

A Comparative Study of Film Genre Narratives in Addressing Patriarchy and Gender Bias

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Abstract. This study takes patriarchal film works as the core analysis framework, and compares the presentation of three different film forms of documentaries, feature films and animations in gender issues, and focuses on how the image of women and its power structure is constructed through different narrative strategies and aesthetic mechanisms. As a documentary, *One Child Nation* reveals how national policies penetrate into the family and individual levels through oral history and real images, has a long-term and systematic impact on women's reproductive rights, physical autonomy and emotional experience, and presents the specific operation of the patriarchal structure at the level of system. *Raise the Red Lantern* takes the closed family space as the core of the narrative. Through the ritualized daily order, hierarchy and the competitive relationship between women, it meticulously shows the psychological process of women being disciplined, internalized and self-consumed in the patriarchal family system. It emphasizes that patriarchy does not only rely on violence to maintain, but also through symbols, rules and emotional control are continued. And *Mulan*, as an animated work for popular culture, forms tension between traditional gender norms and modern "empowerment" narratives. Although the female image in the film gains action by crossing gender boundaries into the male-dominated public domain, its subject sex is still closely bound to obedience, sacrifice and loyalty to the family and country, reflecting the compromise and limitations of the animation genre when challenging the patriarchal structure. The study further pointed out that the film is not only a tool to reproduce male gaze and patriarchal ideology. It also has the potential to reflect, question and even loosen the gender power structure. Whether the gender narrative can move towards a richer, rigorous and critical direction in the future depends on the diversity of the creative subject. And the real participation of different genders, cultures and social experiences in film production.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Gender Representation, Male Gaze, Feminist Film Theory, Cultural Narrative

1. Introduction

Patriarchy is one of the concepts of sociology and gender studies. It is a social system where men assume the leading power and authority in the public institutions, cultural beliefs and patterns in the family structures [1]. Such imbalance of power does not just arise when it comes to personal

relationship. It is engrained within the structure of society and supported by legal, cultural, and customary values. According to Sylvia Walby, there are six interconnected systems upholding patriarchy and these include the household, paid labor, cultural representation, sexuality, the state, and violence [1]. These institutions operate in collaboration such that men have a higher access to resources and decision-making authority. R. W. Connell develops this view in his theory about the gender order, which determines the way masculinity is created locally, naturalized, and given power whereas femininity tends to be equated with the dependency or emotional work [2]. Thus and so, patriarchy is not merely a political and economic system, but a cultural and ideological system, which constructs the identity and social expectations.

Although patriarchy is a world-wide process, the way it is manifested differs in different cultures. Historical religious beliefs and capitalist work organization in most of the Western countries placed men as the heads of households and authorities in the sphere of life [2]. This power could be sanctified as rational, moral or was ordained by God. Confucian ethics were used in East Asian societies to uphold gender hierarchies using the principles of filial piety, continuation of male descent line and segregation of domestic and public areas [1]. What ensued was a sub scribe system where women were supposed to give up their own free will to being devoted to the family. Such differences in cultures indicate that patriarchy exists using various processes that rely on the local history and belief systems along with social organization. One of the best places to research such dynamics is in film since it may be both reproductive and contrasting of patriarchal norms. The film industry shapes the perceptions of gender among audiences in three ways: campaigning narrative roles, emotional identifications, and visual influences.

2. Current industry background

The theory of the male gaze introduced by Laura Mulvey states that traditional film is organized in such a way that the male gaze becomes a central theme of the film, and women come out as objects of visual pleasure, as opposed to active subjects [3]. Films reinforce gendered power relations by using framing, lighting, camera movement and focus on narrative without saying it. Mary Ann Doane goes further to discuss how the female spectator is a fluctuating position in a visual system that is dominated by the male gaze [4]. She contends that it is possible to have only a partial and temporary subjectivity of women, which she terms as masquerade- a self-aware femininity. In this tactic, the woman is not merely feminine, she performs femininity, and overacts it to extents similar to making it visible and not natural. In such a way, she builds a fractured space between her and the feminine performance embedded in her life. This range gives the girl viewer or character a chance to appreciate that femininity is a social construct and her femininity is not necessarily part of her. Doane however also adds that this strategy can never be liberating at all. It also offers a temporary feeling of agency to women, but they still act under the same patriarchal structure that establishes and constrains femininity as a meaning in the first place. Cinema however serves as a critique space. The new approaches to feminist films as well as the modern media habits assume the creation of newer strategies to put women agency in the limelight and to reveal the oppressive aspects of patriarchy. Movies like *Thelma and Louise* and *Little Women* show how the concept of identity and characterization can reorganize the woman. According to the recent industry studies, including the reports by the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative [5] and the Geena Davis Institute [6], the number of women directors and screenwriters take on a role in which greater gender representation occurs. It is an indication that the alteration in the structures of the production of films directly affects the cultural discourse of gender.

3. Research methodology

This research paper employs a qualitative comparative analysis of the film to investigate the ways in which various forms of cinema are stated as the embodiment of patriarchy and gender inequality. There are three films chosen as they represent three different genres: documentary *One Child Nation*, feature film *Raise the Red Lantern*, and animated film *Mulan*. The genres have their specific narrative conventions, strategy of emotions, technique of aesthetics. By comparing these movies, one can gain a better insight into the way visual narration exemplifies and reforms gender standards.

This analysis dwells upon some aspects like narrative structure, construction of characters, symbolic imagery, etc.

4. Manifestation across discrete filmic genres

4.1 Documentary: *One Child Nation* (2019)

One Child Nation that directed by Nanfu Wang lays bare the way the one child policy of the Chinese impinged on the state, cultural conventions and gender expectation. The accounts of this movie are of forced sterilizations, child abandonment, and emotional trauma. To be more precise, it is made of interviews with residents of director's home city, such as her mother, brother, grandfather, uncle, the family planning manager in the village, and the midwife. She reveals that it is not simple as she documents the most eminent responses of these individuals when discussing these policies like the way her uncle was coerced by her grandma to leave her daughter and the way her grandmother threatened her mother to get her son another baby. The interviews of various individuals also present a variety of views and opinions regarding the events and offer the viewers more information and details. Moreover to this the film offers many archives belonging to the Chinese family planning era to reveal the overall situation of the society during this era including the point that all folk art is used to promote the idea of the preference of sons and family planning. According to Sewell's argument, the documentary reveals how the reproductive ability of women was controlled by not only the government policies but also the conventional family needs of having sons. The bodies of women are not shown as independent [7].

The documentary setting generates a powerful emotional reaction. Interviews enable the subjects to voice out and archival pictures anchor personal experiences out in the history. Brylla illustrates that documentaries help to reflect on the ethical dimension by exercising empathy [8]. As spectators observe the testimonies of people harmed by the state policy, they are enticed to ask questions concerning the authority legitimacy and cultural values that condone the gendered suffering. In that way, *One Child Nation* does not as much recall the past; it questions the standardization of patriarchal reasoning in national identity.

4.2 Feature film: *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991)

Raise the Red Lantern, directed by Zhang Yimou, tells the story of Songlian, a young woman who becomes the fourth wife of a rich man. In the household, each wife wants the husband's favor. When he chooses a wife for the night, red lanterns are lit outside her room. This creates jealousy and competition among the women. Over time, Songlian feels trapped by the rules and pressure in the house. The issue of patriarchy at home has been explored in *Raise the Red Lantern* regarding the theme of confinement, competition and psychological control. The environment an isolated household with strict rituals functioning, is a feudal microcosm consisting of patriarchy. According

to Zhuang and Yang, the red lanterns are a symbol of power and subjugation as when a lantern is lit, it is said that a woman is offered some temporary favor; when the lantern is extinguished, a woman is no longer visible [9]. In the film, the women do not present an open aspect in defying the system. They instead assimilate the logic of patriarchs and turn their conflict against each other. Wang recognizes the household as an allegoric model of the dominance of the male: the male figure is also hardly visible, but his existence determines all the regulations [10]. Suppression of feelings, tactical maneuvering and the use of ritual are all mediums of showing that patriarchy is enacted by norm, but not plain blood violence. According to Coplan, feature films can induce emotional contagion i.e. audiences get to experience psychological conditions of characters [11]. The emotional appeal of *Raise the Red Lantern* helps the audience experience the hopelessness and the stress of women limited by the patriarchal relationships.

4.3 Animated film: *Mulan* (1998 / 2020)

Mulan tells the story of a young woman who takes her father's place in the army by disguising herself as a man. The animated 1998 version applauds the woman who breaks gender role because she does a purely male job. Nevertheless, Manaworapong and Bowen suggest that the story concludes by upholding the idea of patriarchy by making the success of the main character Mulan's actions that were done on behalf of the family and the country [12]. The live-action version of 2020 changes the focus to inner strength which is reflected in the idea of *qi*, but remains connected to empowerment as a result of loyalty and collective identity. According to Liu, animation is based on the visual metaphor and simplified emotional lines. This renders *Mulan* especially effective with young viewers that are growing gender sensitive [13]. The movie is not only entertaining but it also takes part in educating different cultures. Courtesy, duty and femininity. The symbolic system influences people about the initial thoughts on bravery, responsibility and femininity.

4.4 Genre strategies of patriarchy

Patriarchy in the three films is brought forth in various aspects. Documentary reveals structural violence and makes moral judgment. It emphasizes the reflection of factual subjects and the emotional testimony [8,7]. The emphasis of feature film is put on emotional interiority, relationship with each other, and the way in which patriarchy can work by psychological conditioning. It focuses on dramatic richness and tension of the story [9,11]. Symbolic storytelling in animation film creates cultural imaginations and future gender identity. It also takes into account allegory and cultural mediation [12,13]. Nevertheless, in spite of such differences, all three films demonstrate how patriarchy may submissively seem within the midst of normalcy. In both instances, gender inequality is enshrined in daily life activities, structures or culture. The success of the film showing these systems is related to the degree to which it can appeal to the viewers on an emotional and intellectual level.

5. Limitations of dominant cinematic perspectives

Meanwhile, we have to admit that a lots of movies are based on narrow-mindedness. There are works that reduce gender experiences or strengthen the male based perspectives [3]. In other words, we need the voices of women and LGBTQ+ creators, as well as those of minorities, must be included in the filmmaking in the future. When these come from more identities to express the issue of patriarchy, the audience can get a more comprehensive and critical understanding through diverse

content. The further enlargement of narrative points of view enables films to resist hegemonic norms more efficiently.

6. Conclusion

The cinema is a reflection and a transformative medium. It is a representation of current gender hierarchies, and also provides the possibility to challenge them and recreate. Film can also shed some light into the buildings that uphold the patriarchal authority through the documentary truth, the dramatic emotional richness, and the symbolic cultural narrative. In cases when filmmakers combine different views and give more attention to narrative pluralism, cinema can help people to understand better and make a social change. These films weren't just entertainment; they were a wake-up call. They urged us to reconsider what we might have taken for granted about our society's values. It was about more than just watching a movie; it was an invitation to start a conversation, to question things we thought were normal but might be deeply ingrained biases. It is imperative to continue working to expand the representation and disrupt the deliberate gender narratives to reconstruct the cultural image and build a more just social future.

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