The Presentation of Body Landscape and the Reflection on Problems in Chinese Feminist Films Since the New Century

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Abstract. Since the new century, Chinese feminist cinema has focused on women's survival challenges, striving to highlight women's self-reflection and liberate them from the gaze of others in the cinematic space, constructing a unique discourse for women. However, in consumer society, the representation of female bodies in feminist films still fails to escape the constraints of patriarchal consumption norms, manifesting as deficiencies, objectification, and collective identification in films. The symbolic and pornographic issues surrounding female body representations in feminist films lead to dissonance and fractures between these representations and women's consciousness. Over time, this is detrimental to the development of Chinese feminist cinema.

Keywords: feminist film; body landscape; feminist theory; consumer society

1 Introduction

Since the new century, Chinese feminist cinema has flourished, demonstrating filmmakers 'proactive construction of discourse on women's film survival. Outstanding works in Chinese feminist cinema have achieved both box office success and critical acclaim. However, analyzing feminist films since the new millennium reveals that with rapid economic development and the increasing commodification of consumerist society, the representation of women's bodies in feminist cinema has diverged from feminist ideals.[1] The portrayal of the female body cannot escape the gaze and patriarchal discipline and oppression of male-dominated society. Feminist filmmakers often find it difficult to break free from the influence of social culture in their creative process. The resulting body landscapes in feminist cinema exhibit a lack of authenticity, objectification, and a desire for recognition. The shaping of the female body still fails to escape male gaze, and some films exhibit symbolic and pornographic tendencies, inadvertently catering to the scrutiny of consumer society. In the real world, women lose their courage to fight for and secure tangible power due to the illusion and dislocation presented in the body landscapes depicted in feminist cinema.

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2 Overview of Chinese Feminist Films Since the New Century

Since the new century, Chinese feminist films have focused on women's survival challenges, striving to showcase women's self-care and liberate them from the gaze of others in the cinematic domain, constructing a unique female film discourse.[2] However, in consumer society, the representation of women's bodies in feminist films still cannot escape the patriarchal norms of consumer society, manifesting as missing representations, becoming objects, and collectively recognized bodily landscapes. When discussing feminist films, it is first necessary to define the scope of feminist films. Academia has two definitions for feminist films: the first is from the perspective of the creative subject, considering films directed by women as feminist films, where only when both the director and screenwriter are women can the film more genuinely focus on women. The second view holds that feminist films must be created by women and must center around women. Domestic scholar Guo Peijun argues: "Female directors who consciously observe themes related to women create more standardized female films." This article primarily discusses feminist films that feature women as protagonists, with a clear awareness of female subjects, depicting unique artistic and life experiences of women, not limited to female creators.

2.1 Since the New Century, Women Have Widely Participated in Social and Economic Development

With employment fields further expanding. The female employment rate has remained at a high level, accounting for 43.5% of those aged 18-64 who are employed, while men account for 56.5%. [3]Nearly seven out of ten women are employed, with urban and rural female employment ratios being 66.3% and 73.2%, respectively. As women become more involved in the workforce, demand for films related to women continues to rise. Feminist films frequently enter the public eye, focusing on the unique living spaces and emotional perspectives of women, telling their distinctive stories. From award-winning films directed by female directors like Ma Liwen and Li Yu at major film festivals, to "Hi, Mom" becoming the box office champion during the Spring Festival in 2021, feminist films have gradually moved from niche productions to mainstream commercial films with broader audiences.

In the 21st century, Chinese female creators examine women's emotional lives from a more conscious feminist perspective and stance. Their works often focus on mother-daughter relationships within family life and the growth of young girls. Through generational conflicts among women, they explore the spiritual and psychological worlds of women in a tense family atmosphere. From "The One Who Loves Me Most" to "We Two," "Red Beauty," and "Memory Looks at Me," up to recent works like "Love in the Time of Love," "Goodbye, Nanping Evening Bell," "Spring Tide," and 2021's "Hi, Mom," although these films have different styles and present.[4]

2.2 The Female Body Landscape Is Presented as Missing, Becoming an Object and Being Recognized by the Collective

Since the new century, consumer society has continued to develop, and the spectacle society has gradually taken shape. The main characteristic of the spectacle society is to numb the audience through creating dazzling new entertainment events and hypnotic illusions. In this society, people engage with society through various special media. "Symbols surpass objects, copies surpass originals, appearances surpass realities, phenomena surpass essences" are the primary features of the spectacle society.[5] Consumption is the main driver in such a society, where meaning consumption and value consumption become the essence of consumer behavior. In consumption activities, the significance and value of consumption are mainly manifested through aesthetic meanings and values conveyed by external representational elements such as symbols, copies, representations, and phenomena.

In today's society, the entirety of social life is overshadowed by the constructed social landscape of virtual images, with the socio-cultural system transitioning towards a world inverted through visual representation. Under various symbolic constructions and illusions, the body exists in the form of images rather than physical presence. As a spectacle, the body is observed during performances, and this bodily spectacle has become a new network order and mode of daily expression in the integrated media environment.[6] Contemporary society has become a world that is both embodied and spectacled, where research on bodily spectacles and visual culture intersect with studies on consumerism.

2.3 Presenting the Missing Body Landscape

The dual orientation of consumer culture and visual culture has made our attitude toward the body, whether it be the desire to spy or the satisfaction of curiosity, increasingly significant in the cinematic space. In the lenses of Chinese feminist films of the new century, the bodies of middle-aged and elderly women, as well as disabled women, begin to appear. In the process of shaping these bodies, there is no longer a deliberate effort to cater to the male gaze; instead, they reveal the tender gaze unique to female directors.

On the one hand, female directors in the new century have begun to focus on the survival and inner states of middle-aged and elderly women. For example, the portrayal of a middle-aged woman who has lost her child in "Guanyin Mountain" and the image of a mother suffering from Alzheimer's disease in "Everything About My Mother." These depictions of the bodies of middle-aged and elderly women are rarely seen in mainstream films. On the other hand, the representation of women's bodies remains incomplete. In some women's films, there are always women with physical ailments, whose bodies require male involvement to become complete. In "Send Me Up to the Blue Sky," Sheng Nan is diagnosed with uterine cancer and, before surgery, yearns for an excellent sexual experience. She believes that this can only be achieved with male participation, persistently seeking a man to complete her life.

In the film, the representation of women's bodies is always missing, needing to be filled by men to become complete. [7]Additionally, in new century films, the theme of mothers finding male partners for their daughters is inevitable. In "Spring Tide," Guo Jianbo meets a man through his mother's introduction, yearning for a male partner to fill the spiritual void within women. Women are always searching for a missing partner. In commercially successful films like "Hi, Mom," a significant part of the movie revolves around finding a suitable partner for the mother. Li Leying is dedicated to finding a more suitable partner for her mother, with men becoming an indispensable element in the representation of women's bodies. The portrayal of women's bodies lacks a proactive and autonomous construction of subjectivity.

3 Becoming the Physical Landscape of the Object

Undoubtedly, in women's films since the new century, it is difficult to find body spectacles that carry a clear male gaze, and there are few representations of bodies that carry the connotation of the other as seen through a male gaze. However, as spectacles, bodies need to be performed and also need to be observed. Yet, bodies that perform seem to lack subjectivity and are inevitably driven and lured by objects.

In a society where consumerism is prevalent, the body landscape becomes a symbol of commodification and representation, consumed and admired. However, this body landscape lacks intrinsic meaning and value; it is merely an external symbol or image. In feminist films of the new century, some directors have begun to explore a body landscape that is uniquely warm and specific to women. This body landscape starts from the inner experiences of women, exploring the unique significance and value of the female body in life and emotions. For example, in some feminist films, the female body is endowed with more emotional and spiritual connotations, rather than just being an external symbol or image. This unique warm body landscape of women aims to break down the shaping of the body landscape by consumerist culture, allowing audiences to gain a deeper understanding of women& inner worlds and life experiences. At the same time, this body landscape also provides more possibilities for feminist film creation, enabling female directors to explore and express women lives and emotions more freely.

In feminist films, the portrayal of bodily landscapes often carries emotional and spiritual connotations. These emotions and spirits reflect the sense of identity and shared values among women, reinforcing their collective recognition. In quot;Send Me to the Blue Sky, Sheng Nan is markedly different from the saintly or promiscuous images typically associated with male directors; she dresses more androgynously and no longer emphasizes the so-called. in her body expression. Carnival as a young girl, Xiaomi does not directly display any specific parts of her body. The statue of Marilyn Monroe, a symbol of fashion culture, no longer carries physical significance. Instead, the female body is shaped into a force of resistance and subversion, expressing women. pursuit of freedom, equality, and dignity. This power and pursuit are significant manifestations of women&collective identity and represent an important direction for feminist film creation.

In addition, the body landscape in feminist films also reflects the status and role of women in history and culture. In the film Guanyin Mountainbodies are crafted into cultural symbols and representations, highlighting their importance and status in history and culture. In the movie, middle-aged woman Chang Yueqin attempts suicide by cutting her wrist but is saved. She then goes to Guanyin Mountain with three young men who live in her home. Guanyin holds significant meaning in social culture. This cultural symbol and representation is an important source of identity for women and serves as crucial material for feminist filmmaking.

In summary, in some feminist films of the new century, the representation of bodily spectacles has gradually freed itself from the influence of consumerist culture, exploring a warm and unique bodily landscape exclusive to women. This bodily landscape reflects the sense of identity and shared values among women, as well as their status and role in history and culture. As an important medium in consumer society, the representation of bodily spectacles is very common in films. In films, especially spectacle films, the landscape is a frequent subject of criticism. Conventionally, bodily spectacles in films are often seen as the objectification of others under male gaze, while female bodily spectacles tend to cater to the voyeuristic and fetishistic tendencies of male audiences, lacking a self-aware and autonomous perspective

4 The Presentation of Body Landscape and the Dislocation of Female Consciousness in Chinese Feminist Films

In the new century's Chinese feminist cinema, the representation of bodily landscapes has gradually moved away from the influence of consumerist culture to explore the tender and unique bodily landscapes specific to women. This bodily landscape reflects the sense of identity and shared values among women, as well as their status and role in history and culture. The current social and cultural system is transitioning towards a visually inverted world, where all aspects of social life are encoded into the spectacle. People are captivated by this spectacle, immersed in its visual pleasure and enjoyment, gradually losing their ability to think independently and make judgments. In this spectacle society, the presentation of bodily landscapes also reveals some issues.

From the perspective of deficiency and the other, women should take the initiative in bodily writing rather than submit to male discourse, trapped in the identity subject under the logic of the phallus. In acknowledging differences, women no longer perceive themselves according to male desires. Since the new century, feminist films have shown a warm gaze towards female bodies, but there is a slight misalignment and fissure between the representation of bodily landscapes and feminist consciousness.

The female body is presented in a pornographic manner. Although these films attempt to break free from the influence of male gaze, they often fall into another trap of "objectification," overemphasizing sensory pleasure and visual impact. This pornographic portrayal of the body often leads audiences to overlook its deeper meaning and value, focusing instead on mere visual satisfaction. In the film "The Blood Goddess," Tang Ning more often serves as a pornographic symbol. At the beginning of the film, Tang Zhen sees through a small hole that her nominal sister, Tang Ning, is having an

affair with a family henchman, and Tang Ning's naked body is directly shown. Such depictions in films often involve showcasing women's sexuality

As Chinese society continues to advance and women status gradually improves, more and more female directors are beginning to focus on and explore feminist themes, using film as a medium to express the identity and shared values of women. In recent years, films such as My Sister and ;Everything About My Mother have seen some female directors delve into the challenges and difficulties women face in the workplace, as well as their roles and responsibilities in family and society. [8]These films not only showcase the strength and independence of women but also reveal their efforts in pursuing freedom, equality, and dignity. With the continuous expansion of China film market and the improvement of audience quality, female audiences have raised higher expectations for the portrayal and representation of female characters in films. This has prompted filmmakers and directors to pay greater attention to the needs and expectations of female audiences, leading to more authentic, multi-dimensional, and rich portrayals of women in films.

5 Conclusion

As international cultural exchanges become increasingly frequent, Chinese feminist films are also gradually making their way onto the world stage. Chinese feminist films can gain more opportunities to showcase their works and voice the perspectives of women. At the same time, they can learn from the successful experiences and creative philosophies of feminist films from other countries and regions. The success of Barbie in 2023 has demonstrated that there is a significant market for feminist films internationally, so Chinese feminist films still need to continuously improve their creative standards and expressive capabilities.

The future development of Chinese feminist cinema holds broad prospects and potential. By continuously improving creative standards and expressive capabilities, it can address the misalignment and gaps between the representation of bodily landscapes and female consciousness in feminist films. Strengthening exchanges and cooperation with other countries and regions, and gaining support and attention from the government and all sectors of society, Chinese feminist cinema is sure to achieve more significant accomplishments in its future development.

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