Exploring the Awakening of Female Character Consciousness in Film Works from a Male Perspective

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Abstract: This study focuses on the individual consciousness awakening of female characters created in film works by male directors and screenwriters. Through this study can discover how women's independent consciousness is reflected in the changing times, what kind of existence the female group has become from a male perspective, and how this existence has changed. This study mainly analyzes female characters in films directed by male directors in the mid to late 20th century, as well as in postmodern parts of China and the United States. From the perspective of character portrayal techniques, character traits, image, and other aspects, conduct a search and reading of relevant literature. Through research, it has been found that the awakening of female characters in film art is a profound cultural phenomenon, which not only reflects the status and rights of women in society but also demonstrates the reaction and driving role of film as an art form in social change. In summary, the awakening of female characters in movies is a constantly evolving and changing process, reflecting society's attitude and progress towards gender equality, and providing unlimited possibilities and challenges for the development of female characters in future film works.

Keywords: Cinematographic work, female characters, female consciousness, gender equality, feminism

1. Introduction

In most historical contexts, men often symbolize representatives of all authority, while women often appear as male "service providers" or "consumer goods" [1]. It is not difficult to see in most film and television works of the last century that female characters are still accessories of male characters, and it seems that they will lose their meaning of existence if they are separated from men. This study will focus on the individual independence consciousness awakening of female characters in film works from a male perspective. With the changes of the times, more and more new ideas are emerging, and the mainstream values of different eras are reflected in numerous film and television works from the past to the present. Among them, works involving women's issues highlight women's self-awareness from various aspects. In the movie, they are no longer dependent on men, have their independent thoughts, and have created their world. In the past, traditional feminism only regarded the experiences of white middle-class women, who were opposite to those of white male elites, as a universal experience for women worldwide, while ignoring the issue of internal differences. Therefore, women's subject consciousness, including independent consciousness, the transformation, and

awakening of consciousness, is inevitably diverse and complex, full of internal contradictions, and constantly changing. It can be seen that modern feminism emphasizes the construction of a female world characterized by diverse differences and with a special layout and perspective, supporting the diversification and differentiation of feminism. The ultimate goal of this study is to analyze the female characters created by male screenwriters and directors to discover the changes in men's understanding of women, the existence of female groups from a male perspective in different eras, and how this transformation has been a gradual process from mid-century film and television works to contemporary film and television works.

2.   Female Characters in Movies

In the 1970s, the portrayal of female characters in film and television works began to gradually change, and they began to have independent thinking [2]. For example, Teresa in the film *Mean Streets* directed by the director Martin Scorsese appears in the film as a supporting role. She is the lover of the hero Charlie and the cousin of Johnny. She lives with her boyfriend in a small Italian neighborhood below Manhattan, but unfortunately, her boyfriend Charlie doesn't have a decent job and makes a living by doing black market business and being a subordinate of the mafia. As for her cousin Johnny, there is no doubt that he is a troublesome maker with a hot temper, often causing trouble, and owing a large amount of money to black market businessman Michel but unable to repay it. Teresa can be said to be a clear stream in the small Italian neighborhood. She truly loves Charlie but is very tired of the current impoverished life in small Italy. She yearns for the outside world and shapes an ideal family in this chaotic society. The Lower East Side of Manhattan was one of the areas where immigrants and poor people from different countries gathered. At that time, the overall education level of the residents was not high, and various immigration and racial discrimination issues led to a relatively chaotic situation in the area. In the chaos, there are still two undeniable orders: Catholicism and Mafia. The former ignores reality and blindly teaches people to be good, while the latter ignores human nature and only knows about selfishness. This has led to many young people living in long-term mental confusion and financial scarcity, either integrating into society, contradicting themselves, or giving up on themselves. Teresa has her independent thoughts in this chaotic society. She yearns to break free from this chaos, but her heart is more than enough. As a woman, she is still powerless and can only hope that her boyfriend Charlie can make changes. However, Charlie always pays attention to her black-market work. At the end of the film, the fate of the three after the car accident is unknown, only to know that after a glimmer of hope, The three young people once again fall into endless darkness.

On the other hand, there are films of the same era as *Mean Streets*, directed by Woody Allen in the film *Annie Hall*, in which the female protagonist Annie Hall can also serve as a representative of independent-thinking women of that era. Annie dresses fashionably, has a lively personality, and harbors fantasies about big cities, eager to become a singer. Annie's film style is designed for a girl who is not yet sure who she is. When she first meets Alvy, she often shows nervousness, a lack of confidence, and a sense of security. Before encountering Alvy, her life seems chaotic, and this contradiction and chaos are reflected in her clothing. Her style is strange and unique, often paired with loose khaki pants with antique vests and shirts inherited from Grammy Hall. In addition, she always wears a men's round-top hat. From the first half of the film, it can be seen that Annie, as an image full of confusion about her own life, initially relied more or less on Alvy economically and emotionally, but on this basis, she has also been striving to find her own meaning. Encouraged by Alvy, she walked into the university campus and gathered the courage to participate in singing performances and so on. After breaking up with Alvy, Annie moved to California to pursue her music dream. Later, Alvy flew to California hoping to reconcile with Annie as before but was rejected by her. Now, she no longer depends on anyone. In her love with Alvy, she found her own meaning and

realized what she wanted. Just like the love fades repeatedly mentioned in movies, a person's independent spirit will never disappear. Although Annie Hall's film traces and analyzes the reasons for Alvy's emotional failure from his perspective, on the other hand, it is also a film about women's independence and self-awareness, and Annie's unique style in the film has become a symbol.

Looking at several works by Chinese director Ang Lee were mostly produced in the late 1990s and early 21st century. Refusing to belong to the "other" is a common characteristic of female characters in Ang Lee's films. They dare to resist patriarchy, actively master their discourse ability, and also have control over their bodies. For example, in the movie *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, Wang Jiaolong confronts the representative of male rights, Li Mubai, to seize the Qingming Sword, which symbolizes supreme power, and obtain the freedom he desires, the blue-eyed fox in the film, to satisfy its desires, violently resists patriarchy and replaces it, which reflects the desire of women to pursue gender equality and liberate themselves under the oppression of patriarchal society. Marianne in the movie *Sense and Sensibility* dares to express her emotions and attitudes in the family. Alma in *Brokeback Mountain* has also transformed from initially being introverted in family, emotions, and career to being a woman who holds the power of discourse in family, marriage, and career. They dare to express themselves and strive for social recognition. In *The Wedding Banque*, Wei insists on her wishes in the family and rejects female bodies as male reproductive tools in an unconventional way, she is no longer passive and reserved in her attitude towards her body, but full of initiative and openness. In the past, women's autonomy was often suppressed and constrained, and most women were forced to become tools for men to satisfy their desires and receive religious teachings. Some even sold women as commodities at different prices. The portrayal of women in Ang Lee's films breaks the passive position of women in a patriarchal society and represents a new image of women with their independent thoughts and consciousness.

Entering postmodern works, there have been new differences in the portrayal of female characters, and female characters in animated films have also broken the traditional storyline. For example, two Disney animated films: *Frozen* and *Mulan*. Princess Elsa and Princess Anna in "*Frozen*" are portrayed as independent women who are determined, brave, and self-reliant. They do not need the protection of dwarves or the kiss of princes and overcome countless difficulties with their spirit of fighting against fate. After Elsa's magic was revealed and forced to leave the Kingdom of Allendale, Anna embarked on a journey to find her sister alone. No matter what difficulties or obstacles she encountered, she remained steadfast and even sacrificed herself in life and death to save her sister. At the same time, the film breaks the "standard ending" of a happy life for the princess and prince, and the "salvation" in the film is no longer exclusive to the prince, but a self-redemption between the two princesses. Anna gave up flying to Aisha to block the sword for her. The embrace of the two sisters saved Anna from being frozen by magic. The theme of the film has redefined "true love", and this change is undoubtedly an affirmation of women's status. In the past, women were often labeled as weak, but in the movie *Mulan*, Mulan broke the prejudice that women can only rely on their husbands and children with her indomitable spirit. She trained hard with her unyielding spirit, from being clumsy at the beginning to leading the way in the military camp. With her indomitable spirit, she gained the admiration of her teammates. She can win alone in battle without relying on male power. The Mulan in the film is confident and unrestrained, free from small details, and dares to express her emotions straightforwardly. She does not care about worldly and unconventional perspectives, which completely do not meet the requirements of traditional feudal ethics for women. But this is also a reflection of her spirit. She is a traitor to traditional ethics, and if she does not agree with women, she should be dignified and elegant, abide by women's ethics, and pursue her unique values. After her identity was exposed, Mulan began to contemplate the significance of joining the military. In the end, she understood that joining the army was not only to honor her ancestors and fulfill filial piety but also to prove her abilities. Prove that as long as there is a tenacious, indomitable, and courageous

spirit, women can also overcome their physical shortcomings, break people's prejudices against women, and prove their value. In the film, she said, "Perhaps I'm just doing this to prove that I have the ability so that when I look in the mirror again, I'll see a heroine." This is the climax of the entire drama, where Mulan no longer conceals her true gender, but instead participates in the war as a woman. She demonstrated a strong awakening of self-awareness and pursuit of self-worth, yearning for social identity, and displaying strong feminist characteristics.

3. Comparison of Movies from a Male Perspective and a Female Perspective

3.1. The Traditional Performance of Female Characters in Male Visual Films

In the history of film, the traditional performance of female characters in films created by male directors and screenwriters often reflects the gender concepts and cultural background of society. "From the perspective of social role norms, male choreographers are more influenced and influenced by the consciousness of masculinity. It is difficult to communicate and grasp the experience and psychology of female narrators, and they often consciously and unconsciously go back to the control of the patriarchal central consciousness." [3]. "Influenced by the traditional patriarchal and patriarchal perspectives, the status of women in film and television literature creation is lower than that of men. Women have lived in the male gaze for a long time, and it can even be said that women's lives use the male gaze as an important reference ruler to measure and restrict women's bodies, minds, etc." [4]. Female characters in these movies are usually depicted as dependent on men, and their storylines and development revolve around male characters, rather than as independent individuals. When analyzing the movie "*Mean Streets*", it can see the manifestation of this tradition in the role of Teresa.

In "*Mean Streets*" directed by Martin Scorsese, Teresa is a female character with her ideas and wishes. She is eager to break away from the existing living environment and pursue a better quality of life and personal freedom. However, although she has her own goals, her destiny and story are influenced and restricted by the male protagonist Charlie. Teresa's role shows the subordination of women in a male-dominated world, and she seems to exist to set off the storyline of male characters.

"The female body has been materialized, becoming the object of aesthetics and the object of the male gaze, rather than the personality expression of the female subject itself." [5]. The contrast between the male perspective and the female perspective. In the works of male directors and screenwriters, female roles often lack depth and complexity. Their character development is limited by the needs of male characters and story development, rather than being shaped according to their characteristics and storylines. In contrast, female roles in movies created by female directors and screenwriters are usually more three-dimensional and independent. They have their storyline, not just a foil or love interest for male characters.

The gender dynamics in "*Mean Streets*" reflect society's expectations of male and female roles in the 1970s. Men are seen as actors and decision-makers, while women are seen as passive recipients. This dynamic is reflected in the film, Teresa's storyline and development are completely dependent on the actions of the male characters.

With the passage of time and changes in social concepts, female characters in modern movies have begun to show more independence and initiative. They are no longer just accessories to male characters but have their storylines and developments. This change reflects the evolution of society's understanding of gender roles and the advancement of women in society.

By analyzing the role of Teresa in "*Mean Streets*", one can see the dependence and subordination of female characters in movies created by traditional male directors and screenwriters. This expression is in stark contrast to the independence and initiative of female characters in modern movies and shows the evolution of society's understanding of gender roles. With the rise of female

directors and screenwriters in the film industry, look forward to seeing more three-dimensional and independent female characters appear on the screen, showing the diversity and complexity of women.

3.2. The Image of a Female Character Presented from a Female Perspective

In the world of movies, the narrative methods from the perspective of men and women often show significant differences. Through their works, female directors and screenwriters have demonstrated the independence and depth of female characters. These characters are no longer accessories to male stories but have their positions and developments. This change is particularly obvious in the Disney animated movie "*Frozen*", and the two characters Aisha and Anna are representatives of this trend.

3.2.1. Film Narrative from a Female Perspective

"Intervening in the discourse of film research as a woman means that researchers must always be wary of the penetration of patriarchal ideology, break away from the control of mainstream discourse, and firmly reflect rationally on the process of meaning production, acceptance, and interpretation in the special medium of film from the standpoint of 'alienation'." [6]. Female directors and screenwriters tend to give female characters more independence and depth in their creations. Their stories are no longer just accessories to male stories but have their positions and developments.

3.2.2. Presentation from a Female Perspective

"Once a female director manifests a feminist film, from the beginning, she has a superiority that a male director can never match. This is the life experience brought about by the innate female gender." [7]. When female directors and screenwriters present female roles in movies, they are not just shaping a role, but showing a person's predicament, emotions, and thoughts. Through the sharing of female images and the development of female roles in movies, they discussed the current society's expectations of female roles, as well as the presentation of female characters in various life situations. This way of creation makes the performance of female characters in movies more real and profound.

Female directors and screenwriters have brought new perspectives and depth to female roles through their creations. Aisha and Anna in "*Frozen*" are typical examples of this creative trend. They are not only characters but also flesh and blood characters. Their stories and growth reflect the status and role of women in modern society. This method of creation from a female perspective has contributed a new dimension to the development of film art, and it also provides the audience with a richer and more diverse viewing experience.

3.3. Differences

In the history of film, there are often significant differences in the presentation of female characters in film works from the perspective of men and women. In movies created from a male perspective, female characters are often depicted as weak and passive, while movies from a female perspective show more women's independence and strength. This difference is deeply reflected in Disney's animated film "*Mulan*".

The role of *Mulan* in "Mulan Hua" is a groundbreaking image. She not only breaks the traditional female image but also shows the bravery and independence of women. In the works of male directors and screenwriters, female characters are usually shaped as dependent on the existence of men, while Mulan in "*Mulan*" is an autonomous, strong, and independent woman who can face challenges independently.

In movies from a male perspective, female characters are usually depicted as objects in need of protection, and their storylines and development often revolve around male characters. This way of

portraying rarely gives female characters independent space and depth, making their images often single and lacking in complexity. In contrast, in film works from a female perspective, female characters are given more independence and strength. Their stories are no longer an accessory to men's stories but have their positions and developments. This way of expression makes female characters more three-dimensional and real, and their emotions, decisions, and actions are all based on their wishes and choices.

The success of "*Mulan*" lies not only in its wonderful story and animation production but also in its redefinition of female characters. Mulan's image has been recognized at the cultural level. Her heroic color, race, and dislike of love are different from traditional Disney male and female protagonists because she challenges gender stereotypes and provides a non-princess-centered Disney animation experience.

Through the analysis of the role of *Mulan* in "Mulan Hua", one can see the difference between the female roles in the film works from the male perspective and the female perspective. "The heroine in the story continues to grow in the process of awakening women's consciousness, and through unremitting efforts, she has realized the value of surpassing the men of her generation, and then won the recognition of the emperor who represents the highest authority in the patriarchal society, ending the gender discrimination of her individual in her social environment, and achieving a certain degree of equality between men and women." [8]. Mulan's image not only shows the independence and strength of women but also reflects the evolution of society's understanding of gender roles. As more and more female directors and screenwriters participate in film creation, one looks forward to more three-dimensional and independent female roles in future films, showing the diversity and complexity of women. The success of "*Mulan*" shows that when female characters are given true strength and depth, they can become the center of the story, inspiring the audience, especially the female audience, to pursue their dreams and independence.

4.   Discussion

In the art of film, the awakening of consciousness of female characters is a profound cultural phenomenon. It not only reflects the status and rights of women in society but also shows the reaction and promotion of film as an art form to social changes. From "*Mean Streets*" to "*Wedding Banquet*", one can see that female characters have changed from traditional foil to the core of the story. Their awakening and growth reflect society's attitude and progress towards gender equality. In the future, the development of female characters in film works will face new challenges, but it is also full of possibilities.

"Along with the feminist movement, the image of women has been continuously improved, so that more audiences can see the reality of the awakening of women's consciousness, to pay more attention to the social status of the female group." [9]. The awakening of consciousness of female characters is of great significance in the art of film. For example, Princess Elsa in "*Frozen*" abandoned the traditional image of a princess waiting for rescue and showed a new image of an independent woman. Elsa's story is not only an adventure but also a process of self-discovery and growth. Her strength and determination have inspired countless women to pursue freedom and self-realization. Hua Mulan in "*Mulan*" is a representative of bravery and self-improvement. Her image inspires women to challenge traditional gender roles. Mulan's story shows the tenacity and wisdom of women in adversity. She not only made great sacrifices for her family and country but also proved that women can also succeed in the traditionally male field. "Even if Mulan finally realized his pursuit of value by conforming to the system of "monarchy first", obviously this is a kind of recognition and compromise." [10]. The change in the role of women reflects society's attitude and progress towards gender equality. The role of the heroine in "*Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*" breaks the traditional image of weakness and shows the strength and independence of women. These characters not only show the power of women

in the martial arts world but also show emotional and moral complexity and depth. Their stories encourage women to pursue self-worth and independent life.

The female characters in "*Sense and Sensibility*" achieve happiness through their own wisdom and hard work, reflecting the advancement of women in society. This film shows the sanity and emotions of women in the face of love and family pressure. Their choices and actions not only affect their destiny but also the lives of the people around them.

5.   Conclusion

In the future, the development direction of female roles in movies will be more diverse and in-depth. The film will continue to explore the life status and inner world of women in different social and cultural contexts. The research result of this study is that the awakening of consciousness of female characters in movies is a process of continuous development. In the continuous development of films, the dilution of patriarchy and the enhancement of women's self-awareness. This transformation plays an important role in the awakening and growth of women's self-awareness, and women gradually become masters of themselves. Thus, it is further concluded that it not only reflects society's attitude and progress towards gender equality, but also provides unlimited possibilities and challenges for the development of female roles in future film works; this research provides a lot of valuable reference significance for future research in this direction, mainly affecting the social status of women reflected through movies and the awakening of women, future research should focus more on how to balance traditional and modern values, and how to show a unique direction of female power in the context of globalization for in-depth exploration.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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