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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Modernity Gaze of Chinese Female Media Image from the Perspective of Consumerism

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ABSTRACT

With the growing development of the market economy and the widespread popularization of feminist cultural trends, the consumption pattern of "her economy" has set off a huge social upsurge in China. The media platform and consumption culture have gradually evolved into an important way for mainstream society to differentiate, symbolize and regulate gender roles. Based on the images displayed by female consumers on the domestic mass media platform, this paper discusses the changes in modern women's gender roles and the new dilemma of gender consciousness from the perspective of consumerism. First of all, this paper expounds the relationship between consumerism and gender culture from two aspects based on a large amount of literature: the symbol construction of "others" and the modernity gaze that is not divorced from male power, and uses the text analysis method to interpret the cultural characteristics of consumerism implied in female media images, reveals the deconstruction of the former gender gaze by the modern female image and the identity construction that has not completed the new modernity enlightenment; Secondly, taking the threshold space as the core concept, it shows how women struggle between the old and new gender norms from the perspectives of the possibility and constraint of female temperament and the autonomy and discipline of female body; Finally, it comes to the conclusion that in order to create a female media image that is really conducive to the construction of social gender, it is necessary to carry out reflective construction in women's own way based on women's own experience and understanding outside the male gaze perspective.

KEYWORDS

Consumerism, Chinese women, media image, modernity gaze

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1. Introduction

Under the multiple interweaving of the concept of equality that has been cultivated for a long time under national humanism, the traditional gender discourse that has been revived in the social media, and the individual elite consciousness that is emphasized and respected in the mainstream market, the contemporary Chinese women present a contradictory and complex image in the consumerist media. On the one hand, by catering to the female economy through consumerism and empowering the voice of the disadvantaged groups in the all media era, Chinese women want to break the image of women's dependency under the traditional vision and highlight women's independent choice and self-determination in life and work; On the other hand, in the newly constructed female image, too much emphasis is placed on fine makeup and curvy figure, and even the more affluent, successful and concerned women are, the more restricted their external image expression is by the mass media. It can be seen that the modern female images do not fully have the characteristics of equal rights in the context of free creation but are still part of the co construction of consumerism and male discourse.

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Consumerism, Chinese media, and female images have presented complex practical problems in the intertwined interactive development, which is inseparable from the localization of Western feminist thoughts. Before the 20th century in China, women were either included in the discourse system of the father's family or placed under the control of the husband's family (Barlow, 2012). After the 20th century, female images and female concepts were divided into Anti Confucian value symbols and revolutionary political categories (Yang, 2004). Under the grand gender issue of nationalization, the essence of the women's movement in modern China is still the women's liberation movement initiated by men. Since the reform and opening-up, the social gender theory of western academic circles and the evolution of Chinese social values have made Chinese women constantly transform and deconstruct the female image under the traditional gender gaze.

It is true that the Western gender theory and the spread of social media have provided a good theoretical paradigm and voice field for the reconstruction of Chinese women's gender roles. However, based on the complicated modern mass media and gender based consumer market, as well as the different social deep-seated mechanisms and political and economic cultures between China and the west, it is worth asking how Chinese women should understand, construct and negotiate the current gender based consumer culture. How to explore, outline and practice gender roles and gender consciousness in the sense of real equality? In this paper, the author first summarizes the female images created by the mainstream social media Tencent Weibo, Wechat, and the mainstream film and television media platforms iQIYI and Tencent through literature analysis and outlines the general characteristics of female image creation on such websites; then, by using the text analysis method, this paper interprets the hidden cultural characteristics of consumerism. Derived from this, analyze the possible impact on the audience and society under the interaction of consumerism culture and new media; we hope to conduct a systematic academic analysis of the relationship between contemporary consumerism, social media, and female images through some visible issues and phenomena and strive to discover and explain the true situation of Chinese women under the alliance of consumer culture and traditional gender culture. At the same time, we also hope to develop a gender communication theory that can take root in China so that the modern female image can find a balance between implementing the official and self ideology and attracting audience consumption.

2. The Mutual Construction of Consumerism and Gender Culture

In contemporary society, mass media and consumerism are working together in pursuit of profit while ignoring the social value orientation. On the one hand, women's media image has been materialized by the media as a consumption symbol to create desire under the background that there is still a large market for traditional male discourse power. The public has been unconsciously implanted with the aesthetic setting of consumerism for women. Such a framed aesthetic orientation regulates women's subjective consciousness and forms the symbolic fixation of "the other", which makes women's media image show homogeneity under the male perspective. On the other hand, with the rise of women's power in the consumer market, a series of media products featuring "feminist discourse" has been widely pursued to conform to the due meaning of feminist values, and a female media image with symbolic value has been constructed; However, after further investigation, these mass media that seem to liberate women are in fact once again caught in a new round of male power gaze, acting on the audience with a hidden and deep-seated consciousness, which is the modernity gaze preset by consumerism after the audience has experienced a brief media carnival.

2.1 Construction of Gender Symbols

In The Second Sex, Beauvoir defined women as the "other" by the concept of existential philosophy and pointed out that in the long history of human beings, men are the absolute subject, while women are the marginalized object and the other under the expectation of men (Baudrillard, 2008). From the perspective of consumption, the image of the other shows a unique gender culture in the collusion of media symbols and consumerism. In his book Consumer Society, Baudrillard (2008) pointed out that people's consumption behavior is not based on the use value of goods but on the pursuit of the symbolic meaning behind products. Consumption has changed from material consumption to spiritual consumption and has become the consumption of "feeling" and "meaning" contained in symbolic goods and services (Chen, 2001). Therefore, driven by interests, consumerism constantly creates the female media image expected by the main male, and the female media image is gradually materialized into a "commodity" to form a symbol of consumption with sensory stimulation. With the media acculturation and dissemination of the high modernity audio-visual integration, women's aesthetic cognition is unconsciously assimilated into the so-called mainstream aesthetics" dominated by male power, and gradually self-identity deepens the attachment to "other." As John Berg said, in the way of seeing, men look at women, women look at themselves to be seen by men, and women become "a landscape" by connoisseurs (Ouyang, 2015). For example, all the women in the advertisements have beautiful appearances, graceful figures, and fair skin. The reason is that for a long time, the idea of male power standards has been filled with consumption media. In addition, the lack of women's subjective consciousness has caused them to fall into the situation of "being seen" by others. Women have become the media tools to attract the audience. With the publicity of the cultural industry, the visual Carnival of the female landscape has been catalyzed. In the long run, in the rigid context of symbol consumption, the media image of women will continue to deepen into the consumption symbol under the male culture, and also deepen the corrupt custom of " gender dualism."

In addition, with the economic development, women who are increasingly becoming the main force of consumption are constantly imbued with the perfect symbols portrayed by consumerism, "exquisite women", "powerful women", "a lipstick that a woman must have in the life" and "the same style of celebrities" always become top search terms on Weibo... On the one hand, consumerism constructs false self-satisfaction through the symbol of commercial products and promotes self pleasing consumption of women's empowerment; On the other hand, it gives the screening function of commodity differentiation, that is, it makes the audience think that the class division of society and community can be broken by purchasing commodities. According to the perspective of symbol interaction theory, commodity symbols can extend beyond the use of value and become the social symbol to highlight the self class. Therefore, "one lipstick" is endowed with a luxury symbol that can transcend class, and "the same style of celebrities" can build an inner identity with idols. However, consumerism is not limited to the consumption of a commodity for the audience but focuses on the birth of a series of symbol consumption needed to become "exquisite women", and at the same time, with the support of the media, it vigorously spreads "symbol culture."

Therefore, under the advocacy of consumerism, the upgrading of consumption came one after another. These symbolic consumptions are actually women's anxiety about themselves, the beautiful yearning based on the male's vision, and the double image shaping of "consumption" and "being consumed", which potentially affect the audience's consumption habits and value judgments. Gradually, women's aesthetic orientation was coerced by consumerism and succumbed to the female media image of symbol alienation. This self deceptive consumption not only failed to "liberate feminism" but also consumed individual uniqueness. The template type commodity information makes women not self satisfied because of their own internal beauty but will try their best to explore the identity assignment brought by a certain commodity, which is a self pleasing "personality liberation" on the surface, but actually a self consumption of capital narrative.

2.2 Modernity Gaze without Departing from Male Power

It is true that no matter from what angle consumerism shapes the female media image, its essence is ultimately for commercial profit. However, it is undeniable that with the help of commerce, all sectors of society have indeed given more discourse empowerment to women. Especially in recent years, with the awakening of women's consciousness, women's power has gradually been paid attention to by market formats, and various programs with women as the main body have emerged. Most of the characteristics of such female media images are: independent and mature, brave and resolute, not afraid of the social definition of women's age, eager for personal liberation and physical liberation, having the same social status and work achievements as "successful men" under the secular definition, and even surpassing and leading the industry to become opinion leaders. In fact, the creation of various film and television works has seen the public's attention to women's power, trying to break the media environment of women's rights aphasia and deliberately weakening the male gaze in the program narration, trying to build a diversified aesthetic, breaking the stereotype of female motherhood, irrationality, and dependence in the traditional concept, and showing the audience the female style of the new era. Among them, the excellent variety shows include Older Sisters Who Brave the Winds and Waves, broadcasted by Mango TV, Rock & Roast III, broadcasted by iQIYI ... The TV series of "powerful women," such as Nothing but Thirty, broadcasted by Tencent. Based on the nature of media communication, consumerism explains the symbolic potential of female images with market orientation. Taking sister riding the wind and breaking the waves as an example, unlike previous programs that tried to create a young, lovely, and soft female media image, the program team changed the aesthetic tendency of the female group style, focused on the mature charm of the 30-year-old sister, and conveyed the positive feminist values that are age-free. The symbol "sister" has also rapidly become a label of women's power. The products used in popular entertainment shows also contain great potential in the consumer market.

However, it is worth noting that behind the carnival of capital, it seems that modern women have broken through the shackles of male dominated gaze, but in fact, they have fallen into the modern gaze of consumerism again. Foucault believes that staring is the most effective strategy for the social discipline of the body. Its main feature is that the explicit control of the power organization over the human body has become the implicit monitoring of the non-specific power source, and the external discipline has become the conscious self-monitoring. The overall rise of female consciousness is a false image of capital narrative; a new round of deeper female value loss and the construction of a "sister" media image is more a means of capital income generation. The content conveyed in the program is still deeply influenced by male chauvinism, showing a contradictory orientation of both breakthrough and compromise. On the surface, Older Sisters Who Brave the Winds and Waves builds a cool and independent female media image. In essence, it is the reconstruction of the female media image by male chauvinism in the tide of the times. For example, in the narrative of the program, the sisters mentioned how to use the psychological strategy of lust and love to send messages to ambiguous objects, how to manage their bodies, and how to dress up, which are essentially catering and pleasing to masculinity, reflecting the lack of modern women's self-consciousness in the perspective of male chauvinism and the modern gaze of male chauvinism. At the same time, the narrative of the program also emphasizes that women should have economic strength. It seems to show women's self-confidence in economic independence. In fact, it invisibly puts double pressure on ordinary women's income and appearance, conveying the value that women should not only be exquisite and beautiful but also be economically independent. In addition, the cosmetics, accessories, and clothing used by "sisters" in the program all show the omnipresent consumption nature of the media communication; through the program, the female audience gained the spiritual Carnival of escaping from reality for a short time, and then fell into the dual pressure of consumerism and male chauvinism culture, adding to the anxiety of self-identity. In the perspective of consumerism, women's media image is the symbol carrier within the framework design and the established image text. Therefore, women's media image is gradually homogenized and typed. Communication undoubtedly strengthens women's stereotypes and instead falls into a new round of self gaze.

3. The Threshold Space of Female Media Image under the Gaze of Modernity

In the late 1960s, Turner enriched the concept of "threshold" on the basis of van genep (Arnold, 2010); it is pointed out that the so-called threshold space is a state between the established social categories or a state that is shelved or even trapped between two different sets of role expectations (Brian, 2000). The intertwined gender power relationship under the traditional and modern perspectives, together with the new consumerism cultural form, has formed a narrow threshold space in which the female media image seeks a gender identity that can avoid risks and self assert.

3.1 Possibility and Restriction of Womanliness

Gender temperament is constructed under the dual framework of social and cultural education, the external requirements of media guidance and discipline, and the internal self acceptance and deconstruction of the gender subject. The traditional gender temperament of both sexes requires men to be bold and resolute, forthright and uninhibited. Men with delicate emotions and sensitive minds are contrary to this discipline and will be excluded by the whole gender culture and be given the title of "pseudo-girl"; However, women have always been expected by society to become sensitive, perceptive, caring, and affectionate. Women who are determined and resolute are regarded as men who lack femininity in the marriage market. In the process of seeking self gender consciousness and pursuing gender equality, modern women constantly deconstruct the rules of traditional gender temperament and explore more possibilities of gender temperament. However, the restriction of traditional gender ideology after self internalization and the alienation after excessive resistance make women fall into a new modernity gaze.

Gender temperament is constructed by social culture and amplified by gender based consumer markets and social media platforms. If it is said that the former has greatly affected the inner temperament of both sexes, the latter has promoted and derived the tendency to choose different types of jobs that adapt to different gender groups.

In terms of character and temperament, modern women have developed a neutral and cool style for women based on the gentle style of clothing in the traditional consumer market. Many fashion bloggers have called on women on social platforms not to be limited to the quiet and soft temperament under the gaze of men but to dare to show the edges and corners of their own internal characters. This type of temperament, which is not defined by stereotyped gender, shows women's self initiative under the empowerment of contemporary media and is the deconstruction and breakthrough of traditional temperament prejudice.

Based on the difference in gender temperament, society tends to choose men as producers in the practical activities in the major fields of economy, politics, and culture, while women are more placed in the division of labor of domestic work. The gender segregation in employment caused by this historical long-term existence further solidifies the difference in gender temperament (Langelier et al., 2021). Now, quite a number of women in China are no longer confined to gender temperament in their professional choice but are really looking at their interests and career prospects. Many women dare to assume the responsibility of leadership and no longer shrink from their small families, which is a great breakthrough.

When we no longer wear gender colored glasses, are no longer rooted in the concept of the gender order, and return to the cognition that temperament is individual, both genders' temperaments will sprout more possibilities.

The author believes that the main temperament constraints faced by modern Chinese women come from the female leadership image copied according to the male leadership image, which can be seen in the popular female-dominated films and television in the media market. The imagination of a powerful woman fits in with the current gender voice of Chinese women who want to be independent. However, the balance between career, marriage, and family has also become a special issue that big women need to face. In the family structure unit under the gaze of men, whether women participate in social production relations or not, housework and childcare are naturally the main responsibilities of women. However, the powerful woman constructed based on the male leadership image has been castrated from her gentle temperament under the collective imagination of social culture. Her intelligence, courage, and strength in her career must be in contrast with the trivial matters she has faced in her marriage and family. The perfection of femininity and men's sense of responsibility in the family structure needs to be promoted at the same time, which is an interactive topic.

In the past, the two sexes have been confined to the dualistic gender temperament standards for a long time. This gender stereotype is one of the important obstacles to the issue of gender equality, which limits the broader personality shaping and

employment choices of both sexes. However, the construction of the new gender temperament is not to completely erase the differences in the temperament of the two sexes, nor is it to completely reconstruct the gender temperament in a subversive way so that the gender ideology of the two sexes can move from one bondage to another. Instead, it is to break the stereotyped gender pattern of either or the other binary opposition, open up a more free space for the development of the gender temperament so that the temperament type is only related to the individual's personality experience and choice, and will not rise to the issue of gender.

3.2 Female Body Autonomy and Discipline

The consumption behavior in the media consumption society is not the only economic activity but also reflects the cultural value and aesthetic orientation of the whole society. In traditional consumer media advertising, men's clothing accessories are linked to their social status, while women's cosmetics and clothing emphasize highlighting women's body curves and appearance characteristics. Under the consumption culture in which goods are painted with strong gender color, the human body has become the most intuitive material carrier to show gender consumption (Xu, 2019). In order to rebel against the materialized ownership of women's bodies by men in the patriarchal society, women advocate body autonomy and freedom of clothing, but they are caught in the new mainstream gender consciousness norms. They do not spontaneously take the square shoulder, swan-neck, and A4 waist of the star models on the large screen as the body aesthetic templates and unreasonably pursue the exquisite life that is widely publicized in the media. It can be said that in the pursuit of physical autonomy, women have once again built up the gender barrier of the modern gaze, which makes the female group self bound.

In Chinese traditional culture, the topic of women's bodies is hidden and taboo. No matter how independent and fruitful women are under the secular definition, once they enter the topic of intimate relationships and body autonomy, they will be bound by the traditional gender roles and fall into a state of instrumentalizing themselves, dwarfing themselves, and not knowing themselves. They can't help criticizing and commenting on their own bodies with the aesthetics established from the male perspective, which is one of the important reasons for female body anxiety. In modern times, some women repeatedly struggle with such abnormal social aesthetic dogma and gradually dare to reconcile with their own bodies and dare to protest against the critical voices on the topic of body.

In addition to the self acceptance of the body, women's self-consciousness in the body is also manifested in the open expression of desire. In the old cultural concept, men's sexual desire was regarded as normal, while women's related demands were regarded as deviant. Women's desire for love is ignored, and they completely obey men's expectations and tendencies. In contrast, modern women are relatively free from such heavy historical burdens and cultural shackles. In addition, for the media, this is a good hot topic, and for the consumer market, it is also a good market gap. Under the multiple effects of market economy, media flow, and concept awakening, modern women's pursuit of physical autonomy is bold and avant-garde but also contradictory and self splitting.

The symbolic value of consumer goods in a consumer society is infinitely exaggerated. As a distinct gender and cultural symbol, women's bodies are also trapped in prison, constructed by power and capital, and become the object of discipline. This kind of discipline is mainly reflected in the desire for consumption created by the sexy aesthetics from the male perspective and the disguised guidance of commercial products on the female body.

First of all, the sexual consumption of women under the male dominated visual culture has a long history and is deeply rooted. In today's highly commercialized society, in order to cater to the curiosity of the male audience, the media and the consumer market have once again materialized and fawned on the female body. Under this background, the body freedom advocated by women on the basis of the male gaze has been attacked by the patriarchal culture. On the one hand, weight loss products, breast enhancement products, and whitening products are popular in the market; On the other hand, the discussion of "whether body display is active seduction" and "sexuality and safety" is in full swing.

Secondly, the concept and standard of "beauty" dominated by consumerism culture are extremely narrow, with a strong industrialization aesthetic template oriented by product sales. We should try to choose the appropriate clothing type according to our own body characteristics, but the current consumer market products are extremely simplistic, and body discrimination is extremely serious. It is difficult for a Chinese woman with a height of 160cm and a weight of 120kg to buy clothes of her favorite style in the mall because the designer has preset a thin body shape for the cutting she wants.

Body aesthetics is the most primitive aesthetic form and the first image displayed in all social interactions. What women need is to find a balance between the independent display of the body and the social sense of propriety. The boundary of this balance point depends on the degree to which consumerism is de vulgarized and less entertained and also depends on the redefinition of body symbols by the mainstream cultural ideology. Only when the bodies of both sexes are re examined under the concept of

health, instead of focusing too much on the young appearance and beautiful body, can women have greater discourse space in the presentation of life, especially the self-expression of old women in the modern era.

4. Reflection on Modernity under Collective Unconsciousness

Swiss psychologist Jung put forward the concept of "collective unconsciousness." He believes that collective unconsciousness is a kind of deposit of innumerable similar experiences passed down from generation to generation on the psychology of members of a certain race, a same psychological tendency, and constitutes mass psychology (Jung & Gu, 1982). China has been a patriarchal society for thousands of years, and the male hegemony in the collective memory has been imperceptibly integrated into the subconscious of Chinese women. To a large extent, Chinese women's self gaze is a continuation of the tradition of collective unconsciousness and is a self-cultivation in a pseudo environment. It can be understood that in the contemporary era when more and more attention is paid to the emancipation of women's personalities; However, it is still unable to completely break away from the underlying logic in the patriarchal consciousness and unconsciously become the object under the patriarchal system. Therefore, while absorbing the positive and independent female values of the new era, contemporary women paradoxically abide by the subtle rules. Once this unconscious unconsciousness is combined with the public opinion field of consumerism, they will easily cater to the female aesthetic symbols in the perspective of consumerism, thus forming a new self gaze and falling into the trap of media consumption.

From the perspective of consumerism, women are often subject to the dual suppression of consumption capital and male chauvinism. Consumerism gives women false symbolic empowerment and uses cultural industry to produce aesthetic Carnival under the constraint of patriarchy. The reasons can be summed up in three points: first, the commercial incorporation of consumerism; second, the collective unconsciousness under the oppression of patriarchy; and third, the lack of women's independent consciousness. Nowadays, although there are many deficiencies in the construction of female images by various media, it is also of groundbreaking and pioneering significance. The modernity gaze of Chinese women will continue to be more deeply and comprehensively shaped in the future. How can we break through these obstacles?

First of all, for media communication, it is necessary to avoid the deliberate aesthetic preference for the male perspective in the process of agenda setting, avoid the gender bias caused by the subjective factors of media gatekeepers in media communication, and build a true, objective and diversified female media image for the Internet public. At the same time, it should also be vigilant against the media events pointed out by Gudio (2007) in the *Landscape Society*, which deliberately creates extreme remarks due to the pursuit of the cultural wonders of the consumer society. For example, when the leader in a certain field is a woman, the title of the media report is described as "beauty leadership..." The media narrative affects the cognitive psychology of the audience. The media organization should show a sense of social responsibility as a mass text and resist the rigid discipline of women by the power mechanism of the consumer society. At the same time, in the Chinese news media, the frequency and quoting probability of male figures in the past were far higher than that of women. Although the frequency of female figures in communication has an upward trend, it can not cover up the loss of women's right to speak. Therefore, media communication should balance the reporting space of both sexes as news protagonists and increase the voice weight of women in the contemporary era when women's voice is weak.

Secondly, women themselves, ideologically, should improve their self-determination consciousness and jump out of the barrier of traditional masculinism and the dualistic opposition of gender. Li Yinhe, a Chinese scholar, believes that staring is a non violent way of discipline that puts people under heavy pressure, without weapons, physical violence, and material restrictions. Just one staring will make her a self jailer (Li, 2005). It can be seen that the unconscious self-discipline of Chinese women is the heaviest constraint that hinders women's cognition. Therefore, in media communication, the reconstruction of women's brand-new image should be based on women's conscious and active awareness of the male power gaze in the collective unconscious and balance the gender culture in social events in an objective and rational way. In terms of action, women should seek monologue self gaze. The online program *Listen to Her* is a monologue type talk show based on women's life, work, and interpersonal from the perspective of women. It is different from the previous variety show, "playing with obstacles," in the nature of women's rights speech. *Listen to Her* takes "she says" as the main theme, and eight real stories are connected, reflecting the real life of women; it is an effective attempt for social media to objectively spread women's stories.

5. Conclusion

With the development of China's modern economy, media communication has entered a new era of consumption. From the perspective of consumerism, the female image in the "economy" era has more autonomy and choice, breaking through the traditional Confucian ideological trend's discipline on Female Ideology, and presenting a female media image seeking ideological liberation, physical liberation, and temperament liberation in the new era. In the process of the evolution of Chinese women's media image, they are also constrained by various powers - the mutual construction of consumerism and media and the contradiction between patriarchal gaze and self gaze. The media image of women tends to change with the role attributes of men

and women in society. On the one hand, in media communication, women break through the traditional thinking pattern and are no longer limited to the gentle and quiet temperament type and rigid gender binary opposition under the traditional male gaze, showing independent empowerment under media communication. At the same time, they also gradually realize the symbolic value and appearance anxiety of consumerism on the female body, not only regarding the aesthetic value spread by the consumer market as the only standard but also showing the self empowerment consciousness of contemporary women.

On the other hand, with the rising of women's discourse power, the patriarchal culture inevitably breeds a new type of gender gaze, which is deeply rooted in the text narrative of the "feminist" TV media. On the surface, these TV media are the breakthrough of feminism, creating a media image of a group carnival. In essence, from the content presented in the program, they are still pleasing and catering to the male dominated culture. This is rooted in the collective unconsciousness under the suppression of gender for thousands of years in China. However, what people often neglect is that the real opposite of the media image of contemporary Chinese women is not men, but women's collective unconscious catering to men, "exquisite makeup, slim body, economic independence..." which undoubtedly emphasizes the self anxiety of ordinary women. The female media image conveyed in the program is an instant and escapist variety effect, which can not truly adapt to ordinary women. Therefore, in contemporary China, where consumerism and female discourse are isomorphic, the construction of female media images still shows ignorant modernity. Based on China's diversified media environment and long-term gender suppression, the future media image and self awakening of Chinese women will still be a pioneering road of continuous deconstruction and construction with a heavy and long way to go.

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