

Awakening of subject consciousness: the analysis of three young main different types of Chinese female representations based on TV series “All is well”

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Keywords: female images, representation, subject consciousness.

Abstract: The representations of female in TV series are not just some fictional figures which aim to entertain the audiences, but the embodiments of social imagination and expectation for woman as well, since body is a complex, meaningful and concrete field that involves in the communication directly. So, in order to find out the connection between female's self-recognition and the representation of them. Base on TV series ‘All is well’, the purpose of this paper is to answer this big question by narrowing it down to several more specific questions: How are Chinese young woman portrayed in ‘All is well’; Which female groups do they stand for; What are the differences and similarities between these females by comparing 3 main images: Mingyu Su, Fei Wu, Li Zhu from the TV series.

1. Introduction

The social expectation for females, especially young women, is changing together with the development of the whole Chinese society and economic status (Kineta Huang and Stella Yiyang Li, 2008). Females themselves are the representation of the construction of social power which reflect the subject identity of the whole society (Heguimei, 2018). So, when talking about female images or female representation, it is actually the subject identity that is being argued which is so different from Beauvoir's analysis about woman, or which is exactly what Beauvoir is looking for: the subject consciousness construction of females (Simone de Beauvoir, 2011).

The three young female images based on the TV series ‘All is well’ are just like a microcosm of the mainstream young female images of the entire Chinese society. Although there are three females who represent different social expectations for females, those women have one thing in common—being independent, which means the awakening of the subject consciousness.

2. The analysis of the three main female images on ‘All is well’

Based on Suzhou, the city with a complex cultural background, the meeting-point of tradition and modernization, this TV series evoked a severe discussion over Chinese family and traditional Chinese parents after launching around the middle of March.

Table 1: The Discussion Trend about “ALL IS WELL” in Weibo

75 thousands (fans number of the official account)

627(the number of Weibo)

| Hot topics of the TV series in Weibo | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ranking | Topics | Fans number | The discussion | PViews |
| Top1 | #TV Series all is well# | -- | 2.11 million | 4.15billion |
| Top2 | #All is well# | -- | 0.71million | 1.95billion |
| Top3 | #All is well Family of Origin# | -- | 0.03million | 0.15billion |
| Top4 | #Yuchang Peng, All is well# | -- | 0.657million | 0.078billion |
| Top5 | #Chen Yao, All is well# | -- | 0.009168million | 0.015billion |
| Top6 | TV Series All is well | 124 | 0.00004million | 0.006605billion |
| Top7 | #Jingfei Guo, All is well | -- | 0.006323million | 0.002993billion |

Data Source: Enyi Source

The table above shows the popularity of ‘All is well’ which indicates that the problem this TV series discusses about is not all faked but a real concern that many Chinese families are facing, and the main characters are the representatives of the major Chinese young females to some degree.

This TV series’ pivotal topic is mainly about a family story and the main characters are three young females who play different roles in this family.

2.1 Mingyu Su (the only daughter of the family): strong woman

The image of Mingyu Su follows the typical strong woman construction mode. Those women are talented, ambitious and of course independent of spirit and those women are influenced heavily by the reform and opening policy which encourage woman to step out of their family and devote for the whole society (Kineta Huang and Stella Yiyang Li, 2008).

Mingyu had a very unhappy childhood because her parents only wanted boys and they always chose to sacrifice Mingyu for their sons, say, allowances, rooms, education chances. So, Mingyu moved out and started her own life at a very young age and she never went back home before the death of her mother.

Mingyu who owns several Villas and fancy cars, has a very successful career, she is the general manager of a large corporation’ branch and she is the only female who is in that position of the whole corporation. Although she starts everything by herself and her family never provided any help when she is in trouble, when she has everything, people around her start accusing her of being cold blood and unfilial since her parents gave her life, which is the main reason for her final success.

Facing all of the accusations, Mingyu chooses to fight against the oppression of the traditional social morality, she refuses to support her father and law her bother when he hit her. Of course, her behavior is quite the opposite of “Harmony is most precious” for most of the people around her.

When it comes to the real world, Mingzhu Dong is a typical strong woman who is at the same situation like Mingyu and laughed by lots of people. Males as well as females, in their opinion, firstly, it is wrong to choose to be active in so called men’s world; secondly, it is horrible to try to escape from the patriarchal tradition. But those women never give in when facing the problems which can be regarded as the most direct challenge against patriarchy.

"I paid all my personal pleasure. I have no friends because I cannot have friends."

-Dong Mingzhu, Chairman and President of Gree Electric Appliances

According to Mingzhu Dong, loneliness is part of her life but she never regrets for being a strong woman and fights against the traditional social concept about female's roles. Now the TV series depicted Mingyu as such a female which reflects the society's rethinking about female roles, and all of the decisions Mingyu made just embodied the awakening of being independent, furthermore, the call for equality.

2.2 Fei Wu (traditional expectation for female's role): a good wife and a loving mother

Different from Mingyu, Fei Wu, the elder daughter-in-law of the family, is a typical Chinese wife. But the funny part of this image construction is that she is not the hater of Mingyu. Seemingly, Fei is the opposite of Mingyu, she tries her best to be a good wife and loving mother. She basically supports every decision her husband makes and sacrifices her own career for helping her husband.

But the scriptwriter wants to express more than just constructs a typical Chinese wife and eulogizes her virtue. Because after experiencing the hardship with Mingyu and realizing how unbelievable her husband is, she chose to divorce with him (they fix it at last, though).

From the society side the image construction of Fei is more important than Mingyu because there are just a few who can really be strong women. However, there are more females who will be wives. So Fei, a woman who lives for her husband for most of her life, finally realizes the important of being herself, living for herself. The awakening of her subject consciousness can encourage more females to look back to their lives and rethink what it could be when they choose to live for their own and to make the decision for themselves (Nan Zhang, 2017).

2.3 Li Zhu (the only child of her family, a princess girl with a decent job and a loving husband): urban woman

Li Zhu, the younger daughter-in-law of the family, is a representative for the only-child generation who is the King of the family and has all of the family's attentions on her. She likes named brands and spends almost all of her money on fashions. Before getting married, she always got family support from her parents though she has a high-income job. After getting married, she spends all of her husband salaries every month.

Li is the happiest female role in the series, because there is always someone else who help her to settle the matters, her parents at first, her husband after getting married. But after the death of her mother-in-law, she has to live with her father-in-law and it is the beginning for her to take responsibility. For Li the independence is not to start a legendary life or to escape from the suppression of traditional concept but to learn to take responsibility by herself.

The image construction of Li is exaggerated but not going too far from the reality, especially for the only-child generation. There are more and more reports criticizing the only-child families for spoiling their kids, girls particularly, which lead to the increasing number of material girls. According to a research conducted by Professor Xiaotian Feng from Nanjing University, the criticisms from the media are not right: those media only focus on several extreme cases and splash them all over the headlines, as a result, the only-child stereotype is more and more serious (Xiaotian Feng, 2005).

3. The comparisons between the three main female images on ‘All is well’

Although the research shows that there is barely any difference between the only-child generation and other generations, because of the mainstream media’s misreport there are too many misunderstandings over the only-child generation. So the image of Li represents the female of the only-child generation. She started acting like a spoiled girl but when she has to take responsibility, she starts to be independent and learns to rely on herself.

The three female characters in the series have different personalities and life paths. Seemingly, they are quite the opposite of one another, but to make dramatic personality conflict in the series is obviously not the scriptwriter’s main purpose for creating them. When analyzing the three characters, we can find that no matter how different they are, they have one thing in common and that is the awakening of being independent, of their subject consciousness.

For Mingyu, being independent means she chooses to challenge the patriarchal tradition and being a supporter who dare to chase opportunity at the so called men’s world for feminism; for Fei, independence is the betray of her own belief, she is born and taught to be a good wife, a helper for man. She is influenced heavily by traditional concept and she is supposed to be a follower as well as guardian for the traditional rules, so her awakening of being independent is of great significance which reflect the revolt of traditional female groups in China, although it is indirect, it is much more meaningful. The image construction of Fei is a complete process of the self-construction of subject consciousness, during the process Fei transforms her role of being a daughter, a wife, a mother into herself. (Joshua Meyrowize, 1985); For Li, the meaning of being independent is more concrete. The awareness for Li of being independent isn’t about the ideology side but the responsibility side. The image construction of Li is the explanation for the misunderstanding over the girls of the only-child generation, some of them are spoiled and become superficial material girls, but the most of them can still take responsibilities when they have to settle their own problem and learn to grow up as a complete person.

4. Summary

Being complete her, being a subject is the real idea that the scriptwriter wants to pass to the audiences. According to data analysis of the audiences:

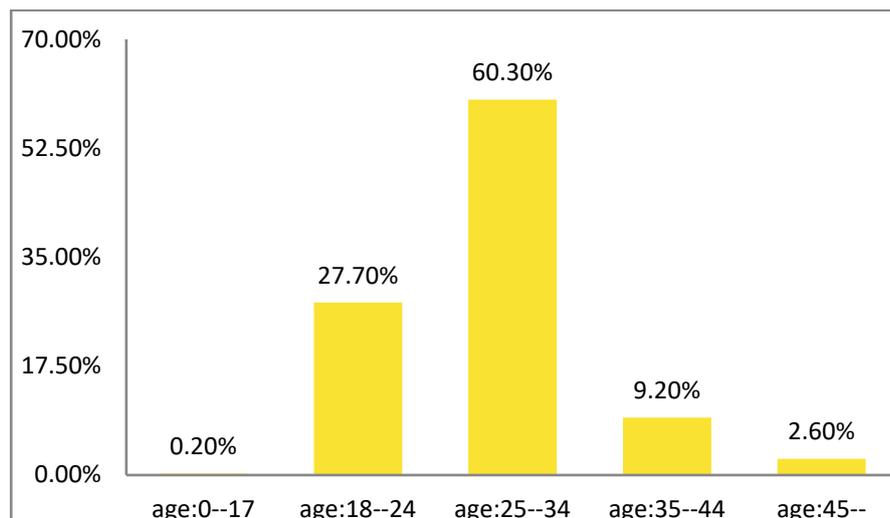


Chart 1: The Fans’ Age Distribution of “ALL IS WELL”

Data Source: AI MAN

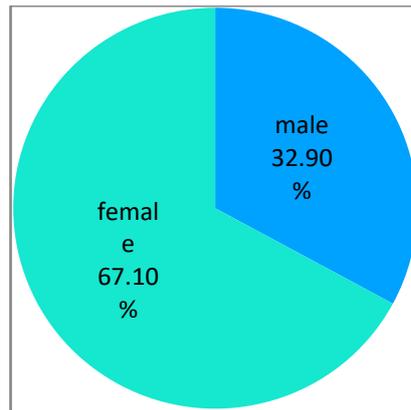


Chart 2: The Fans' Gender Distribution of "ALL IS WELL"

Source: AI MAN

We can learn from the charts above that this TV series has its specific target—young females (among 20—40), and the TV series is not a pandering to their aesthetic taste but an introspection of female roles. Almost every young female in China can find themselves in this TV series; those three characters are the mirror images of Chinese young females. Be influenced by the mirror images, they know themselves better and reshape themselves at the same time (Jasques Lacan, 1949).

The three young female characters represent the mainstream female images as well as their spirit and this TV series emphasize their identity of being the subject which indicates the Chinese society is more tolerant of the diversity of female roles (Yujie Yang, 2017).

Nowadays females' social status in China are improved, but the main reason behind this improvement is definitely not males' generosity but the female groups themselves' realization of being the subject.

This article only focus on the young female characters of this TV series, specifying the age constantly is because there are still other representation of female images over 60 in the TV series, mainly the mother generation which is complex as well and need to be analyzed closely. Some of them are the victims of patriarchy but they become the biggest believers for the patriarchy and victimize their own daughter or daughter-in-law at last. They are pathetic but hateful at the same time; they are the lost souls who never find themselves. So the analysis of these representations is important as well.

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