# IN THE MIDDLE OF EVERYWHERE: VISUALISING WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY CHINESE FAMILY-MORALITY TELEVISION DRAMAS

## Introduction

Family-morality television drama *(jiating lunli dianshiju)* has become one of the most popular television genres in China since the early 1990s. The storylines of these dramas are centered on the domestic conflicts in which, in most of the cases, urban people are involved; the themes of the stories are mainly about living struggles and ethical issues concerning urban families. As many television drama researchers define, 'genres are one of the ways in which texts are made available to readers, viewers and listeners; they are one of the ways in which meanings are packed and classified'.[1] It thus can be further argued that the formation of a culturally specific genre is imbued within a particular social context; it is a product of the discursive cultural processes determined by the interplay of ideology, politics and economy. From this point of view, therefore, I propose that the issues of the Chinese family-morality television drama as a particular television genre be discussed with regard to the tremendous social changes and the rapid development of the mass media in contemporary China.

'Social reform' has been the major theme of the Chinese society since the late 1970s. Of all the social changes taking place over the last two decades, the relationship between the mass media and the public is the most intriguing. Under the old Communist totalitarian mode of control, the mass media in China were 'first and foremost the transmission of the party line'.[2] For a very long time, the mass media had been labeled as 'the mouthpiece' of the Chinese government; political propaganda

---

[1] Sue Thornham and Tony Purvis, *Television drama: Theories and Identities*, New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2005, p.44.
[2] Chin-Chuan Lee, 'Chinese Communication' In *Power, Money and Media*, edited by Lee Chin-Chuan, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000, p.10.

was the most crucial function of the mass media. With the Economic Reform penetrating the deeper levels of the Chinese society, however, the functions of the mass media are changing. As Hong Kong Chinese media scholar *Chin-Chuan Lee* points out, one of the central problems affecting political communication in the PRC in the 1990s involved the ambiguities and contradictions arising from the relationship between continued state control and the developing economic reforms.[3] As far as the family-morality television drama is concerned, it has been one of the dominant forms of expression of the contemporary Chinese television programs since the early 1990s. According to statistics[4], 20 percent of the television dramas aired at prime time were family-morality dramas in China in 2004. As many Chinese television drama critics claim, the stories of family relations remain the major subject in the contemporary television dramas.[5] The centrality of this genre on the Chinese television screen can be primarily ascribed to the position of the family in the Chinese society. As *Ma Ning* argues, the traditional Chinese family was not only characterized by a hierarchical power structure but also represented a cultural norm system that motivated the individual in his or her social practices.[6] Since the Economic Reform began in the early 1980s, this dominant institution has been increasingly challenged by the emergence of new family ideals and values generated by the social transformations. Moral issues concerning the family system, therefore, have been drawn into the central stage of the public awareness.

In this paper I am focused on the visualization of women in the contemporary Chinese family-morality television drama texts. Given the fact that the family relations have witnessed considerable changes over the last two decades, women are always placed at the center of the family conflicts in the dramatic texts. Furthermore, they are

---

[3] Chin-Chuan Lee, 'Ambiguities and Contradictions: Issues in China's Changing Political Communication', In Chin-Chuan Lee, ed., *China's Media, Media's China*, Boulder, Colo: Westview, 1994.

[4] This figure is quoted from the television drama criticism article titled 'who are women: the images of women in the contemporary Chinese family-morality television dramas' from the Chinese magazine *Sanlian Life Weekly*, October 2004.

[5] See Yin, 2005; Qu, 2005; Zhou, 2005; Lu, 2005.

[6] Ma, 1989.

normally positioned as the protagonists and the subjects of the narrative perspectives. As is argued, melodrama is a 'genre whose conventions make ideologies visible and watchable.'[7] Thus, in order to reveal the ideological factors behind the representation of the women in the drama texts, I need to analyze the narrative and textual practices that make the representation possible. By doing so, I will try to answer three central questions: First, how are women addressed in the televisual order of the contemporary Chinese sexual politics? Second, how are the women's subjectivities on screen influenced by the discursive patriarchal and family idealism in contemporary China? And last, what is the relationship between the representation of women and the representation of the Chinese national identities? Each of these questions will be addressed in independent sections below.

## Literature Review

In Britain and the U.S. the study of the representation of women in television dramas is to great extent attributed to the wave of the feminist television criticism. Starting from about the mid 1970s, as British feminist cultural critic Charlotte Brunsdon summarizes, the feminist television criticism in Britain and the U.S. has developed into two main critical areas: 'first in relation to the study of a genre, a soap opera, and second in relation to the study of the audience'.[8] Many feminist television critics, such as Ien Ang[9], Dorothy Hobson[10] and Tania Modleski[11], have conducted influential research on soap opera in relation to female audiences. Considering the central questions of my paper, however, I am mainly concerned with the analytical approaches of textual interpretation that have been adopted by British and U.S. feminist television critics. According to my literature review, Freudian psychoanalysis and structural linguistics have been used as the two main

---

[7] Mary Beth Haralovich, 'All that heaven allows: color, narrative space, and melodrama' in *Close viewings: an anthology of new film criticism*, edited by Peter Lehman, Gainesville: University presses of Florida, pp., 57-72.
[8] Charlotte Brunsdon, 'Identity in Feminist Television Criticism' in *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader*, edited by Charlotte Brunsdon, Julie D'Acci, and Lynn Spigel, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 115.
[9] Ang, 1985.
[10] Hobson, 1982.
[11] Modleski, 1979.

theoretical tools by most of the feminist television critics in their analysis of the visual texts in the past two decades. For instance, Laura Mulvey's article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' published in 1975 is considered as a classic work of the contemporary feminist television and film criticism in the English-speaking academia.[12] Mulvey's psychoanalytical approach in spectator studies, however, has been under attack for more than two decades.[13] The main argument of her opponents is that the patterning of the spectator's desire and pleasure may be more complex and ambiguous – especially for the female spectators – in films where a female character occupies the center of the narrative.

As far as the research literature on Chinese television dramas is concerned, the landscape takes a quite different look. Compared to Chinese film studies both inside and outside of China, the research on Chinese television drama remains very sparse. Although there has been an increasing number of research works on television dramas since the early 1990s in China,[14] the research is still a great lack of diversity; most of the work is focused on the television drama industry, and there is nearly no attention paid to the relationship between the dramas and the viewers. Furthermore, concerning the textual analytical approaches of the television drama research in China, they are largely inherited from film studies.[15] In this circumstance, therefore, I think it is important to take a look at the Chinese film studies literature, particularly, in relation to the representation of women. According to my observation, although the contemporary film studies in China are generally influenced by the theories of psychoanalysis and structural linguistics introduced from the Western world, many Chinese film scholars hold different opinions on the issues of Chinese films from the classical Western theories.[16] Among these film scholars, interestingly, most of them are feminist culture critics.[17] In her discussion of the gender issues in the post-1949 Chinese films, Chinese feminist film critic *Dai Jinhua* argues that the gender issues of

---

[12] See Bennett, 1990; Thornham and Purvis, 2005.
[13] See Bennett, 1990; Mulvey, 1990.
[14] See Zeng, 2005; Zhou, 2005; Yin, 2005.
[15] See Dai, 2002; Lu, 2005.
[16] See Yin, 2005; Dai, 2002; Cui, 2003.
[17] See Dai, 2002; Cui, 2003.

the Chinese women should be positioned in 'the discourse of history'; she claims that although contemporary Chinese women finally share with men 'the same expansive possibilities' 'they lost the power or possibility of affirming, expressing, and exploring their female sexuality'.[18] Another Chinese feminist film scholar *Cui Shuqin* who is currently based in the U.S. also questions the application of the Western concept of gender difference into non-Western socio-cultural conditions like China; she argues that a limited 'feminist focus on the male/female opposition can obscure differences among women of different nations' and 'multiple subject positions situate the female self not as singular but as interactive with different cultural formations'.[19] At the same time, many Chinese culture scholars in Britain and the U.S. discuss the different trajectories of gender representation embedded in the Chinese film and television texts.[20] In his study of the viewing subject and Chinese cinema in the 1980s, Chris Berry reveals that 'there is a matrix of distinguishing factors among 'gender, distanciation, identification, subjectivities, emulation, and rejection' in the 1980s Chinese films.[21] He argues that these factors reflect 'the tension between the communal and the individual as generated by recent social change and felt by mainlanders in the 1980s'.[22] In the discussion of the early 1990s Chinese television serial drama *Yearnings* (*kewang*), American scholar Lisa Rofel indicates that the post-Maoist discourse of Chinese women has been pulled into the narratives of national identity, which has became a site of divergent discourses of class, gender, and nationalism.[23] Hence, it can be seen that all these film and television critics have paved an important way for analyzing the representation of women in the Chinese film and television texts within an appropriate theoretical framework.

---

[18] Dai Jinhua, 'Gender and Narration: Women in Contemporary Chinese Film' in *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, edited by Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow, London, New York: Verso, 2002, p. 100.
[19] Cui Shuqin, *Women through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press, 2003, p. 176.
[20] See Berry, 1991, 1994, 2003; Chow, 1995; Rofel, 1994; Donald, 2000.
[21] Chris Berry, 'Neither One Thing Nor Another: Toward a study of the viewing subject and Chinese Cinema in the 1980s' in *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, identities, Politics*, edited by Nick Browne, Paul G. Pickowicz, Vivian Sobchack and Esther Yau, 1994, p. 109.
[22] Ibid. p.109.
[23] Rofel, 1994.

I now turn to the genre of Chinese family-morality television drama itself. According to my review of the literature in Britain and the U.S., the cultural functions of television drama in Britain and the U.S. can be mainly described as two: on one hand, a way of public entertainment, and on the other, 'a genre of domesticity' for housewives.[24] In his discussion on Taiwanese film director Ang Lee's *Wedding Banquet*, however, Chris Berry distinguishes the European notion of melodrama from the Chinese notion of family-morality drama. He points out that the European notion of melodrama was translated as *wenyipian* that literally means 'literature and art film' in Chinese because of many similar dramaturgical characteristics between them.[25] As he further argues, the distinction between the European family melodrama and the Chinese family-morality *(jiating lunli)* drama is apparent; it 'produces a tension between two different models of secular subjectivity, one based on psychology and its expression and the other based on ethically-defined social and kinship roles'.[26] In addition, as I have claimed in the introduction, the government heavily controls the production of television dramas in China. Thus, the Chinese family-morality television dramas are playing a significant role in sending political messages to the general public. I argue, therefore, that contemporary Chinese family-morality television dramas remain very serious business--culturally, ideologically and politically.[27]

**Methodologies**

In this paper, I examine three contemporary Chinese family-morality television dramas that have attracted tremendous attention from both viewers and critics in recent years; they are *Hand in Hand* (*qianshou*, China Central Television, 1999), *Ten Years of Marriage* (*jiehun shinian*, Tianjin Television Station, 2003), and *Chinese-*

---

[24] Laura Mulvey, 'It will be a Magnificent Obsession: The Melodrama's Role in the Development of Contemporary Film Theory' in *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, edited by Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill, London: BFI, 1994, 122.
[25] Berry, 2003.
[26] Chris Berry, '*Wedding Banquet*: A Family (Melodrama) Affair' in *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*, edited by Chris Berry, London: BFI, 2003, p.186.
[27] See Yang, 1998; Yin, 2005; Lu, 2005.

*style Divorce* (*zhongguoshi lihun*, Nanjing Television Station, 2004). By analyzing these dramatic texts, I attempt to identify and elucidate those formal mechanisms specific to the representation of women in contemporary Chinese family-morality television dramas and how they work in relation to dominant political and cultural discourses that legitimate the existing political order with recourse to the normative structure of Chinese culture.

Unlike most of the previous research work on the Chinese television drama industry that was generally conducted within the theoretical framework of political economy,[28] this paper entails an analytical approach of textual interpretation. The textual interpretation here is comprised of narrative analysis and textual analysis. Narrative analysis concerns not only the structural characteristics of a particular text that provide 'a sense of a beginning, a middle, an end, with endless junctions in between these three major time points'[29] but also the discourse characteristics of the text that can be unraveled as 'how is what told by whom'. As for textual analysis, in the case of television drama, it is aimed at deconstructing the audio-visual elements that constitute a particular text, such as shots, camera angles, sequences, character perspectives, narrations, dialogues, monologues, natural sound and music. The research method of textual interpretation, as I would argue, is of unique importance in the study of television drama in contemporary China. First, the Chinese television drama text can be seen as a special ideological project in which the institutional forces like cultural policy and the textual practices like individual's narrative co-exist. In dealing with the social inscriptions of the family-morality television dramatic text, therefore, one needs to unfold the particular social, cultural, political and historical conditions of a given text by textual interpretation. Second, as Chinese film scholar *Ma Ning* argues in his discussion of Chinese family melodrama of the early 1980s, 'since ancient times, Chinese cultural production has tended toward a fusion of history and fiction with emphasis on didacticism' (*wenyizaidao*).[30] This tradition of

---

[28] See Zhou, 2005; Zeng, 2005; Liu, 2005.
[29] Sue Thornham and Tony Purvis, *Television drama: Theories and Identities*, New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2005, p.31.
[30] Ma Ning, 'Symbolic Representation and Symbolic Violence: Chinese Family Melodrama of the Early 1980s' in East-West Film Journal, 4, No. 1, 1989, p. 83.

cultural production has thus led to the formal quality of the Chinese narrative text that is suggested by Ma as 'the textualization of the context'.[31] *Ma Ning*'s argument of 'the textualization of the context' in the Chinese narrative text, according to my understanding, is derived from the fact that the authoritarian politics in China render the discursive power relations between the dominant political discourse and the text. Hence, it can be argued that analyzing the textual contradictions of a dramatic text can result in one's grasp of the socio-political conditions of its context. In the study of the televisualization of women in the family-morality television dramas, then, I argue that the method of textual interpretation is critical to address the political link between the construction of women and the cultural regulations.

**Part One: Social transformation, culture regulation and the televisual order of sexual politics**

The popularity of family-morality television drama in China is primarily attributable to the formation of a national television drama market, both technologically and socially. Although television production and transmission began in the late 1950s, it was not until the *Deng*-launched Economic Reform (starting in 1978) that the number of television stations as well as the number of television sets proliferated. According to Chinese media scholar *Zeng*, by the end of 2002 nearly every urban household had its own set, with China's television network estimated to reach 78 percent of the population.[32] At the same time, the widespread use of the satellite television technology has given great push to the booming of the television content industry since the early 1990s. In the 1980s, China's television broadcasting system was operating on five levels: the state, the province, the city, the state-owned enterprise and the medium-sized town. This hierarchal system, as a result of the authoritarian politics, was aimed to ensure that economic stability and political power remains intact on the regional level. At the time, China Central Television (CCTV), the biggest

---

[31] Ibid, p. 83.
[32] Zeng, 2005.

national television station in China, was the only satellite television channel. With the urbanization movement taking increasingly faster steps since the early 1990s, the conflicts between the old television broadcasting system and the rapidly growing market demand for popular culture products emerged. In response to the conflicts, then, the Chinese government adopted the 'Get on Board the Satellite' (*shangxing*) policy in 1990. By the end of 2003 there have been around 50 satellite television channels in China. Thus, the introduction of the 'Get on Board the Satellite' policy has led to the construction of a nationwide satellite television-broadcasting network in China. The formation of the satellite television broadcasting network is claimed to be a milestone of the development of Chinese television industry;[33] on one hand, it results in the rise of television consumerism, and on the other hand, it witnesses the multifarious televisualization of the socio-cultural changes taking place in every corner of this post-socialist country. The popularity of the family-morality television dramas, for example, reflects the great market demand from those who are the middle-aged couples of urban nuclear families as they are experiencing family crisis created by the socio-cultural changes. Launched in the late 1970s, reform of the socialist state-owned economy has influenced the Chinese people's lives with irresistible force. This unprecedented reform is characterized as the marketizaiton of the old planned economic system and the absorption of foreign investment. In the urban areas, the past two decades have seen the decline of heavy manufacturing, the growth of service sector employment, multiplying privately-owned enterprises and the global reach of capitalism. Associated with these seemingly positive changes, however, are the rise of unemployment, the increasingly fierce competition in the labor market, and the dislocation of cultural continuity. As Chinese media scholar *Ping Fu* argues in her discussion of visualizing the social transformation in China, 'we see an emerging dichotomy of China and the world, the rural and the urban, the individual and the collective, the traditional and the modern, and woman and man'.[34] The wave of the family-morality television dramas as the cultural representations of

---

[33] See Yin, 2005; Zeng, 2005; Zhou, 2005.
[34] Ping Fu, '*Ermo*: (Tele) visualising Urban/Rural Transformation' in *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*, edited by Chris Berry, London: BFI, 2003, p. 74.

the changing family moral relations thus emerged under these conditions of state retreat and marketization.

The plots of the family-morality television dramas are very generic; the protagonists of the dramas are normally a couple in their thirties who have a small child, are well-educated, burdened with working pressure and confronted with divorce crisis. Very briefly, I will introduce the synopsis of my researched drama texts. In *Hand in Hand*, *Zhong* (husband) is a talented computer engineer who is obsessed with work but failing to pay enough attention to his wife *Xia*. *Xia* holds good qualifications, but she gives up her work and chooses to take care of family. Although *Xia* hopes to receive more care and love from the busy-working *Zhong*, *Zhong* is gradually losing faith in the marriage for the sake of *Xia*'s ill-temper and misunderstanding. *Zhong* then falls in love with a young and beautiful girl *Wang*. Later, *Zhong* and *Xia* get divorced. And their divorce is followed by a series of painful incidents involving the parents and their little son. After some ups and downs in their lives, *Zhong* and *Xia* decide to get reunited at last.

In *Ten Years of Marriage*, *Cheng* (husband) and *Han* (wife) are college mates. Once allocated jobs by the government after graduation they get married. Not long after they have a son, *Han* gets laid off in the downsizing of her factory. Luckily, she finds a new job in a small privately-owned company and is soon promoted through hard work. *Cheng* quits his low-paying job and becomes a clothes vendor. Then, a friend of his who runs an advertising company hires him, and he shows outstanding talent in work. Although the couple is successful in their careers, problems occur in their relationship; there is an increasingly wider emotional gap between them. After being attracted to a young girl *Chun*, *Cheng* gets divorced with *Han*. Divorce, again, is not the end of the story. *Cheng*'s company losses a big deal and turns bankrupt. Meanwhile, *Chun* does not trust his love and leaves him. *Cheng* thus makes up his mind to start a new career. At the same time, *Han* decides to go back to university for

new life goals. When *Cheng* and *Han* meet again, they realize that they still love each other and want to get together again.

*Chinese-Style Divorce* is the latest of the three dramas and the only one that ends in complete divorce. *Song* (husband) is a skillful surgeon in a state-owned hospital. *Lin* (wife) is a respected primary school teacher. Faced with the heavy financial load of sending their son *Dangdang* to a primary school of good reputation, *Lin* tries to convince *Song* to work in a foreign-invested hospital for better pay. *Song* is originally reluctant to do so because he aims at a higher official position. Meanwhile, instead of him, his ambitious single-mother colleague as well as neighbor *Xiao* is elevated to the position through financial and sexual bribes. In great disappointment, *Song* quits the job and takes up a post in the foreign-invested hospital. *Lin* leaves her job and engages in domestic work in order to assist her busy husband. Being a full-time housewife, however, makes *Lin* less confident in herself; she becomes extremely sensitive about *Song*'s attitudes towards her. On knowing that she is kept in the dark about *Song*'s taking *Xiao* to attend one of his friends' wedding party, she goes mad because of *Song*'s cheating. Although it turns out that *Lin* misunderstands the collegial relationship between *Song* and *Xiao*, the couple falls into serious divorce crisis ever since then. However, *Lin* disagrees with divorce request by *Song* and she even intimidates him by committing suicide as she thinks that her sacrifice to family is yet to be paid off. *Lin* tries every attempt to save the family but her hysterics have destroyed all hope. Deep in regret and sadness, *Song* and *Lin* finally sign the divorce contract.

Having introduced the social background and the synopsis of the dramas, I now focus on the political significations of the visualization of women in them. As a Foucauldian media studies researcher, I would turn to 'the Foucault effect' in cultural studies for analytical inspiration. According to Australian cultural theorist Tony Bennett, the role of culture in shaping and regulating different kinds of social conduct should be

understood beyond 'those kinds of singular politics which see all fields of cultural struggle as being connected to a generalized struggle of the subordinate against a single source of power'.[35] Based on Bennett's interpretation of the 'Foucault effect', it can be shown that any particular cultural phenomenon is regulated by a certain kind of order that is the result of the negotiation among complicated power relations. In the case of the Chinese family-morality television dramas, a dramatic text can be treated as a mass cultural technology; it not only operates according to contemporary cultural policies but also resides in a system of symbolic representation that is both political and historical. According to the cultural policies of the Chinese Communist Party--the monopoly of political power in China--culture in the artistic sense is a key device for social engineering, and mass media, in particular, are of great significance to educate the general public and maintain mainstream ideologies.[36] The mainstream ideology in contemporary China, as Chinese media scholar *Yin Hong* argues, 'entails the mainstream political ideology around patriotisms, collectivism, nationalism and heroism on one hand, and the mainstream social ideology characterized in a patriarchal family system on the other'.[37] The mass media representation of family issues, especially gender relations, is therefore subdued by these mainstream ideologies. The issue of divorce, for example, remains the most crucial topic in the representation of family relations. As *Fu Le,* a Chinese television drama producer claims, 'family conflicts in Chinese television dramas should end in a happy reunion – a happy reunion ending in the dramas is important for us to survive censorship '.[38] It is worth noting that the Law of Marriage in the People's Republic of China, since its implementation in 1950, has been continuously improved with social development so that divorce is protected as a basic human right according to the law. In the discourse of political propaganda, however, divorce is denounced as a moral crisis endangering social stability and national solidarity. Although divorce has become a common social

---

[35] Tony Bennett, *Culture: A Reformer's Science*, London: Sage, 1998, p. 82.
[36] See Yin, 2005; Zeng, 2005; Zhou, 2005.
[37] Yin Hong, 'Artistic tradition of Chinese television drama' in *Comparative Research on Television Drama between China and America* (in Chinese), edited by Qu Chunjing and Zhu Ying, Shanghai: *Sanlian* Publishing House, 2005, p. 342.
[38] This quotation is from my interview with Mr. Fu Le, a television drama producer of *Hunan Radio and Television Cooperation, China*, 13th June 2005.

reality in contemporary China[39], it remains a very sensitive topic on screen. In the case of my researched dramas, all the couples are confronted with divorce crisis but eventually end in either happy reunion or great regret. More importantly, the three women protagonists are all depicted as taking more responsibilities in domestic work and emotionally suffering much more than their husbands when facing with divorce crisis. As *Yin* further claims, the state intervention of the family-morality television dramas is aimed at both strengthening the public faith in the present social order and at constructing a symbolic system of social justice for mainstream politics.[40] Thus, it can be seen that the televisual order of the gender relations in the family-morality television dramas is determined, first of all, by state interests. Nevertheless, the civil discourse in contemporary China serves as a significant underlying subtext to the symbolic representation of gender relations. While two decades of the Economic Reform has seen the rise of consumerism in China, it has also witnessed the revival of Confucianism that was primarily a form of political and social ethics that was believed to maintain both political and social harmony. As a result, the popularity of family-morality television dramas indicates the pubic awareness of revisiting the traditional family values prescribed by Confucius in the era of globalization. The advocates of neo-Confucian revival, as Chinese cultural studies scholar *Wang Jing* maintains, 'share the Weberian conviction that moral and spiritual values play a constructive role in rectifying the fetishization of Western material culture'.[41] In my researched dramas, the protagonists are challenged by individual self-interest generated by the social transformation, but they, especially women, are portrayed as managing to defend the traditional family ideals. Hence, the ideology of neo-Confucianism is articulated in the televisualization of gender relations in the family-morality dramas. The rise of neo-Confucianism, therefore, coincides properly with the ideas of the governmental cultural policy under the heading of both political and social harmony. It thus can be argued that the televisualization of the gender relations

---

[39] According to a report released by the Chinese Academy of Social Science in 2002, the divorce rate has been on the rise since 1970 in China.
[40] Yin, 2005.
[41] Wang Jing, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p. 73.

in the family-morality television dramas is sustained by a double standard of state interest on one hand, and continuity of traditional moral principles on the other.


**Part Two: Female subjectivity, discursive patriarchy and family idealism on screen**

As is defined, 'narrative concerns the ways in which the stories of our culture are put together'.[42] Thus, narratives can be understood as cultural processes; they are, as is stated by Roland Barthes, universal, common to all societies in many different forms such as oral, visual, filmic, televisual and written,[43] and more importantly, giving shape to individuals' subjectivities. As I have asserted in the introduction, women are always positioned as the protagonists, the centers and the subjects of the narrative perspectives in the family-morality television dramas. It is thus worth exploring how the female subjectivities are created within the dramatic texts in terms of their languages, behaviors and desires.


Although the past twentieth century had seen China's constantly changing historical scenes, a fully developed and independent movement for female emancipation never made its appearance on the center stage of Chinese society. Rather, the discourse of 'the liberation of women' is always employed as the political method of maintaining male-dominated social structure. The issues of gender were integrated into the Communist discourse during the era of Mao. In the spirit of egalitarianism, gender discrimination was defined as the 'leftover of Feudalism' at the time – women were considered to share the same name with their male counterparts: Comrades. Further, to use *Mao*'s words, 'women are able to support a half of the sky'. However, the Maoist theory of gender equality was superficial; the discourse of social 'equality' between men and women was contextualized among state interest, collectivism and

---

[42] Sue Thornham and Tony Purvis, *Television drama: Theories and Identities*, New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2005, p.29.
[43] Barthes, 1977.

class struggles. In this discourse, the gender of women was in effect distorted. For instance, in the 1950s and 1960s, in order to motivate the public to work harder to achieve the Great Leap Forward (*da yuejin*),[44] a series of examples of 'Iron maiden' (*tie guniang*) were set up by the state-owned propaganda media. These 'Iron women', with their steel shoulders and desexualized look, were never even identified as being in different gender statuses from their male counterparts. In the aftermath of the Maoist ideologies, as Chinese feminist film scholar *Dai Jinhua* argues, 'a common thread running through China's culture in the New Era (1950s and 1960s) is the unique equivalence of political expression and gender expression'.[45] In other words, the female narratives on screen were haunted by the authoritative political reflection during that period of history. Since the *Deng*-launched Economic Reform started from the late 1970s, however, the images of women in China have taken a complex look. On one hand, as Chinese Cultural Studies scholar *Zhen Zhang* who is now based in New York argues, 'fashion and new trends discreetly and decidedly began to reshape Chinese women's self-perception and gender awareness'[46], and on the other hand, the movement of historical and cultural reflection triggered by the cultural identity crisis during the era of globalization confines female expression in the field of revived traditional ethics. Thus, it is under these conditions of marketization and the revival of tradition that the family-morality television dramas emerged. Therefore, the family-morality television dramas can be seen as a forum for family-morality debates, an offering to civilization, and most importantly, a stage for female reflexivity.

As I have introduced in the previous section, the past two decades have seen the growth of service sector employment, multiplying privately-owned enterprises as well as increasingly fierce competition in the labor market in contemporary China. With

---

[44] The Great Leap Forward was a radical social movement in 1957 in China. It was aimed to economically overtake Great Britain within seven years and the USA in fifteen years. It completely failed in the end.
[45] Jinhua Dai, 'Gender and Narration: Women in Contemporary Chinese Film' in *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, edited by Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow, London, New York: Verso, 2002, p. 127-128.
[46] Zhen Zhang 'Mediating time: the "Rice Bowl of Youth" in Fin de Siecle urban China' in *Globalization*, edited by Arjun Appadurai, Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2001, p.137.

these economic transformations taking place, the new issues in relation to sexual division of labor have had great impact on both the public and the domestic life in the Chinese society. Therefore, they are thrust into the spotlight of the family-morality television dramas. Take *Chinese-style Divorce* for instance. Set in a city in northern China by the sea, the drama gives a vivid account of the urban family crisis, which, as a product of changing social relations in the era of Economic Reform, is experienced by both men and women in their private lives. The story starts from the wife *Lin* who always complains about her job as a teacher of Chinese in a secondary school. Her income is unsatisfying. When she is increasingly aware of the financial obstacles of sending her son to a secondary school of good reputation, she turns to press her husband *Song*, a skillful surgeon, to get a new and well-paid job in a foreign-invested hospital. The fact that a wife essentially raises a family financial issue here is due to two strands of reason. First, according to the traditional patriarchal norms in China, women are expected to study the subjects of art rather than the subjects of science because the normative standard for a good woman is not supposed to be her practical skills and scientific creativity but her acceptance of and loyalty to traditional patriarchal values. Meanwhile, as a service industry develops increasingly faster with the principles of a market economy being adopted since the early 1980s in China, the labor market has been gradually favorable for those who have qualifications in the sciences, such as computer technology, mathematics and medicine. The liberal arts like language, history and literature, therefore, are losing popularity. In the case of *Lin*, although her science teacher colleagues, most of whom are male, make good money by taking part-time jobs as tutors for senior high school students, she has to live with limited income and accept this crucial fact caused by the rise of market economy – that she, as a Chinese language teacher, proves less competitive than her male counterparts in the teaching career. Second, the rise of market economy has put women to more realistic domestic responsibility than ever before. In the drama, as has been mentioned, *Lin* and *Song* are faced with a big financial difficulty in sending their son to a well-known secondary school – it reflects a serious social problem created by

the marketization of educational sector in contemporary China. In the era of Mao, the education sector was fully subsidized by the government, so education was free to the general public in the title of socialist welfare. After the introduction of market mechanism into the education sector in the late 1980s, however, the education charge has been the major financial cost for an ordinary unclear family in China. In order to sustain the stability and prosperity of a family the husband, normally as the bread-winner, is always obliged to quit a low-paying job and plunge into the risky "business ocean" (*xiahai*), while the wife is compelled to take up the domestic work. In the drama, after *Song* gets a full-time job in the foreign-invested hospital, *Lin* gives up her unsatisfying teaching job and becomes a housewife – as she says to *Song*, 'you just work hard and I will take good care of our family'. From the drama, it thus can be seen that the new division of labor, the sense of duty, and most importantly, the discourse of love have replaced the feudal patriarchal household values.

In her critique of the Chinese women's individuality, *Dai Jihua* demonstrates that one of the predicaments of modern Chinese women's culture is 'its association with the ambiguous, inchoate position of the individual and the discourses of individuality in Chinese culture'.[47] She claims that the core of China's enlightenment culture and literati's spirit is not by freedom, equality, and universal love but by science and democracy that were introduced from the Western world in the early twentieth century.[48] Thus, within the history of China's modern culture, as she suggests, individuals were never able to become cultural heroes at the historical crossroads — the possibility of a solitary female pursing her own lifestyle was even limited because Chinese women normally consider themselves as 'a collective gender' in the face with male-dominated and patriarchal discourse.[49] What *Dai* argues, from my point of view,

---

[47] Dai Jinhua, 'Gender and Narration: Women in Contemporary Chinese Film' in *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, edited by Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow, London, New York: Verso, 2002, p. 108.
[48] Ibid, p. 108.
[49] Ibid, p. 108.

reveals the historical reason for the failure of the women's liberation movement in China. With the rise of cosmopolitan subjectivities rendered by the transnational population flow and the international cultural exchange, however, contemporary Chinese women have seen the collapse of their collective gender of the past. A lot of urban women not only devote themselves to their careers but also choose to be single. Ironically, there has never been a television drama about this group of 'independent women' appearing in contemporary China — the women depicted in the family-morality television dramas remain traditional; they are responsible for elder care, childcare, childbearing, supporting their husbands, instructing the children, and altruistic devotion. Although all of the female protagonists in my researched dramas are well-educated and have their own professional skills, they all make a common decision: to give up their own work and go back home. Take *Hand in Hand* for instance. The wife *Xia* is originally a well-respected senior manager in a publishing company. The husband *Zhong* works in a computer software company but has an unhappy working relationship with his boss. Not having been given enough love and care by *Xia*, *Zhong* has an affair with a young girl *Chun*. On knowing *Zhong*'s relationship with *Chun*, *Xia* feels guilty that she fails to take good care of her husband. Then, she quickly quits her job and becomes a full-time housewife, only hoping *Zhong* will come back to the family. In the *Chinese-style Divorce*, the same plot can be found. When *Song* gets the job in the foreign-invested hospital, *Lin* immediately makes up her mind to give up own job and take up the domestic work. As a Chinese who grew up in the 1980s, I understand the increasingly heavier economic pressure on Chinese nuclear families caused by the Economic Reform, so I would not make much fuss about many urban women's choice of 'going back home'. But I would argue that the fact that career women are always marginalized and devalued in the family-morality television dramas is worth critical attention. In the dramas, ironically, those career women with good achievement are depicted either as being single and mean or as gaining the social status by seducing males. In *Hand in Hand*, Chun is a young, beautiful girl who is ambitious of a working career but

determined to be single. Why she goes out with *Zhong* is not because she really loves him but because she wants to build up a closer working relationship with *Zhong*'s boss so that she can get a job in *Zhong*'s company. In the *Chinese-style Divorce*, *Song*'s single mother colleague *Xiao* is also the same type of career woman. *Xiao* gets divorced with her husband and lives with her little daughter *Niuniu*. Being a single mother, she tries her best to be a role model for her daughter. Although *Xiao* is trained to be a surgeon, she proves much less skillful than *Song*. In order to get elevated to a senior position over *Song*, then, *Xiao* painfully makes herself have a sexual relationship with some of the evaluation panel people. From these women figures, it can been seen that the career women like *Chun* and *Xiao* in the family-morality television dramas thus are portrayed as sad and negative, while the housewives like *Xia* and *Lin* are depicted as unselfish and positive. This extreme polarization of bad career women and good housewives, as I argue, is highly problematic; it is a product of the propaganda discourse of family idealism. As the Chinese television drama producer *Fu Le* says, 'in contemporary China, the 'safest' woman image on screen is supposed to be a good wife as well as a good mother. Chinese audiences still cannot accept strong career women — they are not suitable for the artistic taste of the majority of the audiences'.[50] *Fu*'s notion of 'artistic taste' here, in my understanding, coincides with the political manipulation of the female subjectivities on screen as I suggest; this kind of artistic taste, therefore, is burdened with political interpretation of the mainstream ideologies that the mass media convey.


**Part Three: Space, time and the narratives of national identities**

According to Benedict Anderson, the sense of 'nation-ness' is historically enabled by the development of print technologies. Although Anderson paves a new way towards analyzing the problematic of nationalism as a cultural system, he fails to pay close attention to the particular ways nations have been imagined.  Lisa Rofel, in her critique of Benedict's approach as applied to Chinese nationalism in the era of popular

[50] The quotation is from the same interview that I made with Mr. Fu Le, a television drama producer of *Hunan Radio and Television Cooperation, China*, 13th June 2005.

culture, argues that 'his (Anderson) theory can explain the origin of imagined communities but not plots, climaxes, or denouement.'[51] She claims that a simple description of the administrative structure of the party-state China is not enough for understanding how official power works in the post-Mao era. Rather, she suggests that we take a close look at how the state power in China operates, not merely through its institutions, but 'through the way the state creates itself as an imagined entity'.[52] Rofel's arguments on the operation of the state-power in China give me much inspiration in investigating the ambiguous relationship between the popular culture, (like a television drama) and state power—how do they incorporate individuals into a common sense of 'nation-ness,' as the common sense of nation-ness enables individuals to reflect on their own cultural identities – for example, their social roles in family relations. Hence, as far as the visualization of the women in the family-morality television dramas is concerned, I would argue that it is necessary to reveal the narrative conventions that construct women as icons of national identity.

As I have claimed in the literature review, contemporary Chinese family-morality television drama remains a serious drama genre, culturally, ideologically and politically. This seriousness that manifests itself in the narratives, as I argue, is not only constructed by a verbal means, but also a visual means. According to the Chinese Communist Party, the ultimate purpose of cultural policy was to create the 'socialist new man', both in the ideal and in reality. The principles of 'socialist realism', therefore, have been officially advocated as the crucial standards of socialist art since the era of Mao. Guided by these 'socialist realism' principles, contemporary Chinese television dramatists, on one hand, try to avoid the ambiguities in the cultural representation of everyday life, and on the other hand, pay close attention to the metaphorical association between human agency and natural environment. Thus, cultural symbolism has been part of a unique artistic style in the contemporary

---

[51] Lisa Rofel, 'Yearnings: Televisual Love and Melodramatic Politics in Contemporary China' in American Enthnologist, 21(4), American Anthropological Association, 1994, p. 701.
[52] Ibid, p.704.

Chinese television dramas. However, the cultural symbolism in the filmic and televisual representation has been under attack since the late 1980s. For instance, Chinese Cultural Studies scholar *Wang Jing* casts great doubt on the relationship between verbal and visual impact in filmic or televisual representation.[53] In her discussion of the highly criticized Chinese documentary River Clergy (*heshang*) in the 1980s, she argues that, rather than usurping and supplanting the verbal, the visual has the capacity to complement words to achieve polysemy and ambiguity. River Clergy is a four-part documentary produced by Chinese writer *Su Xiaokang* and was first broadcast on China Central Television in the year of dragon in 1988. Using clear images but essay-style words, the documentary condemns the totem symbol of dragon and the thousand-year-old 'yellow culture' and metaphorically suggests the choice of ocean as alternative to the Great Wall (*wanli changcheng*) and the Yellow River (*huanghe*) which symbolize, as *Su* argues, conservatism and authoritarianism of Chinese culture. The documentary eventually was banned by the government and *Su* himself was accused of Eurocentrism, total westernization and elite culturalism by the general public. As *Wang* reminds us, although River Clergy to some extent 'transcends' the ideological closure determined by the written text, the conflict between the visual and verbal embedded in it results in 'ambiguity' rather than exclusiveness. The cultural symbolism constructed in River Clergy is also evident in contemporary Chinese family-morality television dramas.

Although the scenes of the Chinese family-morality television dramas are mostly shot indoor, empty shots of an outdoor environment are often used in the dramas. In film theory, an empty shot refers to a shot without any person in the frame. Normally speaking, an empty shot has two main narrative functions in a sequence. First, it, otherwise known as an establishing shot, is used to link two indoor scenes by showing the geographic location of the second scene with a picture of its outdoor environment. Second, it is used to designate a time change when two close scenes take place at a different time. However, in many Chinese family-morality television dramas, empty

---

[53] Wang, 1996.

shots have more narrative functions than the two mentioned; they are metaphorically associated with the themes of the dramas. Take the opening sequence of *Chinese-style Divorce* for an example. This sequence consists of 15 empty shots in an urban area. The order and the contents of the shots are like: 1. A long and wide shot of some old apartments with smoking chimneys. 2. A long and wide shot of some newly built skyscrapers. 3. A long and wide shot of some skyscrapers being built. 4. A medium shot of an old detached-flat. 5. A long and wide shot of an old wooden bridge over a brook linking a newly developed area and an old-looking place. 6. A long and wide shot of more old apartments with old smoking chimneys.7. A medium shot of a busy expressway. 8. A long and wide shot of an ocean. 9. A medium shot of an old and narrow path. 10. A close-up shot of an old wall. 11. A close-up shot of a roof of an old flat. 12. A medium and wide shot of an ocean. 13. A medium shot of an old street. 14. A long and wide shot of more apartments.15. A long and wide shot of a harbor with newly built skyscrapers and old apartments standing together along the seashore. In his discussion of the narratives of the nation, Homi Bhabha argues that 'deprived of the unmediated visibility of historicism, the nation turns from being the symbol of modernity into becoming the symptom of an ethnography of the "contemporary" with culture'.[54] Thus, it could be concluded that this opening sequence of empty shots exhibits a symptom of modernity in contemporary China — the co-existence of the old and the new, of the developing and the underdeveloped. Furthermore, these empty shots, especially those close-up shots, incarnate the contrast between the old things and new things, which create a metaphorical effect for this sequence. These empty shots, therefore, set a meaningful context for the story. In the drama, when *Lin* and *Song* live in an old apartment, they lead a happy life and never complain about their economic situations. Plain as their house is, they firmly trust each other. After *Song* makes some money in the foreign-invested hospital and decides to buy a new apartment by the sea, however, a series of problems occur between him and *Lin*. The direct reason of their conflicts is that *Lin* feels that *Song* has been 'westernized' in the

---

[54] Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation' in Nation and Narration, edited by Homi K. Bhabha, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 298.

hospital that he loses interest in her. In order to keep the stability of the family, then, *Lin* has to stop her husband from working in the foreign-invested hospital. All of the sudden, *Lin* changes from an open-minded, modern woman to a protector of the traditional family values. This unbelievable change, as I would argue, would not happen to an urban woman in reality. Rather, the change is the result of a manipulated female subjectivity on screen with the aim to maintain traditional social and sexual order. The last shot of the drama is also worth mentioning. After *Lin* signs the divorce contract with *Song*, she stands against a big window on which a new skyscraper and an old factory building are both reflected. Then, *Lin*'s face and the reflections of the skyscraper and the old building are right in one frame — this image thus reveals *Lin*'s emotional complex about the old and the new, the traditional and the modern.

Having discussed the spatial nostalgia about the traditional Chinese moral values, I would touch upon the historical specificity of the construction of ethnic and national collectivities embedded in the televisualization of women in the dramas: these are both the Andersonian 'imagined communities'. As I have claimed in the second part, with the rise of cosmopolitan subjectivities rendered by the transnational population flow and the international cultural exchange, contemporary Chinese women have seen the collapse of their collective gender of the past. Thus, unlike their mothers and grandmothers who were oppressed by the traditional patriarchal ethic of unconditionally showing obedience to the husbands, modern Chinese women are becoming aware of the importance of romantic love and their own emotional and biological needs within their marriages. While, as Rey Chow argues, if the conception of 'women' was in the past 'mediated by women's well-defined roles within the Chinese family, the modern promotion of the nation throws into instability all those traditional roles'.[55] Moreover, it can be said that the modernization of female's self-perception poses great challenges to the social and sexual order of traditional Chinese society. In order to cast some light on the relationship between the representation of

---

[55] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p.67.

nation and that of women I will compare the narratives of the women from two generations and analyze their metaphorical mutual relations in my researched dramas. According to my observation, the relationship between mother and daughter, or the relationship between the women of older generation and the women of younger generation portrayed in Chinese family-morality television dramas is not only about transmitting cultural traditions but also about telling a lesson. Take *Ten Years of Marriage* as an example. An old couple, *Wang* (husband) and *Zhao* (wife) are *Cheng* and *Han*'s neighbor. *Zhao* used to love a man when she was young. During the Cultural Revolution, the man was sent to a small village by the Party and then got married with a girl there. Later, *Zhao* got to know *Wang* and married him although she still loved her ex-boyfriend. The marriage of *Zhao* and *Wang* is depicted as a dramatic background for *Cheng* and *Han*'s marriage. Whenever *Han* gets angry with *Cheng* about anything, *Zhao* will appear in the scene. Then, *Han* begins to calm down and tells herself to cherish her true love with *Cheng*. These highly dramatized scenes( or, in other words, 'doubling' scenes), in my opinion, carry the cultural meanings of collective identity and considering women as the symbolic bearers of tolerance and stability. In *Chinese-style Divorce*, gender symbols play an even more obvious role in constructing the collective identities. *Lin* has been kept in darkness about her real mother since she was a baby. She was actually born by a woman that her father fell in love with after he had married. Being tolerant and understanding, *Yujie*, *Lin*'s stepmother, not only forgave her husband's infidelity but also took the responsibilities of raising *Lin*. Thus, *Yujie*, as I argue, can be considered as a signifier of unselfish love and national identities in the drama. When *Yujie* gets to know that *Lin* misunderstands the working colleague relationship between *Xiao* and *Song* and almost hurts her son *Dangdang* because of her hysterical mentality, *Yujie* asks *Lin* to leave her house and slaps *Lin* in the face. And she says to *Lin* that 'a woman should keep the stability of the family'. The climax of the drama is that when *Lin* finally decides to divorce *Song*, *Yujie* is so sad that she suddenly dies from high blood pressure. On *Yujie*'s funeral, *Lin*'s father eventually tells *Lin* the truth of her birth. So, *Lin* is lost in

great regret and pain, and she feels punished by her own destiny. British feminist scholar Nira Yuval-Davis suggests that the mythical unity of national 'imagined communities' which divides the world between 'us' and 'them', is maintained and ideologically reproduced by a whole system of specific cultural codes.[56] These cultural codes, as she claims, include 'style of dress and behavior as well as more elaborate bodies of customs, literary and artistic modes of production, of course, languages'.[57] Thus, she further argues that 'gender symbols play a particularly significant role in this'.[58] It can be seen that what Yuval-Davis argues quite fits in the representation of the generational relationship between women in the family-morality television dramas.

**Conclusion**

In this paper I am focused on the representation of women in contemporary Chinese family-morality television dramas. Through some intensive review on the research literature of both the Western and Chinese television dramas, particularly with regard to the construction of women, I come to realize the inappropriateness of directly applying Western feminist film theories to Chinese texts and the necessity of taking cultural and historical differences into account in studying the representation of Chinese women on screen. By analyzing the effect of an interesting combination of national stability and Confucian principles on the dramas, I find that the representation of women in the dramas is regulated, on one hand, by the state interest, and on the other hand, by the traditional moral discourses. Through interrogating the female reflexivity and individuality embedded in the narratives, I find that the Chinese women on screen are domesticated, polarized and oppressed not only because of their unfavorable positions in the market of new division of labor but also because of their being subdued by the discourse of family idealism that is enforced by

---

[56] Yuval-Davis, 1998.
[57] Yuval-Davis, N. 'Gender and Nation' in *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: the Politics of Transition,* edited by Rick Wilford and Robert L. Miller, London: Routledge, 1998, p.28.
[58] Ibid, p. 28.

narrative manipulation. By criticizing the male-oriented nostalgia about the traditional moral values reflected in the spatial narratives and the anti-modern family values embedded in the historical narratives, I find that the women are depicted as playing crucial roles in cultural and political reproductions of national collectivities in the family-morality dramas. All in all, it can be concluded that the representation of women in contemporary Chinese family-morality television dramas is still caught in the middle of those symbolic power relations of domination and exploitation in the ideology of the Chinese modernity. By looking at the construction process of a mediated realty like this, I come to realize the great significance of critical study of the media content in this age of maketization, consumerism and creativity in China.

(8,464 words)

**Bibliography**
Anderson, Benedict Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, New York: Verso, 1983.

Ang, Ien Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination, London: Routledge, 1985.

Azim, Firdous 'Women and freedom' in Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2002.

Bathes, R. Image-Music-Text, trans. S. Heath, London: Fontana, 1997.

Beck, Ulrich, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order, Cambridge: Polity, 1994.

Bennett, Tony (ed.) Popular Fiction: Technology, Ideology, Production, Reading, London: Routledge, 1990.

Bennett, Tony Culture: A Reformer's Science, London: Sage, 1998.

Berry, Chris (ed.) Perspectives on Chinese Cinema, London: BFI, 1991.

Berry, Chris 'Neither One Thing Nor Another: Toward a study of the viewing subject and Chinese Cinema in the 1980s' in New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, identities, Politics, edited by Nick Browne, Paul G. Pickowicz, Vivian Sobchack and Esther Yau, 1994.

Berry, Chris 'Wedding Banquet: A Family (Melodrama) Affair' in Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes, edited by Chris Berry, London: BFI, 2003.

Bhabha, Homi K. 'DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation' in Nation and Narration, edited by Homi K. Bhabha, London: Routledge, 1990.

Braester, Yomi 'Farewell My Concubine: National Myth and City Memories' in Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes, edited by Chris Berry, London: BFI, 2003.

Brunsdon, Charlotte 'Identity in Feminist Television Criticism' in Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader, edited by Charlotte Brunsdon, Julie D'Acci, and Lynn Spigel, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Brunsdon, Charlotte (ed.) Films for Women, London: BFI, 1986.

Carson, Bruce and Margaret Liewellyn-Jones (eds.) Frames and Fictions on Television: the Politics of Identity within Drama, Exeter: Intellect Books, 2000.

Cui, Shuqin Women through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema, Honolulu: University of Haiwai'I Press, 2003.

Chow, Rey Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Chow, Rey Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

During, Simon (ed.) The Cultural Studies Reader, London: Routledge, 1993.

Donald, Stephanie. H. Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China, Lanham Md: Rowman & Littlefield, c2000.

Fu, Ping 'Ermo: (Tele) visualising Urban/Rural Transformation' in Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes, edited by Chris Berry, London: BFI, 2003.

Gunter, Barrie Television and Gender Representation, London: John Libbey, 1995.

Hall, Stuart (ed.) Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices, London: Sage, 1997.

Haralovich, Mary Beth 'All that heaven allows: color, narrative space, and melodrama' in Close viewings: an anthology of new film criticism, edited by Peter Lehman, Gainesville: University presses of Florida, 1990.

Hartley, John Tele-ology: Studies in Television, London: Routledge, 1992.

Hobson, Dorothy Crossroads: the Drama of a Soap Opera, London: Methuen, 1982.

Kluver, Randy and John H. Powers (eds.) Civic Discourse, Civil Society, and Chinese Communities, Stamford, Connecticut: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1999.

Kristeva, Julia About Chinese Women, trans. Anita Barrows, London: Marion Boyars, 1977.

Lee, Chin-Chuan 'Ambiguities and Contradictions: Issues in China's Changing Political Communication' in China's Media, Media's China, edited by Chin-Chuan Lee, Boulder, Colo: Westview, 1994.

Lee, Chin-Chuan 'Chinese Communication: Prisms, Trajectories, and Modes of Understanding' in Power, Money and Media: Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control in Cultural China, edited by Chin-Chuan Lee, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000.

Lin, Siping 'On the gender construction of the Chinese women and the Taiwanese women in the Taiwanese television dramas' (In Chinese), http://140.112.191.178/csa/journal/07/journal_park34.htm, 2001.

Liu, Haibo 'Two forces and their mutual action: influencing on Chinese television drama' in Comparative Research on Television Drama between China and America (in Chinese), edited by Qu Chunjing and Zhu Ying, Shanghai: Sanlian Publishing House, 2005.

Liu, Shuliang (ed.) Appreciating and Analyzing Chinese Famous Films and TV Plays (in Chinese), Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press, 1999.

Livingstone, Sonia M. Making Sense of Television: the Psychology of Audience Interpretation, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1990.

Lloyd, Justine and Lesley Johnson 'The three faces of eve: the post-war housewife, melodrama, and home' in Feminist Media Studies, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2003.

Lu, Haibo 'Transformation of Chinese Ethical Television Drama on Female Angle of View' in Comparative Research on Television Drama between China and America (in Chinese), edited by Qu Chunjing and Zhu Ying, Shanghai: Sanlian Publishing House, 2005.

Ma, Eric Kit-wai 'Rethinking media studies: the case of China' in De-westernizing Media Studies, edited by James Curran and Myung-Jin Park, London: Routledge, 2000.

Ma, Ning 'Symbolic Representation and Symbolic Violence: Chinese Family Melodrama of the Early 1980s' in East-West Film Journal, 4, No. 1, 1989.
MacDonald, Myra Representing Women: Myths of Feminity in the Popular Media, London: Arnold, 1995.

Madill, Anna and Rebecca Goldmeier 'Eastenders: texts of female desire of community' in International Journal of Cultural Studies, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2003.

McGuigan, Jim Rethinking Cultural Policy, London: Open University Press, 2004.

Modleski, Tania 'The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Opera: Notes on Feminine Narrative Form', Film Quarterly, 33/1, 1979.

Morley, David Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies, London: Routledge, 1992.

Mulvey, Laura 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' [1975] in L. Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 1989.

Mulvey, Laura 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by Duel in the Sun' in Popular Fiction: Technology, Ideology, Production, Reading, edited by Tony Bennett, London: Routledge, 1990.

Mulvey, Laura 'It will be a Magnificent Obsession: the Melodrama's Role in the Development of Contemporary Film Theory' in Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen, edited by Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill, London: BFI, 1994.

Prasad, M. Madhava 'Melodramatic Politics?' in Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2001.

Qu, Chunjing 'The Ethical Pursuing and Audience Rating of Chinese Television Drama' in Comparative Research on Television Drama between China and America (in Chinese), edited by Qu Chunjing and Zhu Ying, Shanghai: Sanlian Publishing House, 2005.

Rofel, Lisa B. 'Yearnings: Televisual Love and Melodramatic Politics in Contemporary China' in American Enthnologist, 21(4), American Anthropological Association, 1994.

Striphas, Ted 'A dialectic with the everyday: communication and cultural politics on Oprah Winfrey's Book Club' in Critical Studies in Media Communication, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2003.

Sun, Wanning 'A Chinese in the new world: television dramas, global cities, and travel to modernity' in Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2001.

Thornham, Sue and Tony Purvis Television drama: Theories and Identities, New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2005.

Wang, Jing High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Wang, Jing and Tani E. Barlow (eds.) Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua, London: Verso, 2002.

Yang, Mayfair Mei-Hui 'Mass Media and Transnational Subjectivity in Shanghai: Notes on (re)cosmopolitanism in a Chinese Metropolis' in Underground Empire: the Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism, edited by Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini, London: Routledge, 1997.

Yin, Hong 'Artistic Tradition of Chinese Television Drama' in Comparative Research on Television Drama between China and America (in Chinese), edited by Qu Chunjing and Zhu Ying, Shanghai: Sanlian Publishing House, 2005.

Yuval-Davis, N. 'Gender and Nation' in Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: the Politics of Transition, edited by Rick Wilford and Robert L. Miller, London: Routledge, 1998.

Zeng, Qingrui 'Artistic and cultural Industry of Chinese Television Drama' in Comparative Research on Television Drama between China and America (in Chinese), edited by Qu Chunjing and Zhu Ying, Shanghai: Sanlian Publishing House,

2005.

Zhang, Zhen 'Mediating time: the "Rice Bowl of Youth" in Fin de Siecle urban China' in Globalization, edited by Arjun Appadurai, Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2001.

Zhou, Xing 'Chinese Television Drama in the New Century' in Comparative Research on Television Drama between China and America (in Chinese), edited by Qu Chunjing and Zhu Ying, Shanghai: Sanlian Publishing House, 2005.

**Appendix**

Glossary of Chinese Characters

This glossary contains all the Chinese characters given in the paper in pinyin romanisation. Phrases and names are listed according to English alphabetical order of the first character.

Beijing                               北京

| | |
|---|---|
| Cheng | 成 |
| Chun | |
| Cui Shuqin | 崔淑琴 |
| Dai Jinhua | 戴 |
| Dangdang | 当当 |
| Dayuejin | 大 |
| Fu Le | 傅 |
| Fu Ping | 符平 |
| Han | |
| Heshang | 河 |
| Huanghe | 黄河 |
| Hunan | 湖南 |
| Jiating Lunli | 家庭 理 |
| Jiating Lunli Dianshiju | 家庭 理 |
| Jiehun Shinian | 婚十年 |
| Kewang | 渴望 |
| Lee Chin-Chuan | 李金 |
| Lin | 林 |
| Lin Siping | 林思平 |
| Liu Haibo | 刘海波 |
| Liu Shuliang | 刘亮 |
| Lu Haibo | 路海波 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Ma Ning | 宁 |
| Nanjing | 南京 |
| Niuniu | |
| Qianshou | 手 |
| Qu Chunjing | 曲春景 |
| Sanlian | 三 |
| Shanghai | 上海 |
| Shangxing | 上星 |
| Song | 宋 |
| Su Xiaokang | 康 |
| Sun Wanning | 皖宁 |
| Tianjin | 天津 |
| Tie Guniang | 姑娘 |
| Wanli Changcheng | 万里 城 |
| Wang | 王 |
| Wang Jing | 王瑾 |
| Wenyipian | 文 片 |
| Wenyizaidao | 文以 道 |
| Xia | 夏 |
| Xiahai | 下海 |
| Xian Neizhu | 内助 |
| Xiao | 肖 |