

Unveiling the Impact of Female Characters in Asian Chinese Women's Cinema: A Study of Character Identification, Transportation, and Media Appreciation

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Abstract

In recent years, research has scrutinized the underlying psychological processes through which different film genres impact moviegoers. This current study, however, focuses on examining the influence of distinct female characters found in Asian Chinese women's cinema. These female characters can be categorized as Independent Women, Consumer Women, and Traditional Women. Drawing insights from the feedback gathered from a sample of 150 viewers who watched three women-centric films, this study has uncovered the extent to which these diverse female characters prompt different levels of Character Identification and Transportation in the audience, both of which are pivotal elements in engaging viewers. Furthermore, the study has explored the direct connection between audience appreciation and these three female character types. While the study found that there was not a statistically significant difference in Character Identification variability among Consumer Women, it did uncover that Independent Women and Traditional Women characters in Chinese women's cinema tend to generate higher levels of Character Identification. Additionally, there were no noticeable distinctions in terms of Transportation across the various female characters. Interestingly, Independent Women and Traditional Women characters did not receive as much Media Appreciation compared to the Consumer Women character. Ultimately, Chinese women's films predominantly resonate with feminists or individuals who hold a particular interest in the contributions of women to the film industry, despite having a relatively limited audience.

Keywords

Asian Chinese women, women's cinema, media appreciation, transportation, character identification

Introduction

Women's cinema emerges at the crossroads of feminist theory and the cinematic medium. Feminism, a multifaceted movement comprising social and political ideologies, strives to define and establish gender equality across political, economic, personal, and social spheres (Beasley, 1999; Donner et al., 2005; Hawkesworth, 2018; Osadola & Oyewumi, 2022). Rooted in the belief that societies have historically prioritized male perspectives and unfairly treated women (Gamble, 2004), feminism champions the fight against deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and the pursuit of equal educational, professional, and interpersonal opportunities for women.

In this context, women's cinema emerges as a potent means of conveying the female perspective to the world. This concept extends beyond geographic boundaries, finding resonance within Chinese women's cinema as well. Today, Chinese women's cinema is characterized by a theoretical approach that draws from Western theoretical frameworks, employing concepts such as Laura Mulvey's gaze theory, Metz's second semiotics, psychoanalysis, and Marxism to dissect the content of women's films. These analytical lenses commend or critique how these films convey female subject consciousness, engaging and influencing the audience (McMurdo & Clayton, 2019).

Remarkably, innovative, and groundbreaking films are often closely associated with female directors and are instrumental in addressing gender-related themes (Luo, 2019). However, it is essential to note that experimental and avant-garde films find appreciation within a limited audience segment (Su-Lin, 2018). Thus, acknowledging the pivotal role of audience reception and endorsement becomes imperative in enabling women's cinema to effectively champion feminist ideals, communicate women's perspectives on a global scale, and garner recognition.

Hence, this paper, based on Lei's (2022), examines the intricate dynamics of narrative success. It explores how cinematic expressions shape the audience's appreciation of media by analyzing the audience's assessment of various Chinese female characters, considering factors such as transportation and character identification. This investigation highlights the paradoxical nature of feminist ideals within the realm of cinema, ultimately shedding light on the profound impact of storytelling on perceptions and emotions.

Literature Review

Chinese Women's Characters in Films

In the realm of cinema, women face significant challenges when it comes to representation and portrayal. They are often underrepresented and, when they do appear, are frequently depicted in a negative light. In contrast to men, who typically assume roles as powerful antagonists, successful entrepreneurs, and superheroes, women are often confined to roles such as housewives, single women, promiscuous characters, or secretaries. This stark contrast in character portrayal, as noted by Busselle and Bilandzic (2009), and reaffirmed by Soto-Sanfiel, Villegas-Simon, and Angulo-Brunet (2021), raises questions about the dynamics between masculinity and femininity in cinema, as discussed by Williams (2021).

Moreover, many of the roles assigned to Chinese women in cinema tend to limit them and make them dependent on their male counterparts, resulting in a loss of their individual character identities. To better understand this phenomenon, it is helpful to categorize female characters in Chinese women's cinema into three groups: traditional females, consumer

females, and independent females, as outlined by Wang (2021b). This categorization forms the foundation of this study, which aims to investigate whether these distinct character types significantly impact how viewers appreciate media.

Traditional Female Character

When playing the role of a traditional female character like a mother, wife, or daughter, women often find themselves suppressing their aspirations to be seen as strong, independent individuals in these additional roles and identities (Zhang, 2019). Examples of this phenomenon include characters like Xiao Yu in "Siao Yu," Teacher Su in "Red Face," and Xiao Calyx in "Red Powder," among others. These women tend to become excessively reliant on their husbands and families, sacrificing their own sense of self and individuality, and essentially becoming transient figures in a male-dominated culture (Yang, 2018). Traditional female characters frequently elicit lower levels of resonance among female viewers and higher levels among male viewers (Zhang, 2019).

Consumer Female Character

In the late 1980s, Western feminism began to exert an influence on the perspectives of Chinese researchers (Armatage & Qin, 2019). Following the surge of consumerism that began in the 2000s, the Chinese middle class expanded significantly, comprising a substantial portion of the population (Hu & Guan, 2021). However, even though women constituted approximately one-third of this middle-class demographic, most of the power and income remained concentrated on the male side. As a result, most middle-class women found themselves positioned between the middle and lower tiers within this social stratum (Wang, 2021a).

From this vantage point, it becomes apparent that women often feel compelled to trade their femininity, which has been commodified as a form of capital linked to physical appearance or beauty, in exchange for privileged resources from men. This dynamic further reinforces the existing disparities in power between the sexes, as portrayed in films (Yang, 2018).

Chinese consumer women often find themselves increasingly engrossed in the pursuit of material possessions. These women are depicted in various ways (Wang, 2015): Firstly, they commence this journey by succumbing to their own self-indulgent desires. For instance, characters such as Xiao Mei in "Desires of the Heart" and Yang Ying in "Beijing Rocks," among others, demonstrate this pattern. The director uses cinematic techniques to critique this portrayal of women. Secondly, they become ensnared by insatiable wants. This transformation is exemplified by characters like Wenxiu, the protagonist in "The Sent-down Girl," who eventually succumbs to the allure of returning to the city. Thirdly, these women often make significant sacrifices to secure their survival. Characters like Manlu in "Eighteen Springs" and Yanni in "Life and Death" embody this narrative. As the audience relates to female characters to varying degrees, it is believed that the consumer female character tends to command more attention and respect from the public (Chen, 2022).

Independent Female Character

This cohort of women actively advocates for their own beliefs and rights while seeking recognition for their female identity. In sharp contrast to the prior two portrayals of women, which emphasize self-reliance and personal growth, this group of female characters exudes an aura of self-empowerment and distinctive self-awareness (Williams, 2021). These women courageously depart from their homes in search of self-discovery, willingly confronting numerous challenges along the way (Su-lin, 2018). Director's captivating depictions of

independent Chinese women to emphasize the sense of female autonomy (Luo, 2019). Independent female characters are typically those with whom the female audience can readily relate and envision themselves. Therefore, the audience has a deep appreciation for this character archetype (Wang, 2021b).

Character Identification

Research indicates that individuals are more inclined to form a connection with the characters in a story as opposed to its plot. They often assume the persona of a character, momentarily immersing themselves in the narrative and experiencing its events as if they were unfolding in their own lives. To truly engage with a text or film and comprehend the emotions and desires of a Chinese woman's character, it is essential for individuals to be able to relate to that character (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010). Furthermore, the degree of character identification with a Chinese women's character also serves as a metric for gauging how the narrative perspective influences perceptions of the ingroup and outgroup (Cohen, 2001).

Narratives possess the capacity to shape individuals' attitudes and behaviors towards those who are stigmatized or classified as members of an outgroup, such as a Chinese women's character (Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020). The narrative perspectives of various characters play a role in amplifying the concept of character identification. As per Wallace and Dawood (2018), an effective entertainment narrative should ensure that the audience can engage with one or more of the characters. Subsequently, given that Chinese women's characters must elicit identification from viewers to evoke empathy, whether in a positive or negative manner, this study examines how these characters lead to character identification among viewers.

Transportation

According to Green and Brock (2000, 2002), transportation is identified as a crucial element in narrative persuasion. When individuals engage with a public entertainment narrative, be it in novels, movies, soap operas, song lyrics, newspapers, magazines, television, or radio, their attention and imagination become immersed in the story, effectively transporting them into the narrative's world. In the past two decades, numerous studies have been conducted (Hu & Guan, 2021; Hamby, Shawver, & Moreau, 2020; Liu & Da'hling, 2016; Zhang, 2014) and demonstrated the persuasive impact of narrative transportation.

Nevertheless, Gerrig (2018) draws a parallel between a reader of a story and a "traveler," contending that, during the act of reading, this "traveler" temporarily detaches from the real world they currently inhabit. He further emphasizes that the experience of transportation is not confined solely to reading; the term "reader" refers to listeners, viewers, or anyone receiving narrative information. Although the reader or viewer may cognitively acknowledge that the novel or movie, they are engaging with is a work of fiction, as a "traveler," they can occasionally lose themselves in the narrative, experiencing intense emotional fluctuations as the storyline involving Chinese women's characters unfolds. This phenomenon is termed transportation, and the "traveler" who experiences the emotional journey of joy, sorrow, and unexpected twists within the story often emerges from it with a positive outlook or altered attitudes (Yang, Xu, & Luo, 2020).

Furthermore, in accordance with Wang's (2015) proposition, transportation should be viewed as a transformative process wherein all the mind's systems and capacities are driven by the unfolding events involving the characters within the narrative. Green and Brock (2000) systematically contrast transportation with cognition, narrative information, and descriptive information (expository information). They argue that factors such as the protagonist, the quality of the text or movie, and the context significantly influence the effectiveness of

transportation. Building on this, it can be inferred that the levels of emotional engagement evoked by Chinese women's characters in a story, cognitive attention, feelings of suspense, a sense of detachment from the immediate surroundings, and the mental images generated all contribute to assessing the impact of Chinese women's characters (Zhang, 2019). Thus, this study investigates the capacity of Chinese women's characters to transport viewers and readers from their real-world environment into a distinct realm.

Media Appreciation

Media appreciation, a subfield within media psychology, focuses on how audiences respond to complex film narratives, such as emotionally impactful and thought-provoking films. It is gaining increased attention in research as a distinct audience response that differs significantly from mere media enjoyment. Oliver and Bartsch (2010) developed a scale to gauge audience responses, specifically differentiating between enjoyment and appreciation as two fundamentally separate reactions. Their findings revealed the emergence of a crucial factor known as the "moving/thought-provoking experience," which was notably more strongly linked to the appreciation of Chinese women's characters. These results suggest that the eudemonic motive plays a pivotal role in driving enjoyment. Based on these insights, media appreciation is defined as "an experiential state characterized by the perception of deeper meaning, the sensation of being emotionally moved, and the inclination to express thoughts and emotions inspired by the experience" (Maureira & Rombout, 2022). This definition emphasizes that the essence of media appreciation lies in its ability to convey meaningfulness.

In recent years, there has been a notable expansion in research concerning how audiences respond to media entertainment, primarily driven by the emergence of the concept of media appreciation (Jang, Lee, & Lee, 2019). These findings suggest that media psychologists have shifted their focus towards the eudemonic perspective when studying Chinese women's characters in films, rather than the hedonic perspective. It is worth noting that, while they are viewed as different aspects, media enjoyment and appreciation are both highly valued and often co-occur (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). Lee (2018) contends that instead of being opposing elements, enjoyment and appreciation are two complementary dimensions that contribute to the diverse variations in positive responses. Therefore, this study demonstrates the importance of media appreciation for viewers to comprehend and value Chinese women's characters in movies.

Conceptual Model

This study is structured as an impactful research endeavor with a primary emphasis on Chinese Women's Characters, Character Identity, Transportation, and Media Appreciation. Consequently, the primary objective of this study is to explore how Chinese Women's Characters influence Character Identity, Transportation, and Media Appreciation. The theoretical framework for this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

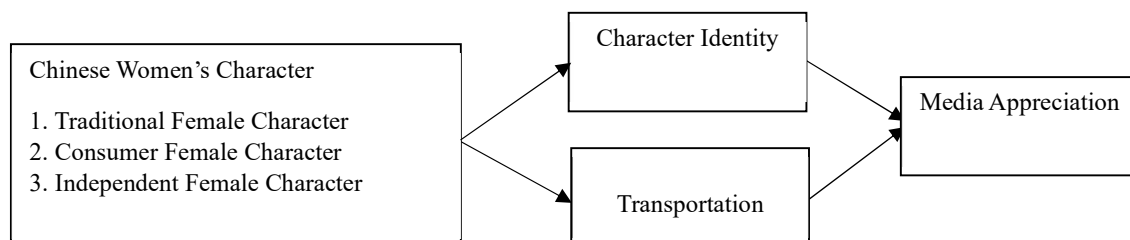


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Hypotheses Development

Currently, Chinese women's characters can be categorized as traditional, consumer-oriented, or independent, as noted by Wang (2015). The extent to which viewers identify with these Chinese women characters is crucial for how their perspectives influence perceptions of both ingroup and outgroup representations in media recognition, as discussed by Cohen (2001). Similarly, the level of immersion and media appreciation can be definitively measured by gauging emotional engagement elicited by Chinese women characters in stories, cognitive focus, emotional responses like suspense, the extent to which viewers lose awareness of their surroundings, and the mental imagery evoked, as highlighted by Zhang (2019).

Wang (2022) stated that Chinese women's characters are often portrayed as excessively emotional, relying on other characters, and limited to low-status occupations. This portrayal has the potential to undermine the character's identity, transportation, and media appreciation of female viewers in contrast to the more assertive and ambitious male actors.

Hence, this study posits the following hypotheses:

H1. Chinese women's characters (traditional female character, consumer female character and independent female character) influence Character Identification.

H2. Chinese women's characters (traditional female character, consumer female character and independent female character) influence Transportation.

H3. Chinese women's characters (traditional female character, consumer female character and independent female character) influence Media Appreciation.

Methodology

Study Design

This study was carefully devised with the aim of examining how the presence of various female characters in films influences the viewer's perception of those films. Participants were requested to view films featuring different female characters and subsequently provide ratings pertaining to the extent of their character identification and transportation. Additionally, participants were instructed to evaluate their perception of the story's engagement, emotional impact, and overall enjoyment.

Participants

For this study, participants were selected from the student body at the University of Shanxi's Communication Department. This recruitment was facilitated through a publicly available credit-bearing elective course centered on film and television appreciation, which was available to the entire campus. Over 150 individuals were enlisted to watch the designated movie and subsequently provide responses to a questionnaire. It is worth noting that individuals who had prior exposure to the film were deliberately excluded from the study.

Stimulus Material

In this quasi-experimental design, three films were selected to serve as stimulus materials, each representing different archetypes of women: Independent Women, Consumer Women, and Traditional Women. Specifically, these films are "Send Me to the Clouds" (2017), "The Sent-Down Girl" (1998), and "Siao Yu" (1998), respectively.

To ensure the authenticity of the experiment, modification was made to the ending of "The Sent-Down Girl." Instead of including the scene depicting Lao Jin killing Wenxiu, the authors opted for an open ending. This decision was made because both "Send Me to the Clouds" and "Siao Yu" feature ambiguous conclusions. It was important to maintain consistency in the experiment's design.

All three of these films explore the underlying concerns of feminist cinema. They vividly depict the profound influence of family and societal pressures on women, as well as the various ways in which the female characters resist these pressures. Additionally, it is noteworthy that each of these films has a single female protagonist in the center of the story.

Measures

The Character Identification scale in this study employs Cohen's (2001) proposed 10-item identity scale, which encompasses four distinct dimensions. The first dimension focuses on empathy, specifically measuring the extent to which viewers perceive the character's emotions. The second dimension, the cognitive aspect, evaluates the degree to which viewers adopt the character's perspective. The third indicator of identification examines motivation, assessing how much the audience internalizes and connects with the character's goals. Lastly, the fourth component of identification, absorption, determines the extent to which self-awareness diminishes during viewing the narrative.

The Transportation scale utilized in this study was adapted from the 15-item transportation scale initially proposed by Green and Brock (2000). To align the scale with the context of movie viewing, certain modifications were made to the original scale originally designed for reading. Specifically, the terms "reading", and "text" were replaced with "viewing" and "film," respectively. This adapted scale encompasses five distinct dimensions: cognitive attention, emotional engagement, suspense, awareness of the environment, and mental imagery. Furthermore, within the Transportation scale, the mental imagery dimension provides the additional purpose to evaluate the audience's perception of the film's main character. However, it is worth noting that the mental imagery and awareness of surroundings dimensions were found to differ significantly from the dimensions of the Character Identification scale. Therefore, for the sake of clarity and efficiency, this study chose to retain the dimensions from the Character Identification scale while eliminating the corresponding dimensions from the Transportation scale.

In evaluating media appreciation, a scale derived from the 15-item audience response scale (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010) was employed. This scale is primarily intended to assess the audience's response to the movie viewing experience, encompassing aspects of both enjoyment and appreciation. It operates on a two-process model, focusing on post-viewing reactions. Specifically, in this study, the authors retained the dimension of enjoyment-related fun from this scale. This decision was made to facilitate a comparison of the disparities in audience enjoyment and appreciation levels subsequent to their exposure to the movie.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire underwent thorough statistical analysis using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0. For continuous variables, such as numerical data, measures of central tendency like mean and standard deviation were computed. Categorical variables were evaluated in terms of frequency and percentage. To ascertain the reliability of the data, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, a widely accepted measure of internal consistency, was applied. Moreover, both Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were employed to validate the scales. Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance

Extracted (AVE) were evaluated using two metrics. The significance level for all tests was set at 0.05 ($P < 0.05$), indicating that observed differences were statistically significant. Using the chi-square test, sample characteristics across experiments were compared, while variations in variables between experimental conditions were assessed through a single ANOVA. This comprehensive analytical approach ensured a rigorous evaluation of the collected data.

Results

Analysis of Variance on The Character Identification Scale

In this study, a one-way ANOVA was employed to examine differences in various variables across different experiments. Subsequently, the Least Significant Difference (LSD) method was applied to compare those variables that displayed notable differences. The following section presents the outcomes of this analysis.

Table 1 reveals the results of the one-way ANOVA. In the female image experiment, significant differences were observed among the variables related to Character Identification, specifically in terms of empathy, motivation, and overall, Character Identification (p -values < 0.01). However, no significant differences were observed in the variables of absorption and cognition, where p -values exceeded 0.05. Further comparisons were conducted for empathy, motivation, and Character Identification using the LSD method, and these findings are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Character Identification scale variance analysis results

Variable	Attribute	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	P
Absorption	Independent	50	3.270	1.135	1.806	0.168
	Consumer	50	3.060	1.013		
	Traditional	50	3.450	0.922		
Cognition	Independent	50	3.207	0.883	1.000	0.371
	Consumer	50	3.133	0.913		
	Traditional	50	3.380	0.891		
Empathy	Independent	50	3.633	0.707	13.977	0.000
	Consumer	50	2.800	1.067		
	Traditional	50	3.520	0.744		
Motivational	Independent	50	3.570	0.776	7.988	0.001
	Consumer	50	2.960	0.908		
	Traditional	50	3.530	0.871		
Character Identification	Independent	50	3.420	0.604	9.448	0.000
	Consumer	50	2.988	0.662		
	Traditional	50	3.470	0.557		

Table 2 presents a comprehensive view of post-hoc test results for the Character Identification scale. In comparison to empathy, the LSD method comparisons revealed that in the Independent Women experiment, empathy scores were higher than those in the Consumer experiment. Similarly, in the Traditional experiment, empathy scores were higher compared to the Consumer experiment. Importantly, no significant difference in empathy was observed between the Independent Women experiment and the Traditional experiment. When it comes to motivation, the results indicated that the Consumer experiment exhibited significantly lower motivation levels than the Independent Women experiment and the traditional experiment. However, no notable difference in motivation was found between the Independent Women experiment and the Traditional experiment. Furthermore, the analysis of variance for Character Identification revealed significant differences. Specifically, the Consumer experiment exhibited significantly lower levels of Character Identification in comparison to both the Independent Women experiment and the Traditional experiment. However, once more, there was no significant difference in Character Identification between the Independent Women experiment and the Traditional experiment.

Table 2: Post-hoc test results for the Character Identification scale

Variable	I	J	Δ (I-J)	SE	P	A two-by-two comparison
Empathy	Independent	Consumer	0.833	0.163	0.000	Independent>Consumer
	Independent	Traditional	0.113	0.163	0.489	
	Consumer	Traditional	-0.720	0.163	0.000	Traditional> Consumer
Motivational	Independent	Consumer	0.610	0.171	0.000	Independent >Consumer
	Independent	Traditional	0.040	0.171	0.815	
	Consumer	Traditional	-0.570	0.171	0.001	Traditional> Consumer
Identification	Independent	Consumer	0.432	0.120	0.000	Independent >Consumer
	Independent	Traditional	-0.050	0.120	0.677	
	Consumer	Traditional	-0.482	0.120	0.000	Traditional> Consumer

Transportation Scale Variability Test

The analysis in Table 3 yielded notable findings. In particular, emotional involvement exhibited significant variation in the female image experiment, with a p-value of 0.035, indicating a statistically significant difference. However, the remaining variables in the female image experiment did not demonstrate significant disparities.

Table 3: Results of the analysis of variance of the Transportation scale

Variable	Attribute	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	P
Cognitive Attention	Independent	50	3.307	1.086	0.698	0.499

	Consumer	50	3.240	0.976		
	Traditional	50	3.467	0.886		
Emotional Involvement	Independent	50	3.273	1.073	3.420	0.035
	Consumer	50	3.753	0.971		
	Traditional	50	3.687	0.934		
Suspense	Independent	50	3.290	0.881	0.392	0.677
	Consumer	50	3.190	1.025		
	Traditional	50	3.350	0.822		
Transportation	Independent	50	3.290	0.805	1.161	0.316
	Consumer	50	3.394	0.757		
	Traditional	50	3.501	0.468		

Table 4 provides the results of two-by-two comparisons conducted using the LSD method. In the Independent Women experiment, emotional involvement scores were notably lower compared to both the Consumer and Traditional experiments. Nonetheless, no significant distinction was observed between the emotional involvement scores of the Consumer and Traditional experiments.

Table 4: Results of post-hoc tests of the Transportation scale

Variable	I	J	Δ (I-J)	SE	P	A two-by-two comparison
Emotional Involvement	Independent	Consumer	-0.480	0.199	0.017	Consumer> Independent
	Independent	Traditional	-0.413	0.199	0.039	Traditional> Independent
	Consumer	Traditional	0.067	0.199	0.738	

Media Appreciation Scale Variance Analysis

The outcomes of the analysis of variance presented in Table 5 illuminate certain distinctions among the experiments. The variables "Fun" and "Artistic Value" in the Media Appreciation scale demonstrated significant differences, with p-values of 0.015 and 0.018 respectively. In contrast, the remaining variables did not exhibit significant differences; all their p-values exceeded 0.05, indicating a lack of statistical significance in these differences.

Table 5: Results of the analysis of variance on the Media Appreciation scale

Variable	Attribute	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	P
Fun	Independent	50	3.407	0.798	4.290	0.015
	Consumer	50	3.833	0.894		

	Traditional	50	3.367	0.951		
Moving/ Thought Provoking	Independent	50	3.980	0.723	2.124	0.123
	Consumer	50	3.993	0.915		
	Traditional	50	3.680	0.926		
Lasting Impression	Independent	50	3.780	1.023	0.048	0.953
	Consumer	50	3.720	0.922		
	Traditional	50	3.760	1.003		
Suspense	Independent	50	3.007	0.970	0.691	0.503
	Consumer	50	3.040	0.776		
	Traditional	50	2.853	0.780		
Artistic Value	Independent	50	3.213	0.835	4.155	0.018
	Consumer	50	3.640	0.799		
	Traditional	50	3.200	0.962		
Media Appreciation	Independent	50	3.477	0.676	2.752	0.067
	Consumer	50	3.645	0.534		
	Traditional	50	3.372	0.541		

As shown in Table 6 in terms of Fun, the results indicate that the Consumer Women experiment was found to be more engaging than both the Independent Women and Traditional experiments. Importantly, there was no significant disparity between the Independent Women and Traditional experiments in terms of Fun. When examining Artistic Value, the data revealed that the Consumer Women experiment exhibited higher levels of artistic value in comparison to both the Independent Women and Traditional experiments. Moreover, no significant distinction in Artistic Value emerged between the Independent Women and Traditional experiments. Turning to audience response, the analysis showed that the Consumer experiment garnered higher responses than the Traditional experiment. On the contrary, the Independent Women experiment did not display any statistically significant difference in audience response compared to both the Consumer and Traditional experiments.

Table 6: Post-hoc test results of the Media Appreciation Scale

Variable	I	J	Δ (I-J)	SE	P	A two-by-two comparison
Fun	Independent	Consumer	-0.427	0.177	0.017	Consumer> Independent
	Independent	Traditional	0.040	0.177	0.821	
	Consumer	Traditional	0.467	0.177	0.009	Consumer> Traditional

Artistic Value	Independent	Consumer	-0.427	0.174	0.015	Consumer> Independent
	Independent	Traditional	0.013	0.174	0.939	
	Consumer	Traditional	0.440	0.174	0.012	Consumer> Traditional
Media Appreciation	Independent	Consumer	-0.168	0.117	0.153	
	Independent	Traditional	0.105	0.117	0.369	
	Consumer	Traditional	0.273	0.117	0.021	Consumer> Traditional

Discussion

In the context of Chinese women's films, Independent Women and Traditional Women both garnered higher levels of Character Identification, though the difference in Character Identification between these two groups was not statistically significant, supporting Hypothesis 1 (H1). Within the scope of Character Identification, the analysis revealed that the dimensions of empathy and motivation significantly differed concerning different female character portrayals. This suggests that viewers expressed greater empathy and could relate to the challenges faced by both these characters. The choice of the two films for this experiment, namely "Siao Yu" and "Send Me to the Clouds," is particularly noteworthy. Despite featuring female protagonists with distinct images, both characters share common goals and aspirations. The emotional resonance that viewers experience is not solely derived from the actions these characters take but rather from the motivations driving their actions, as emphasized by Hamby, Shawver, and Moreau (2020). For instance, Shengnan in "Send Me to the Clouds" grapples with the pressures of family and illness, striving to resolve her challenges independently. Ultimately, she finds reconciliation with herself and develops a profound appreciation for her own identity. Similarly, Xiao Yu in "Siao Yu" faces the dilemma of balancing family devotion with personal independence. Her journey involves relinquishing her identity as a housewife, nurturing her sense of self, and embracing a life characterized by independent value judgments. While these two female characters exhibit distinct characteristics, their narratives both represent the process of women awakening to their independence. Consequently, the audience's recognition of these character types mirrors their recognition of the broader theme of women's awakening and pursuit of independence. Both protagonists deal with the tension between traditional roles and the desire for independence, underscoring the enduring conflict in Asia between women's traditional domestic roles and their engagement in the public sphere, as noted by Hu and Guan (2021).

In the assessment of Transportation, there were no significant differences among the various female character types, thus rejecting Hypothesis 2 (H2). Notably, the sole dimension where distinctions emerged was emotional involvement. The results indicated that both Consumer Women and Traditional Women exhibited higher levels of emotional involvement in comparison to Independent Women. The dimensions of emotional involvement include elements such as "lasting impression," "moving," and "behavioral influence." It is worth noting that "lasting impression" and "moving" are particularly crucial aspects for viewers when appreciating a movie. These findings align with prior research by Wang (2022), where it was noted that a well-developed and skilfully portrayed traditional Chinese female character has the potential to deeply move the audience. Viewers often resonate with her struggles and celebrate her achievements, resulting in a lasting emotional impact that fosters a stronger connection between the viewer and the character. Moreover, as per William's (2021) assertion, a Consumer Woman character in a movie can indeed have a powerful emotional impact on the

audience. This is especially true when such a character defies societal norms, prioritizes self-interest, and displays egocentric behavior. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that this emotional impact can be both transformative and potentially misleading, as it redirects viewers' emotions and perceptions.

Only the portrayal of Consumer Women characters exhibited a significant impact on the measurement of media appreciation, confirming Hypothesis 3 (H3). The results revealed that Consumer Women characters contributed to a higher degree of enjoyment and artistic value when compared to their Traditional and Independent Women counterparts. Specifically, the character of Consumer Women was associated with greater media appreciation than that of Traditional Women. This conclusion aligns with a study conducted by Erhart(2018), which suggested that the depiction of a Consumer Woman in film can offer viewers an escape into a world characterized by opulence, glamour, and material abundance. Immersing oneself in an alternative reality while momentarily setting aside personal concerns can be both exhilarating and enjoyable for the audience. Furthermore, a well-crafted Consumer Woman character can add substantial artistic value to the movie. Through intricate character development, the film can provide a multidimensional character who emotionally connects with viewers by delving into her desires, desires, and motivations. This enriched character portrayal not only enhances the movie's quality but also provides spectators with a more immersive and creative cinematic experience, as discussed by Lee (2018). In addition to offering entertainment value, a Consumer Chinese Woman character can serve as a means to address broader social themes such as consumerism, materialism, and the pursuit of wealth. Research conducted by Li (2021) supports this notion, indicating that films can prompt critical thinking and bolster media appreciation by exploring the intricate and subtle intersections of media and consumer culture. This exploration takes shape through the lived experiences of the characters, offering viewers a thought-provoking perspective on these societal themes.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the audience dynamics of Chinese women's films. It reveals that this genre tends to attract a relatively niche audience, primarily consisting of feminists and individuals with a deep interest in women's contributions to the film industry. Interestingly, despite the limited viewership, Chinese women's characters enjoy substantial favorability among audiences. Viewers gravitate toward specific attributes exhibited by these characters. Independent and Traditional women characters evoke feelings of motivation and empathy in the audience. On the other hand, Consumer and Traditional women characters engender a sense of emotional involvement. Additionally, Consumer Women characters are particularly effective at eliciting enjoyment, artistic appreciation, and media appreciation. It is worth noting that films featuring technological women, as they possess a certain level of entertainment and media appreciation, have the potential to increase the audience for women's films. This expansion can be achieved by facilitating the distribution of women's films across different media platforms. In essence, both traditional and technological mediums can exist in the realm of women's films, as long as they authentically depict women's struggles and provide them with a platform for their voices to be heard. Ultimately, this aligns with the overarching goal of women's cinema.

Future Works

Several promising avenues for future research come to the fore as a result of this study. First and foremost, this study considered the diverse subgenres within Chinese women's cinema. It is plausible that variations in subgenres may exert an influence on how audiences react to these films. Therefore, future research could research deeper into this aspect, exploring how different

subgenres within Chinese women's cinema impact audience responses. Secondly, it is evident that audience measures such as Character Identification, Transportation, and Media Appreciation are influenced by a blend of film quality and the reflection of realistic social values in the films. Future studies might explore the inclusion of perceived realism and attitudes toward women as independent variables that shape the appreciation of Chinese women's cinema. Furthermore, viewers' appreciation of Chinese women's films is intricately linked to evolving social values. Given the nuanced nature of this influence, future research could benefit from conducting qualitative investigations. By delving extensively into viewers' psychological processes, such qualitative studies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, thereby enhancing the quality of findings.

In summary, there is considerable scope for further research in Chinese women's cinema, encompassing subgenres, the influence of perceived realism and social attitudes, and in-depth qualitative examinations of viewer experiences and perceptions.

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