

# An Exploration of the Artistic Image of Female Characters in Chinese Independent Female-Oriented TV Series

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**Abstract.** This paper studies the artistic image of female characters in Chinese independent female-themed TV dramas, mainly exploring whether the female characters in such themed TV dramas are diversified and full, whether they have certain values, and whether they are fully embodied in the image of women. Through this analysis, it can be observed that the changes in the social perception and expectation of female characters, and thus understand the trend of social and cultural evolution. Independent female-themed TV dramas often focus on women's independence and autonomy in family, workplace and society, etc. The study of these character images can reveal the status and role of women in contemporary society. Based on this in-depth exploration by analyzing the three dimensions of role diversity, depth and complexity, and influence, to find the common points and the problems of the current Chinese independent female TV dramas, as well as the root causes of the audience's praise, criticism, or dismissal of such dramas, which are the demands of the women in their lives for their lives, careers, marriages, personal values, and families. By interpreting the results, it promotes the advancement of Chinese themed TV dramas as well as social concepts.

## 1 Introduction

With the development of the times, China's TV drama industry has entered a stage of rapid development since the reform and opening up, and the image of female characters has also changed with the development of TV drama. From the initial female roles that were mostly dependent on men and centered around family and emotions, more and more female characters have been created with rich images, full characters, diverse and more three-dimensional personalities. Especially in recent years, with the awakening of women's independent consciousness and the improvement of their social status, the image of independent women has been widely portrayed and presented in TV dramas.

First of all, due to the deepening of reform and opening up and socialist modernization, the Chinese TV drama industry has provided a broad space for development; the improvement of women's social status and the awakening of women's independent

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consciousness have led to significant changes in the image of women in TV dramas; at the same time, the influx of Western feminist ideas has had a profound impact on Chinese women's self-scrutiny and reflection. The willingness and preference of the audience have also forced the creators of TV dramas to create more diversified and distinctive images of women. At the same time, China's TV drama industry has become one of the largest TV drama producers in the world, and the continuous progress of TV drama production technology has provided basic technical support for the creation of more colorful female images.

The development of technology has also provided the cornerstone for the change in women's image. The course of change of women's image has changed from the 1980s when they were mostly dependent on men's image, they did not have independent thoughts and their social status was extremely low; to the 1990s when women's consciousness was gradually developing, the image began to develop from flat to diversified and multi-level; and then to the beginning of the 21st century to the present day, the image of independent women has been widely portrayed and presented in TV dramas, which are characterized by diversification and distinctiveness.

By exploring the artistic image of female characters in Chinese independent female TV dramas, this paper will aim to deeply analyze the characteristics, formation reasons, and social influence of the image of independent women, and further reveal the law and development trend of female image shaping in TV dramas. This is of great theoretical and practical significance for enriching the theory of characterization in TV dramas, promoting the healthy development of the TV drama industry, and facilitating the enhancement of women's social status. Therefore, it is of great practical significance and theoretical value to explore the artistic image of female characters in Chinese independent female TV dramas.

## 2 Literature review

The image of women in Chinese TV dramas has diversified in recent years, with different social backgrounds, different personalities, different ways of doing things, and different dilemmas. Wang Tian pointed out that the image of women gradually got rid of the stereotypical image of "vase", and shifted the attention from only focusing on the idealized image of women to the image of women in ordinary and different lives, and discarded the single image of women who only waited for the redemption of men and only focused on the love plot, and showed the social topics of women's concerns, survival situation, and growth experience [1].

However, there are still very strong similarities among these differences. Li Shiyu found that female figures in Chinese dramas are usually portrayed as dignified, beautiful, and graceful in order to show women's charisma and self-confidence. Even in workplace dramas, female characters are still expected to have a sense of responsibility for their families and the ability to take care of them. At the same time, their emotional journey is still depicted, which is used to show that after experiencing the struggle and growth of love, they can finally realize their self-worth and emotional balance [2]. This means that even though the image of women is more diverse, there are still new "shackles", which of course has a lot to do with the creation of the TV series itself. When the artwork is oriented to the public, the creation of the characters in the story is bound to appear in the type and look preferred by the majority of the viewers, and unintentionally become a new model, typecast female image. This is inevitable, but it cannot be a "shackle" to stop exploring the image of women.

Song Jiayin points out that the image of independent and individualized women shown on the screen today has increasingly become a psychological projection of many female viewers, so that real-life women struggling with marital turmoil and life failures entrust their thoughts to the siege of life and the reconstruction of values [3]. Diversify to show how

independent women are independent? How to grow up? To a certain extent, it can provide certain methods and different ideas for women to solve the dilemmas of life, and also provide nourishment for the rapid development of women's consciousness, which is not only the social responsibility of film and television works but also highlights the progress of social ideology.

In order to emphasize the independence of women and their characteristics of "big female lead", TV dramas nowadays often set male characters as supporting roles in order to better show their femininity. Chen Xia-nan found that although TV drama producers try to use male characters as supporting roles, they are still portraying "independent women" from a male perspective [4]. Inevitably, women are still portrayed as the "second sex", and in this regard, women are still portrayed from a single point of view.

Gao Xuejie and Jiang Shiye (2019) claimed in *Cultural Analysis of Female Roles in Contemporary Film and Television Aesthetics* that female roles have changed from family ethical center roles to professional rational roles, and the criteria for evaluating female roles have changed from a single moral and ethical scale to diversified criteria such as intellectualism, individuality, and more feminine personal characteristics [5]. This change reflects the real-life audience's demand for female aesthetics, and also represents the audience's desire to see excellent and attractive female characters in TV dramas.

Martha Lauzen's most recent reports on the US context out of the Center for the Study of Women in Film and Television show that women comprised 32% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on independent films in 2018-19, as against only 20% of these roles on the top 250 domestic grossing films of the same period. Martha Lauzen's latest report *Women in Film and Television* published by the Center for American Studies shows that women make up 32% of all directors, writers, and directors, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers in 2018-19 movies, while only 20% of these roles topped the list of the top 250 domestic box office movies of the same period [6]. Such data shows that the producers of TV series are still predominantly male, which also means that they create images of women from a male perspective, which does not show the true image of women.

Researchers found 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 [7].

Lei Kun and Cao Hui pointed out that after 2010, the "identity" of women in female-themed urban dramas has gradually become clearer, and this stage emphasizes the self-consciousness of female characters as well as their more advanced values, outlook on life and emotional concepts. The female characters in this period began to gradually get rid of the perspective of "him" and committed to establishing the perspective of "her" [8].

Li Yu and Zhao Jingchun believe that the economic and spiritual independence of female characters is an important foundation for them to become the main body, and they realize their self-worth through their personal efforts and challenge the old social concepts and values. [9] And such an image is exactly what the audience wants to see in movies and TV dramas, which to a certain extent makes the public better empathize with the female characters, and also makes the plight of women in life clearer.

Stefany Boisvert found the series was also regularly defined as 'more than a show', but as a work of art that encourages people to recognise – not just tolerate – differences [10]. When it was realized that women should not be defined so easily and were featured in TV shows in a genderless or gender-diverse way that was sought after by viewers, it gave women extremely strong power and pushed for a change in societal ideology.

Although there are many scholars in this field, very few scholars have studied the specific artistic image of female characters in Chinese independent female TV dramas. Many articles have analyzed the changes in the image of women in TV dramas, but they have not analyzed the specific female characterization, including the background of the independent female characters in the dramas as well as their personality traits, and why they bring the audience a sense of coolness as well as a sense of achievement. The fundamental reason for the audience's criticism and praise of female characterization today is the demands of women in life for their lives, careers, marriages, personal values, and families.

### **3 Methodology**

In order to analyze the artistic image of female characters in Chinese independent female TV dramas, the following approach will be taken to analyze the depth and complexity of the characters, the diversity of the characters, and the influence of the characters, in an effort to construct a more complete and objective artistic image of female characters in Chinese independent female TV.

Exploring character depth and complexity, the involvement and importance of female characters will be measured by counting the amount of lines they have, including dialog and monologues; and analyze the kinds and depths of emotions shown by female characters in the play, such as love, hate, fear, and joy, and the ways in which these emotions are expressed; the family background, occupation, and social status of the female characters are also examined to assess the richness of their characterizations.

Role diversity will be assessed by categorizing female characters, such as protagonists, supporting characters, villains, etc., and counting the number of each type of character; examining the age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and personality traits of the female characters in order to assess the breadth of their diversity; and analyzing the relationships between the female characters and with other characters, such as family, friendship, and love, in order to assess the complexity of their social networks.

The influence of the characters is analyzed by analyzing the role of the female characters in promoting the development of the plot, such as solving problems and revealing the truth, etc.; the popularity and influence of the female characters among the audience through audience feedback and surveys; and the statistics of awards and honors received by the female characters as an objective indicator to measure their influence.

The female characters are compared and analyzed with male characters or female characters in different films and dramas to assess their relative strengths and weaknesses. Ultimately, combining textual analysis, in-depth interviews, and other methods, an in-depth qualitative study of the degree of fullness and diversity of female characters is conducted.

### **4 Results**

By analyzing the depth, complexity, diversity, and influence of the female characters in Chinese independent female TV dramas, it is found that viewers usually prefer female characters with good family backgrounds and loose finances, as well as the qualities of bravery, independence, and advancement. Inevitably, people are curious about people they do not have access to, and they need to have some problems that ordinary people do not have to reflect the charm of female characters. For example, Vivian Qu in "Ode to Joy", her parents are divorced, but she has been independent since childhood, smart, witty and bold, she dares to pursue her own love and career, and she is good at dealing with complicated interpersonal relationships, and this kind of "out of the box" behavior brings a sense of freshness and coolness to the audience. Another character in the drama, Andy, is also the same, she has the

ability to solve problems, deal with crises calmly and decisively, but at the same time, also has inner purity and vulnerability. Both of these girls have good family backgrounds, and great backgrounds of their own.

Another kind of independent women grew up in a very bad family environment, but when they grew up, they seized every opportunity to improve themselves and achieved great success in their careers. For example, Su Mingyu in "It's All Good" never flinches in the face of her family's indifference and difficulties, she is resilient and independent, and uses her own hard work and talent to change her own destiny. The image of this "goddess of adversity" can easily bring a sense of enjoyment and fulfillment to viewers, and at the same time, inspire viewers to become better person.

## 5 Discussion

The portrayal of independent women is often inseparable from consumerism and material pursuits. The excellent independent women portrayed in these dramas, including "Ode to Joy", "Just Thirty", "It's All Good", and "The Golden Years", always side-step women's success from the material base, which in a certain sense ignores women's spiritual pursuits, and this makes the definition of success narrow. When evaluating a female character as independent and successful, it is easier for the audience to accept the secular success, which often requires a certain social status and is accompanied by a corresponding rich economic status, which leads to the fact that when the creators want to portray a successful and independent woman, they will inevitably look at the lodging environment, the level of consumption, the clothing, the means of travel, etc. to show their economic strength. This leads to the fact that when creators want to portray a successful independent woman, they will inevitably show her economic strength from the aspects of accommodation, consumption level, clothing, traveling tools, etc., reflecting her ability and independence. This is certainly a very good way to portray a woman, but at the same time, it confines her and fails to reflect her spiritual level and pursuits. When there are more and more female characters of this type, it will have some negative impacts on the audience, such as: neglecting the pursuit of spirituality, believing that money is the bottom line of such a good woman, attributing a woman's success to a good family background, and thus pursuing a materialistic life in an extreme way, and neglecting the fact that ability, self-improvement, perseverance, and other good qualities are the key. When people spend a lot of ink and energy to portray a spiritual pursuit, even if the economic life is not satisfactory, but still perseverance, hard work, and progress of the female characters, which will also bring the audience some different perspectives, that is, not have a high social status and rich economic strength is success.

Many producers will focus on depicting women's success in subsidizing a bad family of origin or releasing and reconciling a bad past that has hurt them, which is undoubtedly an attempt to better enrich the female characters, but on the other hand, it also represents society's discipline and definition of women. Today's society is still working hard to improve gender equality, but due to traditional attitudes, many deep-rooted mindsets are hard to break. In the new century, women not only need to accomplish socially significant professional success, but also need to juggle the burden of caring for the family; a woman's success is something that must be achieved with both hands, as people will judge women in different ways, which is unfair and mean to them. In the case of a strong family conflict or an extremely hurtful situation, if a woman chooses to resolve it decisively and leave calmly, then many people will give such a female character a negative image of being cold and uncaring. In fact, as equal genders, women can also choose to reconcile and let go of their feelings, but if women are given this only option, or if the female character does not understand and does not return to the family, there is a rebellious, ruthless and unfeeling image, and such stereotypes are a kind of prejudice of the society as well as the audience towards the female

group. Common TV dramas often choose to let this type of women return to the family to choose to understand and release, after all, they are portraying a positive image of women. But perhaps, even if the audience does not buy it, creators still need to make efforts to try to portray the popular sense of "heartless" and "indifferent" female characters, which is also the creators of the social value of the audience to push back, to provide support for women in real life.

## 6 Conclusion

This paper analyzes the artistic image of female characters in Chinese independent women's TV dramas, and finds that many TV dramas about independent women are highly sought after, from which viewers can feel an extremely strong sense of coolness to counteract the powerlessness of women facing dilemmas in real life, which gives many viewers new hope and new ideas.

However, even in independent female dramas, there are still many stereotypes of women, including the type of successful women's family backgrounds and the neglect of the choice of female characters. In a market where female producers account for less than half of the male producers, it is easy for female characters to be narrated from a male point of view, which is not fully representative of the image of women. Because of deep-rooted traditions, people's aesthetics still do not favor female characters who are too individualistic or too calm, and that's why feminism in real life has a long way to go.

In short, creators still need to pay attention to the different characteristics, different personalities, different backgrounds of women, to create a more diverse image of women's roles, the existence of film and television drama is not only the nature of the entertainment, but also has a certain significance on the impact of the community, the emergence of more meaningful and successful independent women will force the audience to the value of the power and possibilities given to more women!

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