools have implemented gender education programs that aim to teach children about gender equality and respect for diversity.

Overall, the feminist movement in China has come a long way since its early days in the 20th century. While there is still a long way to go in achieving full gender equality, the progress made thus far is a testament to the resilience and determination of feminist activists and their allies. As more and more people become aware of the importance of gender equality, it is hoped that this movement will continue to gain momentum and bring about lasting change in Chinese society.

4. Summary and Reflection

The impact of feminist movements on the changing portrayal of women in film and television is crucial and should be highly valued. There are several key aspects to this impact. Firstly, the feminist movement continually emphasizes that women should have the same social status and power as men, gradually degrading the passive and weak female image in traditional film and television. It also supervises and critiques the representation of women in film and television, ensuring that women receive fair and just portrayals. Secondly, the feminist movement awakens women's sense of autonomy, calling on women to continually self-reflect and express their needs and rights from their own perspectives. This breaks the stereotype of "good girl," "good wife," and "good mother" in traditional film and television, striving for more inclusive, diverse, and autonomous female images. Thirdly, it demands higher standards from filmmakers, requiring them to create films with more humanistic care and profound reflection, promoting social equality and diversity.

To promote the diversity and equality of female characters in film and television, it is recommended to promote female directors and screenwriters, who can handle complex women's issues and emotions from more flexible and diverse perspectives. Secondly, relevant public welfare activities can be initiated, such as film screenings and discussions, reading papers and books related to films, promoting women's self-reflection and awareness, and further promoting the diversity and equality of female roles in the film and television industry. In addition to the above, this article also provides the following insights: Firstly, it is necessary to instill the concept of respecting women's autonomy and diversity in film and television producers to promote diverse female characters and eliminate gender discrimination. Secondly, it is necessary to encourage filmmakers to attempt to create more avant-garde, thought-provoking, and creative female images, promoting women's innovation and creativity. Lastly, as individuals, we need to continually pay attention to the rights and interests of society and individuals. We all have a responsibility to bring more positive influences on society.

Overall, the feminist movement has played a vital role in changing the portrayal of women in film and television, and this impact should not be overlooked. Through promoting diversity and equality in the film and television industry, we can further advance the feminist movement and create a more just and equal society.

References

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