

# The construction of female image in *Nothing but Thirty* from the perspective of feminism

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**Abstract:** With the arrival of the 21st century, the urban female group image TV series has become a new trend in contemporary film and TV series. Take *Nothing but Thirty* as an example, this kind of film and television reflects the important position of feminism in the current society. Through the portrayal of different types of Gu Jia, Wang Manni and other characters, the series has a real and vivid portrayal of the contemporary female group. This thesis combines feminist theory with the construction of female image, explores how Gu Jia, Wang Manni, Zhong Xiaoqin and other characters get out of the group image syndrome of women, and carry out self-transformation and self-construction in self-consciousness, thus revealing the deep mechanism of contemporary female image shaping and construction.

## 1. Introduction

"gender politics and rights exist as different ideologies in different societies and cultures, and are often intertwined and influenced by each other". As a new trend of thought, feminism takes female consciousness and rights as the core, and aims at "de-genderization", "liberation of women" and "de-oppression". Its ultimate goal is to achieve the balance between gender and power on the basis of eliminating gender inequality between men and women. From the perspective of social gender, feminist media criticism theory puts women in an active position to discuss and solve the problem of gender inequality. It rejects the view of women as "objects" or "others." It believes that women should obtain equal status, advocates to embody the status of the subject in social life, and fights for their own rights and status with an active attitude.

Directed by Xiaobo Zhang, *Nothing but Thirty* is an urban emotional TV series starring Yao Tong, Rachel Momo, Maggie, etc. The series starts from the perspective of women, with three thirty-year-old women constantly swinging and struggling between marriage, career and ideals to depict the choices and confusion they face in different stages of life, and demonstrates the inequality and survival status quo of women groups from multiple dimensions. In the narrative, a large number of characters and details are used to present the narrative space, and the characters in the series are told in a group-like way by character playing. Three women of different age strata and professional backgrounds appear in the series: Gu Jia, who is admired by others and strives for success in life, Wang Manni, who is highly expected by parents, independent and dare to love and hate, and Zhong Xiaoqin, who is forced into a "marriage black hole" but strong and

optimistic... They use their different and mutual reflection of words and deeds to express the characters and the complex emotional relationship between the characters in the series, depicting the survival status quo of urban women and the dilemmas they face in the social and cultural environment, as well as the shift of female role value. This thesis intends to start from the perspective of feminism, combining the content of the series and the relationship between the characters, to conduct an in-depth analysis of the symptoms and the shift of the value of Gu Jia and other female characters.

## 2. The core of feminist criticism

The rise of feminist criticism is inextricably linked with the rise of western feminist movement. With the penetration of feminist thought, the deepening of gender studies and the application of feminism, its vision has been further expanded. In the second half of the 20th century, Laura Mulvey explored the issues of "visual pleasure" and "power" in her book *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. She used psychoanalysis and ideological theory to deconstruct and criticize Hollywood narrative films under the background of patriarchy, and carried out a profound analysis on them, so as to convey different levels of social power. Mulvey's feminist stance is negative, and she sees the female unconscious as something that does not exist. Under the "gaze" of men, how women, as "others", get out of the state of "aphasia" and enter the scope of social public life is a problem with far-reaching significance and urgency.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir pointed out that women are not produced by matter and naturally

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generated, but are composed of many social factors, and are not fixed 1. Therefore, in the 1990s, although feminism "traveled" to China, the discussion of gender issues in China is not static, and even when it comes to gender issues, it is difficult to escape the specific social, historical and cultural background. Whether it is outside the family driven by external forces or return to the family by market operation, modernity is the dominant motivation behind it. Women are not only the subject of culture and system, but also break the fixed family structure and division of labor in the traditional concept, reshape the model and relationship structure of the family with diversified practices, reshape the significance of the family to women's life, and let the "light of freedom" shine on themselves, thus bringing new possibilities and hopes to themselves.

Gender is a historical category, it is the result of the development of human society, and human understanding of gender has always been limited and even discriminatory. Despite the rapid development of information in the new era, it has also brought profound changes to the social division of labor, undoubtedly bringing new opportunities and challenges to feminism. Some people call the 21st century "her century." Women in the new era are more willing to use their personal experience to understand, analyze, criticize and reflect on the construction of gender identity and the social inequality existing in the daily field, and to find the power of social change 2. *Nothing but Thirty* portrays and shapes three heroines with distinct personalities, three-dimensional images and different personalities. The deep reason lies in contemporary feminism's true and vivid portrayal of self-consciousness and self-image construction from the perspective of "the other". They have their own "intolerance" and "making life" Assertiveness and courage, so that the voice and knowledge of female life wisdom are disseminated in the social process.

### 3. The group symptoms of female roles

"Female narration provides a powerful channel for the publicity of female consciousness, but this does not mean that all film and television works with female narration must represent and reflect female consciousness 3." In the real world, "women" are a large and complex group with different symptoms. Although it is in the female perspective, it still maintains the culture and consciousness of male power, shaping the image of a man's ideal other woman, the objectification scene, the gaze of the body, and the solidification of the profession, so that women are still imprisoned until today.

#### 3.1. Women in captivity

The TV series narrative from a female perspective, Gu Jia high education, high level of appearance, high emotional intelligence, when the husband derailed, repeatedly test, check mobile phones, and mistress fighting, in the confession, sacrifice, unwilling, frustrated... This self-reliant, transcendent woman is once again falling into a

rut of self-indulgence. Because of her children, she became a housewife, so she wanted to return to the family work, but her husband and children did not understand, and strongly opposed. And Wang Manni lost in the player Liang Zhengxian weaving dream, because she is afraid of losing all, so do not want to wake up. Later, she even resigned and lived a degenerate life, which was incompatible with the sober, self-reliant female image she created in the TV series, making people doubt that her people will collapse. In the film and television, Gu Jia is defined as "maternal". Although she stands in the position of women, she does not make women break free from the bondage of patriarchal society, but precisely deprives women of their richness 4.

#### 3.2. Scenes that are objectified

The state in which the materialized relationship is overshadowed by the relationship between people, while people are dominated by things. A woman who bought the necklace in the TV series told Wang Manni that it was a divorce settlement from her ex-husband, who worked hard together to turn a poor couple into billionaires. One day, her husband wants to divorce her. She looked at the mistress who lived a luxurious life and had an impulse to spend money. The heroine Gu Jia is willing to spend money to buy a limited edition bag, just to enter the wife circle. In this circle, these "bags" can be divided into three kinds of people. Wang Manni for the European trip to buy a lot of luxury goods, also spent a lot of money, in the luxury cruise ship, she met handsome Liang Zhengxian. This undoubtedly explains that women use luxury goods to show their identity and value, while material goods are the key factor to measure whether women can achieve success. In the director's weaving of glitz and romance, this is undoubtedly to inject the audience into the life TV series of the upper class, to experience the material and feel the cultural logic in a kind of immersion. It constructs its cultural connotation and value system based on the development of the plot, and then stimulates the chain psychological reaction of the audience, so as to complete a conspicuous symbolic and metaphorical function 5.

#### 3.3. Being stared

"In an unbalanced world, the pleasure of the audience would split into positive men and negative women. The man's eye casts his imagination on the woman's body, and the female form is designed according to it 6." In *Nothing but Thirty* the wives are kept in their own circle by their husbands, although it looks very beautiful, but it is a sad. When a man's gaze becomes a woman's measure, it not only measures the woman's body, but also restricts the woman's life. Although Zhao Jingyu enjoys the material life that men give her, she has lost her courage and the ability to be independent after being imprisoned for so many years. Gu Jia wants to look for young and beautiful escorts for his partners. In the TV series, women are defined as men's appendages, in order to get men's appreciation, maintain their sexy body, the pursuit of good posture. As the object of desire of both the men and the

audience in the series, they are subjected to the gaze of the men, but in the end they are reduced to symbols of sex.

### 3.4. Solidified occupations

"If the circumstances of a man's existence force him to give up all other virtues, and to unilaterally develop a character, he cannot go beyond unilateral, malformed development 7." women in series are imprisoned in such a role, Wang Manni is a salesman, Zhong Xiaoqin is an ordinary employee, Gu Jia is a housewife. In film and television, women are usually salespeople, female managers, or ordinary administrative staff, and rarely appear on the screen as athletes, lawyers, police and other professions. Men, on the other hand, are complex brain physical and mental responsibilities. Therefore, women are not only seeking equality in the family, but also looking forward to removing prejudice and discrimination in the workplace and treatment.

To sum up, when discussing the group symptoms of female roles, we should not ignore the negative effects of stereotypes on the shaping of female images. Although *Nothing but Thirty* stands in the female perspective, it falls into some inherent concepts and stereotypes in the representation of female images.

First, women are not monolithic; they have a variety of life trajectories, values, and emotional experiences. By creating diverse female characters, TV series can present their various roles and faces in the family, workplace and society. Such creations not only help break down stereotypes about women, but also more fully reflect the complexity of women in real life.

Secondly, in order to get rid of the influence of male culture on female image, TV series creators need to create more independent and autonomous female characters. This includes shaping women's ability to succeed in their careers, to think independently at home, and to control their own destinies. By showing women's autonomy, the audience can better recognize and understand the diversity of women, rather than just confining them to traditional role positioning.

Third, get rid of the objectified perspective and transform women from pure aesthetic objects into characters with depth and connotation. TV series should avoid over-emphasizing women's looks and focus more on their thoughts, emotions and growth process. This way of creation can provide the audience with more abundant and profound female images, making them more representative and resonant.

By breaking the traditional female image stereotype, TV series can present a more real, diversified and three-dimensional female world to the audience. Only by truly paying attention to the complexity and independence of women in creation can we give more power to female roles, guide audiences beyond stereotypes, and better understand and respect the status and role of women in society. The following is the concrete value transformation of the female roles in the TV series *Nothing but Thirty*.

## 4. The value shift of women's roles

Media can not only reflect society, but also construct society. Through the construction of media, gender image can convey fixed image and value meaning. In recent years, the film and television art works of "her theme" have broken through men's aesthetic vision of women, faced the collective plight of women in real life, and dared to break the inherent concepts of female timidity, weakness, femininity, etc., reflecting the value shift of contemporary female subjective consciousness 8. *Nothing but Thirty* is constructed from the perspective of feminism, the depiction of female group images, and the depth of the living state of contemporary male and female groups. The TV series takes women as the starting point, allowing the audience to re-examine their own role positioning in social life.

### 4.1. From "victim" to "Aggressor"

The female image in *Nothing but Thirty* is very "adaptive", "transformational" and "resistance". In the TV series, Gu Jia from the independent "rebel" to deal with the mistress, and then became the "attacker" who finally broke the decadent idea and sent her cheating husband to prison. It is not difficult to see that the public demands self-improvement, self-knowledge and self-consistency for women, highlighting the reform of female aesthetics 9. At present, the relationship line of characters in domestic TV series is not limited to "single female protagonist", but the implementation of double female protagonist or multiple female protagonist, which has gradually become the most prominent narrative mode in movies and TV series. It embodies the identity of women, and it is this identity that becomes a force of female power and a weapon of confrontation. The sisterhood in the TV series proves that after being frustrated in work and love, you can also rely on friendship. With the big twist of the plot, it greatly improves the status of women. It can be seen that today "she" can be restless in the family, can be an "aggressor" who breaks old things and establishes new things, and can take the initiative to "do things". And "she" is no longer a gender that can only accept the fate of the "victim."

### 4.2. From "Age Anxiety" to "Redefinition"

Women's age has long been seen as a sensitive subject. Behind this, in fact, is a kind of "declining" identity, is a negative attitude towards women, limits the possibility of female development, inevitably induces women's "age anxiety". In the late plot of *Nothing but Thirty*, Wang Manni faces up to her age, dismissive of age prejudice, and finally gets a gorgeous transformation. As her sense of self develops, she begins to experiment with various forms of self-worth. It can be seen that age is definitely not the limiting condition in the growth of women, and the inherent concept of age counterpoint can not be relied on to frame the trajectory of women's life development. Reject age anxiety, which is the self-reconciliation and second transformation of women's value consciousness. At the end of the series, they are fresh and confident,

elegant and generous, even if they have reached the age of aging, there are infinite possibilities. It can be seen that from "age anxiety" to any stage of life, you can be redefined, you can reconcile with yourself, and do your own subversive transformation.

#### 4.3. From "family place" to "urban space"

"Geography" and "gender" are complex and profound, interwoven and influential concepts. These factors are intertwined and play an important role in life. In the past, women's activity places were basically concentrated in the "stove" and "vegetable market", the social circle was narrow, there were few social problems to talk about, and these "places" limited women's expression. In recent years, the number of workplace TV series about her has increased. The story is set in Shanghai, and its heroines "leave the kitchen and the family." They frequently visit coffee shops, restaurants and leisure venues, and have multiple interactions with urban Spaces. They can not only look at the whole city from the floor-to-ceiling Windows of the office, but also shuttle through the bustling commercial blocks and exquisite office buildings, which is a social space intertwined with modernity and utopia. These Spaces break through the traditional "family place" and place themselves in the bustling "city space", which enables women's status to be further transformed and promoted.

Through the creation of female images, the transformation of the value of female roles presents three major changes. 1) From "victim" to "aggressor": The female images in the TV series have adaptability, transformation and resistance. Gu Jia from being forced to deal with the rebel of the small three independently, gradually developed into the attacker who broke down the decadent idea. The plot highlights the public's aesthetic changes for women to be self-reliant, self-aware and self-consistent. 2) From "age anxiety" to "redefinition": For a long time, women's age has been regarded as a sensitive topic, leading to age anxiety. In the TV series, Wang Manni faces age squarely, rejects age prejudice, and finally transforms and realizes various forms of self-worth. The plot expresses the idea that age anxiety is rejected, and that any stage can be redefined and reconciled with the self. 3) From the "family place" to the "urban space": the complex interweaving of geography and gender, in the past, women's activities were limited to the kitchen and the wet market. In Shanghai, the heroine leaves her family and walks into the urban space, interacting with coffee shops, restaurants and leisure places. This change broke through the traditional concept of family place and placed women in modern urban spaces, further elevating their status.

In general, through these changes, *Nothing but Thirty* presents the rise of female power, emphasizing women's autonomy, diversity, and ability to fight against conventional wisdom. This reflects the evolution of contemporary women's social roles and self-perception.

## 5. Conclusion

As the "other" and gender issues continue to be mentioned, more and more female-themed films and television have entered the public vision. Through the analysis of different types of female role images in *Nothing but Thirty*, this thesis discusses the symptoms of contemporary women, the transformation of self-consciousness and the completion of self-construction. It can be seen that behind the emergence and rise of female consciousness in the face of many "her themes", we can not blindly optimistic that women's main status has begun to rise and become stable, but can only calmly look at the signal of female consciousness awakening sent by the media. From the perspective of female critical theory, it is of great significance to explore the deep mechanism of the three protagonists' self-shaping and self-construction in terms of self-consciousness, whether films and television with this theme can transform people's ideological consciousness, relieve women's realistic anxiety, and bring them spiritual comfort.

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