

# The Shape and Influence of Chinese Variety Shows on College Students' Gender Identity in the Context of Media Diversity

Yumeng Yang

Beijing Normal University – Hong Kong Baptist University United International College, Zhuhai, Guangdong, 519000, China  
yangyumeng0926@163.com

## ABSTRACT

Based on the social background, this paper analyzed the impact of the Chinese variety shows on the gender concept forms of college students. Due to the multi-gender culture, gender concepts have become more and more complex, and there are more voices in gender shaping. College students are the group of people who will become the new socially dominant generation. Therefore, the gender ideologies of the college students are important. This study discovered that, even if most college students have already formed certain personal realizations about gender, their concepts will be influenced by their frequent exposure to the traditional gender roles defined by Chinese variety shows. Therefore, the proper social gender setting needs different efforts from the whole society.

**Keywords:** *gender identity, gender concepts, variety shows, media companies*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the information age, mass media permeate almost every field of social life and play a crucial social role in shaping gender. Under the influence of multi-gender culture, the gender concept conveyed and shaped by modern mass media is not a single gender concept but contains both traditional stereotypes and modern gender concepts.

Television, as a media platform, is one of the most effective media of mass communication, playing a decisive role in the transmission of information, and its intervention in social life is profound. With the development of diversified media forms, variety shows are no longer limited to TV forms, but spread in diversified forms such as network TV and public opinion evaluation. The information environment formed by variety shows that not only imperceptively shapes the cognition and behavior of men and women, but also exerts an influence on gender psychology through this shaping. As a key period for teenagers to enter adulthood, whether gender identity and shaping will also be affected by corresponding programs is unclear.

With the development of human society, people's gender concepts are also changing constantly, or being solidified, changing, or being formed. We are familiar

with gender concepts: "men are superior to women", "men are strong and women are weak", "gender equality", "queer theory" and so on. In nature, gender concepts can be divided into two categories: traditional gender concepts and modern gender concepts—traditional gender stereotypes and various feminist gender concepts. In the information age, as a medium with a strong right of speech, the mass media has almost penetrated into every field of social life and plays a crucial social role in shaping gender. Mass media is closely related to the formation and strengthening of social gender impressions of social members in the process of socialization.

In the journal called *Tradition and Modernity: The Role of Mass Media in Shaping Gender*, written by Li Haiyan, the writer focused on talking about the traditional gender concepts instead of comparing the gender roles in the past and now. Meanwhile, this article also talks about the limitations of mass media, which have further influenced the form and the development of traditional gender concepts in Chinese society. Li said, "Some media workers lack modern gender concepts, which inevitably affects their gender orientation in news reports. The mass media has already become an important part of the market-oriented economy. [1] This journal mainly talked

about the disadvantages of shaping gender concepts in mass media.

In the journal called "A Perspective on Gender Discrimination in Television," written by Wang Xueyujie, the writer focused on analyzing the reasons and the phenomenon of gender discrimination in television. Furthermore, this article indicated that in order to cater to the audience, the mass media takes the dominant symbolic techniques and cultural values as an important medium to show social phenomena. According to Wang, under the operation of this mode of expression, the female image and the image symbol of the female category are ignored, excluded, and even distorted by the masses in the production of mass media culture. That is, the mass media annihilates the female symbolic image. [2]

Based on reviewing the last research on the discussion of gender roles, this paper finds a specific angle in Chinese variety shows to analyze gender shaping. As talked about above, of the two journals, both of them are talking for the whole society. Therefore, this paper chose to do the research on a specific group, college students.

This paper uses the literature review method to explore the definition of the terms, such as gender stereotype and gender role. Meanwhile, the paper also uses the comparison method to analyze the different Chinese variety shows of different gender roles.

In this research, this paper analyzes the gender roles based on the different variety shows, which also represent the different Chinese cultural content backgrounds. This paper aimed to provide some reflections to the Chinese media industry on gender settings in the shows, and the paper also attempted to make some efforts towards multi-gender culture.

## **2. ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF CHINESE VARIETY SHOWS ON COLLEGE STUDENTS' GENDER IDENTITY**

The mass media often view women as others from the perspective of men in an exposed or obscure way, and "copy and paste" the traditional concept of social division of labor between men and women. Women are positioned at the core of family roles and subordinate positions in social roles, while men are in the opposite role position. Through this symbolization of roles, gender stereotypes of social division of labor of both sexes are set up, which further strengthens the concepts of "men work outside and women work inside", "men are social people and women are family people", and falls into the old routine of simply classifying men and women into "public domain" and "private domain" respectively.

In recent years, various TV stations have set off a wave of parent-child reality shows. The seemingly warm

variety shows, however, hide the stereotyped impression of traditional society on the division of labor between genders. Such as "Where's Daddy" and "Daddy is at Home", the titles of these variety shows convey the implicit message that the father is often away from home and the center of his activities is society rather than the family.

Gender stereotypes can be defined as beliefs about certain attributes that differentiate how women and men are (descriptive beliefs) or should be (prescriptive or proscriptive beliefs) [3]. Mass media reports on sexual temperament are still influenced by traditional notions of sexual temperament. For example, in family ethics dramas, when a wife or child has a problem, the first thing they do is call their husband or father for help. In spy or disaster movies, men are often the Captain America-style heroes of intelligence and courage who are called upon to save the day, turn the plot around and save the world. It can be seen that in the mass media propaganda of gender temperament, male temperament is superior to female temperament. Masculinity is not only an essential factor to success, but also a very valuable quality. Femininity, on the other hand, is only suitable for women in domestic affairs, not social affairs. The message is that men are more capable than women, and women should snuggle under their male umbrella. This is a manifestation of inequality between men and women, as well as a reflection of gender discrimination. The mass media perpetuates the idea that men are invincible and women are confined to the traditional gender stereotypes of the family. In addition, this may lead to the superiority of men over women and a women's sense of inferiority, which will also lead to the persistence of "the men dominating women," which is more unfavorable for both sexes to get equal treatment and fair competition opportunities in society.

A third set of stereotypes addresses roles and occupations. Analyses indicate that men are more often placed in the world of work and women in the home; when women are shown in the work place, their occupations tend to align with gender stereotypes. " ([4] For example, in the Chinese variety show called "The Housemen," different male celebrities are invited to attend the show. They will be in charge of doing the housework at home. The audience will be attracted to seeing the show because it is unusual to see the phenomenon in Chinese families.

## **3. TRADITIONAL GENDER CONCEPTS**

As for Chinese traditional concepts, in a family, wife always needs to be in charge of the housework, while the husband needs to work hard and doesn't need to do the housework. In this case, the man who helps to do the normal "family things," like washing the dishes or attending family activities with children, will get praise from others. However, a woman who makes a good living

and does less housework will be regarded as "irresponsible." this cultural background, many college students who grow up in these traditional families may be influenced by their parents or other family members. Meanwhile, the Chinese variety shows related to the gender roles in family will also be a factor that may form this gender stereotypes.

The Chinese variety shows are also the direct appearance of the traditional gender concepts. When watching these variety shows related to the gender, college students will have a reflection of gender identity, because they have certain personal social identity. Although these variety shows are one of the factor to form the traditional concepts of gender, it will also help students to reflect the gender identity and change the traditional concepts.

### ***3.1. The phenomenon of coverage of traditional gender concepts***

In mass media coverage of the modern sexual temperament in urban romances, we often see one or two mildly comical and particularly "girly" male best friends. The mass media's temperamental orientation of men is no longer just the image of tough guys, and the male image presents diversified and even feminine characteristics. A typical representative is the "warm male" who is most favored by girls. The characteristics of a "warm male" are being careful, thoughtful, washing, cooking, and doing needlework skillfully. In addition, the popular descriptions of women, such as "number one woman" and "female tomboy," also highlight the strong side of women. The "man" side gradually gets rid of the stereotyped feminine temperament of female subservience and dependence on men.

On the one hand, the mass media has enriched the connotation of gender temperament, on the other hand, it has also changed the negative influence brought by the stereotype of gender temperament, which is conducive to promoting the survival of men and women in a comfortable and relaxed social atmosphere.

Although modern mass media are still dominated by traditional gender concepts when they transmit and shape gender concepts, they no longer simply spread traditional gender concepts and stereotypes, but integrate modern gender concepts advocated by modern feminist activists, forming the current situation where tradition and modernity are intertwined. This is not the confusion of gender communication in the mass media, but the true reflection of gender communication under the influence of multi-gender culture.

### ***3.2. The reason of mass media transmitting traditional gender concepts***

The reason why the mass media still transmit some traditional gender concepts in modern society is related to the "wide blind spot of gender consciousness" of mass media workers themselves. Some media workers lack modern gender concept, which inevitably affects their gender orientation in news reports. Mass media, as an important part of the market economy, follow the competitive principle of the market economy. "In order to obtain commercial interests, mass media choose women with commercial hot spots as tools to attract people's attention, so as to stimulate the needs of consumers and objectify women" [5]. "Mass media put women in the spotlight to be seen, so that women cannot jump out of the situation that men 'see' and their own 'be seen', but completely ignore the gender issue" [6]. Therefore, the mass media itself leads to the continuous dissemination of traditional gender concepts.

According to cultivation theory, ideas have the characteristics of continuity. Once an idea is formed and accepted by most people, it is difficult to change. Under the ideology of traditional "patriarchy" and "husband's authority", the traditional gender concepts such as "men are superior to women", "men are subordinate to women", "men are the master of foreign affairs, and women are the master of domestic affairs" are very stubborn. Under such social and cultural conditions, the mass media will inevitably be influenced, spreading the traditional gender concept of male hegemony throughout society, infiltrating people's work and lives, misleading people's views of gender, affecting the correct understanding of gender in society, and having a significant negative impact on society. Because of this historical tradition, the traditional gender concept still has great influence.

## **4. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTION**

### ***4.1. Discussion of the shape of Chinese variety shows on college students' gender identity***

While national policies encourage the mass media to spread female-friendly news coverage and ban sexist content, the mainstream media can largely do the same. However, the Chinese government's legal regulations on the dissemination of social gender concepts in mass media mainly focus on pornographic content and women's images, but the media has not formed a restraint mechanism. In addition, the operability of China's legal system and policies is relatively low, especially for the legal system of mass media. Although there are legal norms on the surface, it is difficult to implement them, and there are often problems when there are laws that are difficult to follow or not to follow. In addition, the leaders and staff of the mass media are not able to enforce

relevant laws and policies rigorously, resulting in the failure of relevant policies to play their due role.

With the development of human society, the meaning of some words or idioms has changed greatly, which is far from the original meaning, and this will affect people's recognition of the word. For example, idioms such as "a man goes out to work and a woman stays at home" and "it is better to marry well than to do well" have taken on new meanings. "Men work outside and women work inside" is no longer the traditional sense of men struggling outside to support the family, and women at home to take care of the husband and children, in-laws, and housework. Nowadays, most Chinese people tend to interpret "men working outside and women staying at home" as a voluntary choice between husband and wife to best safeguard the interests of the family on the basis of equality through coordination and equal responsibility. [7] It can be seen that the novelty of the old words gives a reasonable reason for the existence of the traditional gender concept, so it is not reasonable to judge the connotation of the gender concept only according to its literal meaning.

While feminists promoted the awakening of women themselves, they also liberated men. "Men are no longer expected to be a tough guy or a successful man. Men who are treated gently by society now have a more relaxed social environment. " [8]: Therefore, feminists vigorously promoted the dissemination of modern gender concepts and also had an impact on the shaping of gender in the mass media.

#### **4.2. Suggestions**

As Dominic Lasorsa said, "in old and new media alike, the story seems the same: journalism is a male-dominated business, with more male-oriented stories being produced mostly by males." [9] Therefore, in the media industry, the media company should have a reflection on the different angles to develop the variety shows, not only from the male perspective but also from the female perspective. Gender roles in society are always a hot topic, and media companies play a significant role in that society.

Some media workers lack modern gender concepts, which inevitably affects their gender orientation in news reports. The mass media, as an important part of the market economy, follow the competitive principles of the market economy. In order to obtain commercial interests, the mass media choose women with commercial hot spots as tools to attract people's attention, so as to stimulate the needs of consumers and objectify women.

Per the cultivation theory, individuals who repeatedly view television content that promotes traditional gender stereotypes are expected to be more inclined to accept these stereotypes as true and to endorse these beliefs in their lives [10]. Therefore, although the college students

already have a certain realization of gender identity, their personal thoughts will still be influenced by the frequent exposure to the content of variety shows related to gender stereotypes.

With the development of social media, it is essential for colleges to set the courses related to gender roles and gender identity so that students can have an official way to have a better understanding of the different gender identities.

From the perspective of the whole society, it is hard to define the dominant concept of gender roles. Traditional gender identity has existed in Chinese society for a long time and cannot be changed quickly. However, as social media evolves, the gender stereotype will improve if the official media channel can provide a positive guide to direct gender reporting.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the paper finds that in the information age, mass media permeate almost every field of social life and play a crucial social role in shaping gender. Under the influence of multi-gender culture, the gender concept conveyed and shaped by modern mass media is not a single gender concept but contains both traditional stereotypes and modern gender concepts.

In modern mass media, traditional and modern gender concepts are interwoven into shaping gender. This is the manifestation of gender cultural diversity, but also the normal phenomenon of gender concepts from traditional to modern transition. Either traditional or modern gender gender notions of utopia are not women's counterattacks on men, nor do men continue to "conquer," but people in different countries and regions, people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, people of different cultures and beliefs, people of different genders or genders can live together freely and comfortably. Therefore, the mass media should play the role of social tools, spread modern gender concepts, and guide the public to get rid of the shackles of traditional gender concepts.

As for the limitations, the paper didn't design the actual questionnaires to evaluate the group of college students, and the research was based on the literature and existing research. Meanwhile, the definition of traditional gender is based on the realization of Chinese society, and the paper didn't set the background of the whole society.

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