

# A Study on Motives of Chinese Female Audiences for Watching Korean Fantasy TV Dramas

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**Abstract:** *With love as the theme and mythology, ghosts and magic as elements, Korean fantasy TV dramas have set romantic and beautiful plots and attracted a large number of Chinese female audiences. Based on Melodramatic Imagination and Stuart Hall's theory of "encoding/decoding", this paper investigated Chinese female audiences' motives of watching Korean fantasy TV dramas Hotel Druena through the form of focus group interviews to interpret reasons for the popularity of Korean fantasy TV dramas and Chinese women's overall cognition of Korean TV dramas from the perspective of female audiences. Thinking that South Korea's fantasy dramas are good at women's pursuit and desire for emotional elements, women who watch this type of south Korean TV dramas are temporarily relieving pressure of real life, thus satisfying the needs of female gaze and consumption.*

**Keywords:** Fantasy TV series; Chinese Female Audience; Focus Group Interviews

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, as a new type of TV series, Korean fantasy TV dramas have attracted a large number of female TV audiences in China with their fantasy plot design. As a literary concept, fantasy originates from western literature. Zwitani Torodov points out in Introduction to Fantasy Literature that "fantasy is the hesitation experienced by a person who only knows the laws of nature in the face of obvious supernatural events" [1].

In fantasy texts, authors depict "supernatural" events that are unlikely to occur in everyday life. Fantasy TV dramas usually take fictional space and time as the narrative background, "taking supernatural events as the story line, and the characters in the series are classified into mythical or supernatural forces. In their fictional space and time, there is a behavioral evaluation system and value cognition system that are different from the real space and time" [2].

American TV dramas such as *Game of Thrones* and *Westworld* are typical examples of fantasy TV dramas. Different from the American fantasy TV dramas, which integrates heroes, epics, myths and other elements, South Korean fantasy TV dramas combines suspense, magic and other elements with its best love mother title, combines eastern and Western myths and legends and ghost stories to set romantic story plots, trying to satisfy the audience's yearning for better love and life, and catering to the taste of eastern audiences. In particular, *Hotel Druena*, which is popular in China in 2019, integrates the narrative archetype of ghost myth, which is very similar to China's ghost myth stories. Moreover, this TV drama integrates the common values of Eastern culture, such as the Confucian culture that good and evil are rewarded, which eliminates cultural discount and caters to the cultural taste and aesthetic needs of Chinese TV viewers. Therefore, this paper takes *Hotel Druena* as the research sample, selects Chinese female audiences who have watched this TV drama, and conducts focus group interviews with them. This paper hopes to solve is what is the viewing motivation of Chinese female audiences to watch Korean fantasy TV dramas such as *Hotel Druena* and the reasons for the formation of such viewing motivation.

The significance of this paper is that, firstly, this paper adopts the methods of focus group interview and in-depth interview, and analyzes the interview content with Nvivo12, which can provide research methods from other perspectives for the academic field of TV dramas research and enrich the diversity of research methods. Secondly, in the process of investigation and research, this paper focuses on the analysis of the narrative creation of Korean fantasy TV dramas, which can not only promote the classification of fantasy TV dramas in the Chinese TV drama industry, but also provide suggestions for the creation of Chinese fantasy TV dramas. In addition, it is of great value for this study to study the dissemination of Korean TV dramas in China. As the most influential cultural product of "Korean Wave", this paper focuses on the cultural consumption of Korean TV dramas by Chinese audiences and their acceptance psychology of Korean TV dramas, which is also a study on the transnational dissemination of Korean Wave culture.

## 2.Theoretical background and literature review

In *watching Dallas:soap operas and melodramatic imagination*(1985), Ien Ang developed the melodramatic imagination, which analyzed the female audience without using ethnographic research methods. She believes that modern women face an insoluble dilemma, explaining the tension between women's pleasure in watching dramas and their desire for feminism. As a symbol of real life, the recurring conflicts and struggles in TV dramas provide a safe imagination space for female audiences by identifying with the characters in the series. The creator of Korean TV dramas has created a perfect fantasy for the audience. In Ien Ang's research, it is called fantasy, through which the audience breaks through the restrictions of daily life and explores another situation, identity and the possibility of life [3]

There are few researchers on Korean fantasy TV dramas in Chinese literature, and there is no clear standard for the definition of fantasy dramas. Only one of the dissertations studied Korean fantasy TV dramas. Using the method of text analysis, the author analyzes Korean fantasy TV dramas such as *My Love from the Star*, *The Son of The House Tower*, and *My Girlfriend is a Nine-tail Fox*. The author believes that the most important core of Korean fantasy TV dramas is to take love as the theme and integrate romantic and delicate emotional elements in traditional Korean TV dramas.

In foreign literature, many scholars believe that female audiences watch Korean TV dramas because Korean TV dramas can provide female audiences with temporarily escaped fantasy and audience pleasure [4]. Fantasy drama plot setting beyond reality, provides viewers with imaginary utopia, the characters in the fantasy drama setting, plot setting will enhance the audience watching TV after psychological satisfaction [5]. Korean TV drama writers for female audience's emotions, social status, consumer psychology and so on, into the modern women in the TV dramas of its own value, focus on the problems of the family and social attribute, seized the female audience watch the psychological and emotional consumption status [6].

It is worth mentioning in Korean literature, many scholars in the illusion of sex fantasy play and its success was analyzed, and the thought of Korea's fantasy TV drama with hero ability on the premise of super ability fantasy, love fantasy genre and genre, the combination of narrative form and strategy to expand and change [7]. The Korean fantasy TV dramas incorporates elements such as idols and consumption, which will also arouse the audience's crazy psychology of consumerism [8]. Many Korean scholars have also analyzed the narrative texts of fantasy TV dramas, such as the fantasy mechanism of soul exchange and the protagonist's design of superpowers. *The Korean Myth: The Opposite · The Inside · the Abyss* by Kim Yee-kyu and *The History of Korean Myth* by Lim Byung-hee all explain the contents related to various Korean myths and legends in Korean TV dramas.

In addition, the theory of encoding and decoding in *Television Discourse* (1980), Stuart Hall believes that transmission and reception in the process of media communication are regarded as a set of process of encoding and decoding in the sense of discourse. At the same time, other scholars of the Birmingham School, such as David Morley, followed Hall's idea and proposed that the audience is the audience of concrete history [9]. They are not simple consumers of media content, but active interpreters of information. In their opinion, the mass media cannot be separated from a specific social and historical context in the process of production and communication. As the decoder with subject initiative, the audience is also embedded with a specific social identity meaning. Therefore, the research on the audience also needs to be carried out in combination with their different socio-economic, educational, professional and other backgrounds.

Although Chinese female audience and Korean female audience are in the same Asian cultural circle, different social, historical, cultural and other background factors also make Chinese female audience have different motivations and psychology to watch fantasy TV dramas. Since the 1980s, the status of Chinese

women has been significantly improved. After social and economic changes, the gender role of women has changed from pan-politicization to pan-marketization [10]. At present, consumerism culture and post-modern culture are prevailing, and the entertainment, utilitarian and practical environment of mass media all affect Chinese women's choice and consumption of media products.

Based on the existing literature, the current research literature mainly focuses on the narrative text of Korean fantasy TV dramas, but few studies take the audience as the perspective. There are also some deficiencies in these studies. First, there are few researchers on why women watch Korean fantasy TV dramas, and there is a lack of substantive research. Secondly, domestic scholars mainly focus on theoretical analysis of female audiences watching Korean fantasy TV dramas, lacking empirical scientific research, and the research results are relatively subjective. Therefore, this research attempts to study the viewing motivation and viewing psychology of Chinese female audiences watching Korean fantasy TV dramas in the form of in-depth interviews, in an attempt to explore whether the viewing motivation and viewing psychology of Chinese female audiences are related to their social, cultural and other specific viewing situations.

### 3. Materials and Methods

The interview is conducted in the form of in-depth interview. One is to find interviewees through the Internet discussion community of Korean TV dramas, and the other is to directly find viewers of dramas. The interview process adopts semi-structured formula, which prepares a unified interview outline for the interviewer, but the questions asked in the actual interview will be adjusted. There are two types of interviews: an in-depth interview with one person and a focus group interview with two or three people.

Four topics are designed in the interview outline: "Motivation for Watching Korean fantasy TV series", "Acceptance level of Korean fantasy TV series", "cognitive attitude toward Korean fantasy TV series", "emotional attitude toward Korean fantasy TV series" and "Identity identity of Korean fantasy TV series". Under the "motive of watching", topics such as leisure and entertainment, seeking knowledge and receiving instruction, following the crowd, catharsis and elimination, escape from seclusion, retrospect and identification, criticism and reference are designed. Under "acceptance degree", three sub-topics are designed: social class and acceptance degree, social change and acceptance degree, cultural psychology (national culture psychology, times culture psychology, fashion culture psychology) and acceptance degree. Under "cognitive attitude", three sub-topics are designed: theme identity, plot identity, character identity and creation style identity. Three subtopics, pleasure, fantasy and resonance, are designed in "emotional attitude". The information of interviewees is shown in (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Interviewee information

number	Name	Age	professional	Marital status
1	Wang Xue	33	Media reporter	married
2	Li Lili	33	Media mastermind	married
3	Zou Yangyang	31	College teacher	unmarried
4	Jiang Yu	26	TV planning	unmarried
5	Wu Shuo	35	Doctor	married
6	Liu Ying	33	College teacher	married
7	Tao Hong	53	Housewife	married
8	Liu Huan	57	insurance company staff	married
9	Wu Lianfen	46	Housewife	married
10	Cao Xueting	23	College students	unmarried
11	Gao Jing	23	College students	unmarried
12	Cheng Huanhuan	30	psychological counselor	unmarried
13	Chen Yanan	27	Cosmetics assistant	unmarried
14	Li Jiayi	26	beautician	unmarried
15	Yang Bohui	42	press editor	married
16	Gao Yuan	45	television reporter	unmarried
17	Chen Dani	25	graduate student in South Korea	unmarried
18	Wang Juan	22	Department Store sales	unmarried
19	Jiang Shuang	24	fitness instructor	unmarried
20	Su Dan	34	TV mastermind	married
21	Wang Qing	42	radio anchor	married
22	Fu Yao	19	College student	unmarried

23	Li Jiatong	40	auto sales	unmarried
24	Xia Yanyan	37	film and television producer	married
25	Zhuang Li	36	bank clerk	married
26	Ma Xiaochun	53	College teacher	married
27	Xu Meiyun	43	Housewife	married
28	Wu Xin	47	housewife	married
29	Yan Weina	41	TV production	unmarried
30	Zhang Xiaofei	39	TV reporter	unmarried

### 3. Results

The interviewees for this interview selected Chinese female audiences who have watched Korean TV dramas for more than 3 years. They are the audiences of Korean TV drama broadcasting platforms such as Douban, Korean drama TV and YYets. The average age of the interviewees is 35.4 years old. The interviewees are mainly from 30 to 47 years old, accounting for 60% of the interviewees. The married ones account for 56.6% and the unmarried ones account for 43.4%.

The interview recording lasted 4 hours and 3 minutes. After it was converted into text, Nvivo12 software was used for encoding and microword cloud for keyword extraction. In this study, two coders code at the same time, and then classify the codes, classify and modify the materials. The final results have high consistency, good reliability and validity. Then, microwords cloud was used to screen keywords, and 238 keywords and 53 key words were obtained. In the coding process of Nvivo12, the high-frequency words in the interview were “plot design”, “heroine” and “character modeling”, which reached 30%, 20% and 15% respectively. The results are shown in Figure 1. High frequency words appear in the cloud of microwords are drama, heroine and love. The content of this discussion is determined by combining two high-frequency terms.

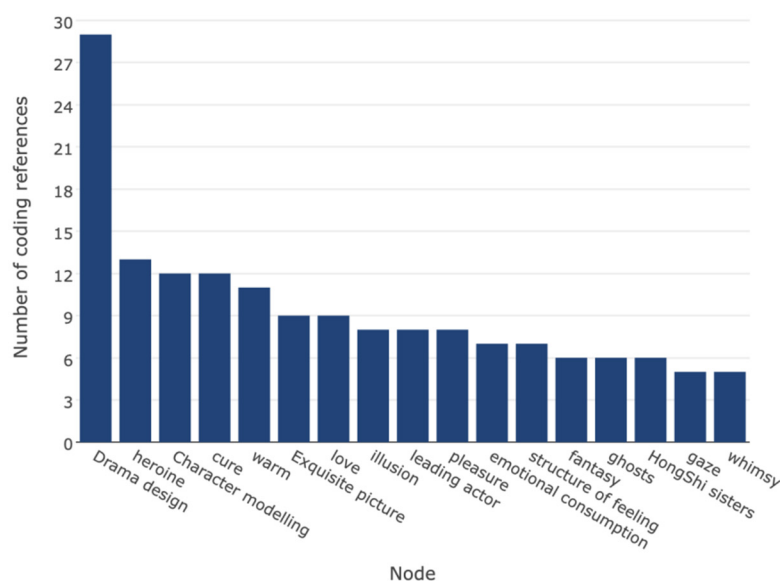


Figure 1. Data obtained after interview coding using Nvivo12

### 4. Discussion

Discussions are made based on the above research results.

#### 4.1. Fantasy utopia

During the interview, many visitors watch Korean fantasy TV dramas with almost the same motivation: the virtual time and space in the fantasy TV dramas and the romantic love that transcending the identity barrier are the themes favored by female audiences. In the face of the troubles in real life, the fantasy elements of fantasy TV dramas just give the female audience a space for imagination and investment.

*Let me forget the troubles of real life, temporarily immersed in this beautiful dream inside.....The love story in it makes me feel so sweet. [Interviewee S]*

*In this to find my love, or their own dreams, I like to watch this TV play, because it is so beautiful. [Interviewee Z]*

In the TV drama *Hotel Druena*, the heroine Zhang Manyue is exquisite and beautiful, cold outside and hot inside, jealous of evil, but she is not a perfect female image, her personality is dissolute and curt, greedy and capricious, scheming and suspicious, quite gangster, which is completely different from the previous inspiring and strong “Cinderella” image in Korean TV dramas, and even brings in the Hong sisters who are good at magic realism style. This narrative text turned into a female version of the story of “beauty and the beast”, will be used for material made conscious exaggeration and subversion, and developed between Chinese female audience defamiliarization, has broken the original expectation field of vision, raised the defamiliarization of Chinese female audience aesthetic experience. The role of Zhang Manyue also challenges the traditional patriarchal ideology of eastern society and becomes an empathic object to satisfy Chinese female audience’s desire for spiritual freedom and emotional identity.

From the perspective of the text of the fantasy TV dramas, the fantasy of the narrative is the castle in the air inside the screen, are far from the real world, but the female audience can get convergence in the human experience and life experience. From the film and television production level, Ien Ang, points out that Watch Dallas’ drama text offers the audience is a mirage of realistic illusion, the vision of the real from the text structure [11]. Under the influence of the current film and television media, the audience has a large amount of viewing experience and is very familiar with camera changes, film editing, music and sound effects and other film and television production techniques, which also provide the social and cultural foundation for the real illusion of fantasy TV dramas. From the traditional single emotional narration in the original Korean dramas, *Hotel Deruna* has turned into multiple detailed narration. It is not only has the fantasy of romantic love, but also adds various details of social life that women pay attention to, introducing the Chinese female audience into a real fantasy, involuntarily increasing the degree of emotional involvement.

According to David Morley’s theory of Specific historical audiences, the emotional structure of Chinese female audiences is closely related to the modernization process of Chinese society and the ideological values of mass media [3]. In the process of modernization, the social roles of Chinese women are diversified and diversified. Wives, mothers, career women, single women, tough women, strong women, domineered female, etc. Although women’s identities and roles are constantly enriched, and the concept of gender equality has been deeply rooted in people’s minds, women are still unable to escape the shackling of traditional gender concepts and culture. Many interviewed women said that their motivation for watching Korean dramas is to temporarily get rid of the increasingly strict standards for modern women, such as standards for workplace and family, social roles and self-identity.

#### 4.2 From pleasure to Resistance

The setting of characters in *Hotel Deruna* subverted the model of domineering CEO and Cinderella in traditional Korean dramas and transformed into domineering female CEO and male version of Cinderella. The subversion of characters is actually a kind of compensation remodeling for the male-dominated social order. Women’s emotional needs have been paid more attention and satisfied, which is a manifestation of the importance attached to women’s right of speech. Female audiences in this TV dramas become “happy audiences”, and will refer to their own lives by plot and characters, which indicates that they can freely walk through the fictional plots and their own lives, and find the fun and pleasure in them [12].

*I totally feel that I am the character of Zhang Manyue, and I am also very withdrawn. I feel that there is no love suitable for me in real life. In this TV series, I seem to feel that I have gained the love of a star. [Interviewee Z]*

The story of fantasy drama of beyond the emotional disorders in real society. Zhang Manyue with super ability across the identity and space-time and fall in love with ordinary people Ju Canxing. This love story provides female audience a romantic fantasy utopia, giving female audience evasion pleasure. Fantasy TV dramas, on the other hand, as a type of Korean TV dramas, although into the genie, psychics, religious or epic myth legend and other elements, but the good and evil have reported, such as ethical and moral values are encouraging people to temporal social reality. *Hotel Deruna* is not limited to the narration of romantic love stories between men and women, in which the moral and ethical feelings such as family affection and friendship,

as well as the trivial details in the private fields such as family and interpersonal relationship can enable Chinese female audiences to find emotional identification and create pleasure in connection with their real life.

*I like to watch this TV drama because of the role of Zhang Manyue. How many such characters are there in real life? It's just a male version of Ghost, a woman can be so dashing and domineering, I am very happy to see, especially when she pointed a gun at the corrupt mayor, so handsome.*[Interviewee F]

*Hotel Deruna* subverted the traditional script-writing model and challenged the ideology of the patriarchal society in Korea to some extent. Although it is a conventional narrative plot to punish the evil and promote the good, Zhang Manyue pointed a gun at the mayor and ruined him, it also has the meaning of resisting the patriarchal social system. After China's reform and opening up, women have an increasingly strong sense of independence, but at present, Chinese women are still in a patriarchal society, and their long-term self-discipline also makes them anxious. There is no doubt that the virtual space and fantasy love brought by the fantasy TV dramas provide a utopia for Chinese female audiences to escape from the real society temporarily. The character of Zhang Manyue challenges the conventions under the patriarchal ideology, so that female audiences can feel the pleasure and experience beyond the patriarchal society.

*China also has such fantasy TV series, like Love · The First Love of a Thousand years old, but the plot is completely different, the heroine is Mary Sue, only the logic of love. The Hotel Deruna is more rebellious, healing and has a fuller cast of characters.* [Interviewee K]

*Zhang Manyue actually not perfect, and it is a very sad characters, although she has a super ability, lived hundreds of years, but she do in the sad helpless, face a lot of life and death to leave, finally only yourself watch the tree in the below.* [Interviewee G]

In the process of media production, the text meaning in the unconscious discourse system of the mass media is coding [13], women audience in the process of decoding is the so-called female discourse dominance coding drama from, so when the audience watching the TV took obedience - hegemonic position, then paralysis in fashion, self-help, independence in modern female stereotypes. However, real life is far from the utopia created by TV series. With the improvement of media literacy, Chinese women's consciousness of independence is constantly awakening. They are no longer one-dimensional to accept media information, but to criticize and reflect on media cultural products. Fed up with the perfectly-designed urban superwoman, the gentle, kind Mary Sue, and the virtuous, submissive Gaya type, they desperately needed some rebellious, unconventional drama to break through the conventional narratives offered by the mass media agenda in the modern patriarchal society. Zhang's imperfect character exactly satisfies the defamiliarization experience of Chinese female audiences and becomes their motivation to watch such dramas.

#### 4.3 From gaze to consumption

In addition to experiencing romantic fantasy and pleasure, the women also rated watching fantasy TV series as enjoyable to gaze [14]. Gaze is a concept mentioned by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Taking Hollywood classic films as an example, she believes that women are always under the gaze of men, the object to be watched and the source of male desire. Her theory and later practice were questioned because they completely denied women the pleasure of watching. J. Byars, reviewing a series of 1950s family ethics dramas, argues that the manipulation and structure of the camera enabled women to express their desires positively, openly and generously [15]. As a typical form of mass culture, TV dramas provide passive entertainment and mainstream ideology with monotonous stories and production lines. However, the special relationship between TV series and female groups is reflected in that the market and business should be based on the positioning and construction of female consumers, so that women can actively participate in the selection and construction of TV dramas texts. Through this process, women can complete the construction of their self-identity, which can be seen as the gaze of women.

*There are many works of the Hong sisters, such as The Lord's Sun and 'My Girlfriend is a Nine-tailed Fox,' which I like very much. They always care about what the female audience wants to see from the perspective of women. South Korea has a lot of female screenwriters, they are very understanding of female audience psychology.* [Interviewee D]

*I like Korean fantasy TV dramas because they add love, affection or friendship into the fantasy. Unlike American fantasy TV dramas that add suspense, mythology and epic, Korean fantasy TV dramas are closer to women's perspective.*

[Interviewee H]

Quite a few interviewees said that they have their own unique viewing logic when watching TV dramas. This logic is the gaze of women, who choose to watch TV dramas according to their own logic and consume TV dramas. What causes them to develop this gaze logic?

First, the media texts of Korean dramas provide the possibility of gazing for Chinese women. The scriptwriters *Hotel Deruna*, the Hong Sisters, are among the top female scriptwriters in South Korea, where love and family are the main themes, making the scriptwriters mostly female. The participation and control of female screenwriters constitute the female gaze and the female narrative [16]. Female scriptwriters will explore the shining points of women. With the continuous improvement of women's right of speech, female scriptwriters break through the traditional patriarchal consciousness and seriously consider women's emotional appeals and needs.

Secondly, China is now in a consumerist society and multicultural environment. The integration of multiculturalism and traditional culture, the demand of consumer subjects for commodity diversification and the demand of female audiences for male diversification have led to the diversity and mixture of male temperament. The appearance of such images as “flower boy” and “little fresh meat” in Korean TV dramas subverts the relationship between the traditional male subject and the female subject, and makes it possible for women to change from gazing to consumption [17]. Women have upgraded from the “consumed” side in the past to the active consumer side, and TV dramas undoubtedly provide the text of such consumption. There is no doubt that Ju Canxing is a “little fresh meat”, and the female version of the narrative text of the domineering “President and Cinderella” provides the agent satisfaction for Chinese women on screen.

## 5. Conclusions

**Table 2.** The key information of the interview

interviewee	key information of the interview
interviewee S	forget the troubles of real life;feel so sweet
Interviewee Z	I like to watch this TV play,because it is so beautiful
interviewee Z	I am also very withdrawn;I seem to feel that I have gained the love of a star
interviewee F	a woman can be so dashing and domineering, I am very happy to see
Interviewee G	Zhang Manyue actually not perfect, and it is a very sad characters
Interviewee K	The <i>Hotel Deruna</i> is more rebellious, healing and has a fuller cast of characters.
Interviewee D	They always care about what the female audience wants to see from the perspective of women.
interviewee H	I like Korean fantasy TV dramas because they add love, affection or friendship into the fantasy.

Based on the above discussion, first of all, Chinese female audiences' initial motivation is to enjoy the experience of watching Korean fantasy TV dramas. Secondly, Korean fantasy TV dramas have not deviated from the traditional love TV dramas, trying to show a romantic and beautiful fantasy utopia, attracting a large number of Chinese female audience. Finally, due to the residual patriarchy culture, the influence of postmodern thoughts and consumerism culture, these factors have affected the viewing psychology of female TV drama audiences in China. Moreover, the TV dramas of various genres on the Current Chinese TV dramas market cannot meet the demand of female audiences. The Korean fantasy TV dramas combines elements such as love, suspense, magic and comedy, breaking the traditional TV series narrative mode and strengthening the defamiliarization experience of Chinese female audiences. Love is the most important emotional resource that needs to be examined in the interpersonal relationship in the Confucian culture circle of Asia [18]. The colleagues in The Korean fantasy TV dramas who show strange and magical stories have not forgotten to inject universal human emotions such as love, family affection and friendship. While consuming Korean fantasy TV

dramas, Chinese women are also re-examining Confucian ethics and the true, the good and the beautiful in the world [19].

While consuming Korean fantasy TV dramas, Chinese women have also been influenced by consumerist culture. As a concentrated embodiment of cultural showcase and social and economic life changes, TV dramas play a role as a bellwether in the construction of women's independent and healthy values, the establishment of women's subjective consciousness and self-expression of emotion. Korean TV dramas with romantic utopian created or blue consumption had sex may let many women audience get stuck here and not know it, and excessive fashion discipline is circle of women into the male watch stereoscopic landscape, back into the male dominated aesthetic system [20]. Therefore, in the follow-up research, the negative influence of some consumerist culture in Korean TV dramas can be studied by means of investigation and interview. China and Korea TV makers should play the media agenda-setting function, guide more women develop positive health watch consumer psychology, as well as the health of the free-standing self-improvement mindset.

Admittedly, this paper adopt the way of the qualitative interview, interview object choice is limited, sample size is limited, the discussion still needs to be correct. In the follow-up research, a certain number of samples can be investigated by means of questionnaire survey among Chinese female audiences in a quantitative way, so as to obtain more objective research results.

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