

Interpreting Women in Historical Dramas from a Feminist Perspective

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Abstract: Since Chinese TV dramas have been in full swing, women have been playing an increasingly important role in TV dramas, echoing the contemporary social theme of feminism, such as the transformation of roles from housewife to strong woman. For example, from housewives to career women, women have their own unique artistic images in TV dramas. Contemporary TV dramas allow us to see the image of women in different periods of China, especially in historical TV dramas, where the way of women's survival and development is more meaningful to explore in the context of patriarchal and male-centered society and the ancient idea of balance, and the female roles in them are diverse, such as in Qing Ping Yue and The Story of Minglan, which are going to be explored in this paper. This paper will translate the language of female characters in TV dramas into modern feminism through specific cases, analyze its commonalities with modern new women's consciousness, and explain the reasons and processes of its development. At the same time, it will promote the dissemination of feminism in our daily life and raise its status by giving feasible solutions to specific cases.

Keywords: feminism, balanced ideology, patriarchal society, historical dramas

1. Introduction

With the increasing proportion of female characters in contemporary historical dramas, the status of women has been elevated in comparison with the past, and contemporary women are becoming more independent. The entry point of this thesis is the TV drama Qing Ping Yue, which takes the life of Song Renzong as a clue, and tells the story of Zhao Zhen, the Emperor of the Northern Song Dynasty, from a young boy who ascends to the throne and gradually takes control of the imperial government to the story of his exhaustive efforts to love his country and rule the people, and creates a prosperous and peaceful "Renzong Sheng Shi" for the Northern Song Dynasty [1, 2]. The story of Song Renzong's initiatives centered on the idea of "balance" and the distinctive portraits of the Song people are built up in a comprehensive and detailed manner. Included is the illiberal marriage of Princess Fukang, the daughter of Emperor Renzong. Historically, prior to the Song Dynasty, women's freedom was limited by a patriarchal society, and it was not until the Song Dynasty that cultural literacy became widespread that women's freedom was improved. But even though patriarchal society was somewhat diluted during the Song Dynasty, it still subtly affected women's lives. These repressive ideologies created an image of women who were not free. Therefore, this thesis analyzes the limitations that ancient women in balanced ideology and female characters in other periods in TV

dramas still face and the irrationality of the historical language used in modern TV dramas for modern feminism by using modern feminist language. This thesis will be argued in terms of the impact of patriarchal society on women and the relationship between modern historical dramas and feminism.

2. Impact of Patriarchal Society on Women

Patriarchal societies are usually male-dominated, and women are usually the dependent party and therefore do not have absolute freedom. These effects are sometimes downplayed from a historian's point of view, i.e., the macroscopic point of view. This thesis will therefore give a short overview of traditional women's views on marriage and then give relative advice from a feminist, i.e., female, point of view [3][4].

2.1. Traditional Women's View of Marriage

Throughout the history of China, most of the marriage systems have followed three points: following the order of parents and the words of matchmakers, emphasizing the importance of the family as a good match, and valuing the six rites of passage. In ancient times, most marriages were characterized by the word balance, and the reason for the appearance of the bride price and dowry is rooted in this statement. For example, in the Song Dynasty, the main reason for the prevalence of dowry was that women had certain property rights, so wealthy families with daughters would use matchmakers to ask around for information about young scholarly men who were taking the exams in the capital, and the whole family would look forward to benefiting from marrying a scholar. Sometimes families would invest in their future son-in-law's education because they wanted to find the right match to marry their daughters off to. Behind these rules is the most basic point that men are superior to women. Women were mostly dependent on men in marriage and were subordinate to men. Before the Tang Dynasty, women did not have the opportunity to receive an education, and few girls were able to have a say in various situations, so women did not have absolute freedom in traditional marriages, especially in the patriarchal society that prevailed in ancient times. Patriarchal society consists of two stages, one is the agrarian society and the other is the first two industrial revolutions. For the agrarian society in which ancient China lived, men had greater physical strength and mobility and could play an important role in daily life, while women had to bear children and were called upon to reproduce offspring, which required a great deal of time and energy, and they were unable to cope with jobs that required them to move around [5]. So it is difficult for women to have a place in either the higher or lower classes [6][7]. Therefore, women are subordinate in the whole patriarchal society. In the book *Patriarchy and Capitalism*, it is mentioned that "the domination of the womb was originally a struggle over the ownership of the newborn baby, which was the core issue of patriarchy", and that women's reproductive rights and the fruits of reproduction were firmly in the hands of the patriarchal family [8]. This idea was reflected in ancient Chinese marriages, where women would feel complacent about being able to give their husband's family a boy. This is the limitation of the ancient women's view of marriage in a patriarchal society and the backwardness of their thinking.

2.2. Women's Lives under the Traditional Idea of Balance

Ancient Chinese philosophy attaches great importance to the overall correlation and the middle way. The middle way can also be understood as the control of the balance, which is a relative state of motion in a non-fixed static balance. Taiji Bagua, yin and yang in the elimination of this and that always maintains a balanced and stable state, but within the qiankun, is in the midst of the development of changes in the balance of the thought of history is the development of the movement, people believe that the balance of the development of the foundation, only to reach a state of equilibrium. Only by reaching a state of equilibrium can all things begin to move normally relative

to each other. On a macro level, any dynasty is constantly searching for a balance at the beginning of its establishment, and when it reaches the ultimate level of development, it will create an unprecedented period of prosperity. For example, during the time of Qin Shi Huang, but after reaching the peak of its development, the balance will be broken again and move in the opposite direction, starting to go downhill, and continue to go to the end, for example, during the time of Emperor Yuan of Han Dynasty, the phenomenon of corruption began to appear, so that the Han Dynasty thus declined. In terms of women's attire, women's clothing was usually symmetrical from left to right, including the pasties that had appeared in the Song Dynasty, which appeared after shirts, jackets, coats, skirts, and pants, with left and right half-openings, and continued the idea of balance in dress under the purity and elegance of Cheng-Zhu rationalization. In terms of daily life, women would achieve body balance through proper exercise, tonic or attenuation methods. Proper exercise helps to balance the body, while over-exercise depletes the body's yang energy. Tonic methods, on the other hand, maintain balance and improve health by replenishing what the body needs. An example is the Five Animal Circus. For eating, three meals a day were served at set times, and children from wealthy families had the rule that they could not keep pinching a dish. Under the influence of patriarchal society, women would leave the decision-making of important matters to men in order to maintain a balanced relationship in the family, and men would also take pride in maintaining a balanced relationship in the backyard. All in all, the idea of balance in ancient Chinese patriarchal society is one of the most important reasons for the influence on women's status [9].

3. Modern Historical Dramas and Feminism

3.1. Perspectives on Presenting Female Characters in Historical Dramas

Nowadays, most of the historical dramas depict the social situation of the time from the perspective of male characters. For example, the TV drama *Qing Ping Le* depicts the court and society from the perspective of the emperor Zhao Zhen, while the female characters include the empress, consorts, and princesses. This perspective is obviously incomplete. Because they were emperors and high-class men in a patriarchal society, they would inevitably fail to depict the female characters in a comprehensive manner. Even the psychological depictions of the female characters in the drama could not make up for this shortcoming, and could not accurately reflect the specific problems of the society at that time, such as the patriarchal and hierarchical feudal systems. Because the storyteller herself is not from a woman's point of view, the contemporary historical dramas should focus their language on female characters, who, as a vulnerable group, are sometimes in a better position to see the essence of the dynasty and the flaws in the development of society. For example, as Princess Hui Rou, the eldest princess of Emperor Renzong of Song, was deeply favored by her father, but her life was still full of misfortune [10]. Her life is constantly followed by the constraints of power; she is the daughter of a government official, a puppet of politics, a propitiation of balanced thinking, and one of the many women affected by a patriarchal society. These constraints are obviously not fully realized in Song Renzong's perspective. In the meantime, women's personal choices are annihilated like a trickle of water in the tides of the times, and it is this trickle of water that makes the tides.

3.2. Ways in Which Modern Feminist Language Is Transposed in Television Dramas

The emancipation and free development of women are not only social issues but also issues for women themselves. Being a woman requires self-awakening and self-enlightenment in order to promote development. Women are often unrecognized as subjects of creative and practical activity and can only succeed by relying on a combination of women's own self-improvement struggles and social movements. This thesis argues that one of the historical TV dramas that has done a better job is "Knowing Whether to Know or Not, It Should be Green, Fat, Red and Thin" where the female

protagonist, Minglan, portrays the social background and the social status quo of the Northern Song Dynasty from her point of view, such as the status of women and the limitations she is subjected to in her life, for example, her inability to disobey her father, who often makes stupid decisions, and her inability to rely on her own strength to protect her grandmother, who adores her, and instead, has to rely on a family of powerful husbands. power over her husband's family. The TV series "Mi Yue Zhuan" also adopts the same starting point of a female character, and the audience can see the difficulties and challenges that a woman has to overcome in order to step into the political arena, and the limitations that she faces not only from the male's idea of "balancing the power of husband and wife", but also from the unfairness she encounters outside of the inner house. We can see the drawbacks of the ideas of different periods, such as the fact that most men in their time believed that women were always out of doors, or that they did not have the ability to make decisions, contrary to the modern idea of equality for all, and that some of the better roles that women can play are not being fully utilized. We can see the hegemonic and patriarchal center of discourse in which women live, and the enormity of women's struggle to find their own independent space to survive and thrive in life. This perspective is clearly deeper and more meaningful than from the perspective of male roles. It emphasizes the spirit of women's self-reliance and self-improvement, allowing the audience to reflect deeply on the traditional marriage model and the changing status of women at that time, and emphasizes the self-worth and development that women should have, striving to pursue their own dreams and careers.

4. Conclusion

When standing at the intersection of times and looking back at history, we can always generate our own set of systems for judging right and wrong, and we always live in the future as well as in the past. On this basis, the modern translation of the ancient social background and traditional culture can also be seen as an understanding of the process of cultural evolution. Whether it is the ancient idea of balance, male superiority, female inferiority, or different class systems for the time period, they are all the inner prime movers that drive their development. So by translating this behavior into modern language or by unfolding the depiction of the social situation from the perspective of the underprivileged, we can better help the contemporary us to develop ourselves and the present society. Tell women in contemporary society what kind of position they should put themselves in so that women can improve their recognition of themselves. This paper hopes that future historical dramas will put more effort into portraying the underprivileged, not only to show the prosperity of society but also to show the shortcomings of the dynasty and the politics of the time, so that women or other mentally handicapped groups can think more.

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