

# *Exploring the Shaping of Female Image of “She-theme” Movies and TV Series from the Perspective of “She- economy”*

## *—Taking Just Thirty for an Example*

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**Abstract:** The development of “She-economy” has given birth to “She-theme” movies and TV series, which emphasize women’s right to speak, which has made an important breakthrough in the stereotype of female image shaping in the mass media. However, due to the long-term dominance of male discourse, most creators and audiences of movies and TV series have no clearer cognition of female subject consciousness. It can be found that the female image presented in the existing film and television works on the market is still subject to this. This leads to the development of “She-economy” and the imbalance of women’s right to speak. Therefore, in order to create more progressive “She-theme” movies and TV dramas and realize their sustainable development, this paper researches on female image shaping in “She-theme” has become an important issue. Although the three heroines in *Just Thirty* can be considered independent women, they are still not free from the stereotypes of women that exist in a patriarchal society, which still requires women to put the family first, take the initiative to take up the task of child-rearing, and sacrifice the development of their own interests for the sake of the family. This paper hopes to arouse the attention of the society on such phenomena.

**Keywords:** she-economy, she-theme, female image, *Just Thirty*

## 1. Introduction

Chinese society has long had a deep-rooted stereotype of women as weak characters who are naturally attached to men. It is precisely because of the existence of female stereotypes and the two objective factors that the society is dominated by men for a long time, many TV dramas have an obvious tendency of “otherization” in the portrayal of female images, which virtually strengthens the audience’s stereotype of female images. In this context, the female images in TV series either conform to the male aesthetic appearance, or conform to the characteristics expected by men in personality, such as thriftiness and love to do housework, showing the low voice of women [1]. With the development of China’s social economy, “She -economy” has begun to rise, and women’s status has gradually improved, followed by the gradual enhancement of women’s independent consciousness. Films and TV dramas of “She-theme”, which discuss the independence and growth of women, came

into being [2]. These dramas have further considered the shaping of female images, emphasizing female consciousness and female stance.

This paper conducts researches by searching for relevant information on CNKI and using literature analysis and case analysis methods. As the representative of “She-theme”, *Just Thirty* focuses on three women who are about to enter their thirties. It launches a multi-line narrative, tells the story of three heroines with completely different life experiences and personality characteristics, who can face difficulties more bravely after experiencing setbacks, and is favored by the majority of female groups. This paper delves deeper into the experiences of the three female protagonists and reflect on the shortcomings of the portrayal of female characters in “She-theme” TV dramas.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Concept and Research Status of “She-economy”

“She-economy”, also known as “female economy”, is one of the 171 new Chinese words published by the Ministry of Education in 2022 [3]. According to Dou Rong’s description, “She-economy” is an economic term, which is a way of saying female economy [4]. It refers to an economic phenomenon with female gender characteristics formed in response to women’s financial management and consumption needs with the improvement of women’s economic and social status. According to previous estimates by Guotai Junan Securities, the size of China’s female economic market was close to 2.5 trillion yuan in 2015, and is expected to reach 4.5 trillion yuan in 2019, and still has great potential in the next decade [5]. Women are becoming the main force in China’s consumer market. Modern women are appreciating their personal value by pursuing a more textured life. The “She-economy” around women is also rising. According to the “‘She-economy’ Insight Report 2022”, with the rapid development of the Internet, the scale of female users is rising year by year, the number of active users has reached 582 million, the proportion of the whole network increased to 49.3%, accounting for nearly half [6].

The author searched the key words on CNKI and found that the term “She-economy” first appeared in the research in 2006. As of March 2023, there were 188 articles on “She-economy” in academic journals, of which 179 articles were published in 2015 and later. Before 2015, there were only 9 papers. It is not difficult to see that “She-economy” has attracted more attention from the academic community in the past eight years. Among the 179 papers published in 2015 and after, the research on “She-economy” is mainly concentrated in the field of marketing, which is closely related to female consumption. However, the research on the impact of “She-economy” on female images in movies and TV shows is slightly insufficient.

### 2.2. Research Overview of “She-theme”

At present, there is a temporary lack of independent systematic research on “She-theme” in the academic circle, and more research is done on “She-theme” in certain film and television works or as a branch of realistic subject matter. For example, among the 29 relevant papers that can be searched on Zhixin, “She-theme” has not been used as an independent research topic in any of them. Chen describes the contradictions and dilemmas faced by the female characters in the drama, and points out the fact that the TV series *Just Thirty* speaks for women to a certain extent [7]. Bi Yanhua and Li Jie take the film *My Sister* as an example to discuss the topic that “She-theme” attempts to break through the old coding mode and to a certain extent complete the breakthrough of female self-consciousness [8]. The literature that can be consulted can serve as a follow-up study. The author provides the research basis for the systematic and detailed study of “other subjects”.

### 3. Typical Images Building

*Just Thirty* starts from reality and abandons flat characterization. Grasp the spiritual core of the characters and construct a vivid three-dimensional character image. Among them, Jia Gu is married and has a child, Xiaoqin Zhong is married and has no children, and Manni Wang is an unmarried woman struggling in Shanghai. The images of these three women almost cover most of the situations that women in their thirties may face.

Manni Wang, who works in a luxury store, is a girl from a small city on the 18th tier. She lives and works alone in Shanghai. She works hard and assiduously. Her dream is to put down roots in a big city [5]. Manni Wang is eager for a decent life and luxurious enjoyment in the upper class society, but she still adheres to the bottom line of morality while seeking the maximization of interests. She pursues performance, but never in order to kickback, let male customers touch. Though she cannot resist the temptation of luxury cars, jewelry and beautiful clothes, she cannot accept being kept as a pet by her boyfriend without dignity and becoming a third party who destroys other people's feelings. She yearns for the position of store manager for a long time, but will not get the position through improper means. If the gold digger worships other people's gold, Manni Wang is looking for their own wealth, with the strength of the upper class, equal enjoyment of material pleasure [9]. The image of "Manni Wang" in the early stage reflects the life status of a large part of 30-year-old women in big cities: they have their own careers and dreams, but they lack a strong spiritual core to support themselves. After being betrayed by her boyfriend, Manni Wang gave up her career of eight years and returned to her hometown to work, but was inspired by her boyfriend and friends to return to Shanghai to work [5]. Manni Wang's experience is thought-provoking. Her heart is eager for independence, but she always lives under the value brought by men intentionally or unintentionally. Manni Wang's name is pronounced like the English word "Money", a metaphor for her strong desire for money and her dream of achieving social advancement.

Jia Gu is a full-time wife, belonging to the elite class of society, she worries about the large and small housework at home, while helping her husband to work together. It can be said that Jia Gu is what many "30+" women want to be, and is the character that most conforms to the "big woman" setting. In the face of day to day life, she did not choose to flow in plain, but rain or shine fitness, learning flower arrangement, baking, cooking, astronomy and other skills, constantly through the wife circle to network and business, always maintain the enthusiasm of learning and social competitiveness, subvert the general housewife's relatively weak character positioning. She is aggressive and strict, and wants to seek a better quality life, but her husband is content with the status quo and made a betrayal of the family behavior, their harmonious and happy marriage on the surface, in fact, has already quietly collapsed. Such an independent and responsible woman has also experienced a dramatic marriage, which seems to be in line with the female character image shaped by traditional gender concepts. "Jia Gu" is a homonym for "Gu Jia", a reference to the heroine's identity as a housewife, while their joint fireworks business implies that their seemingly happy marriage is as fleeting as fireworks.

Xiaoqin Zhong, a Shanghai native, studies, graduates, goes to work and gets married step by step. She leads a comfortable life and can be said to be the representative of thousands of ordinary women. Growing up in a well-off family in Shanghai, she does not have to worry about household registration, house and savings all day long like Manni Wang and other Shanghai drift. She can be herself without worries and need not depend on men to live [9]. Compared with the first two female images, "Xiaoqin Zhong" was not completely independent in the early period, still living in the protection of her parents, which also led to her doing things always lack of self-determination, in the work she relied on dedication to win the good feelings of colleagues, life to listen to the arrangement of the family, married the husband of the right family but three views. The husband likes to raise fish, while Xiaoqin

Zhong likes cats, and the couple always quarrel because of trifles in life. The couple's love of "cat" and "fish", as naturally hostile food chains, was also the trigger for their divorce. After a failed marriage, Xiaoqin Zhong finally achieved rapid growth, and she gradually began to get rid of her dependence on her parents, from indecision to a strong determination to realize her value through writing. From a good girl to an independent woman, Xiaoqin Zhong relies on her courage to stand firm, breaking the audience's usual prejudice against such images.

#### 4. The Characterization of the Thinking

Under the dual influence of the "She-economy" craze and the traditional family concept, *Just Thirty* begins to explore how women can be independent and pursue self-worth. While it is true that rising careers and financial freedom are the most common ways for women to shake off the label of dependency, mere material success cannot be equated with true independence. True independence comes from within and is different from person to person, not just the superficial appearance of success and fame [9]. The three women in *Just Thirty* explain the meaning of independence in different aspects: Manni Wang gives up the position of store manager in front of her, withstands the temptation of money, starts all over again, and chooses to go abroad to further her education and improve her education; Jia Gu from the struggle for the family, try her best to squeeze into the wife circle, to develop their own tea factory business, to live for themselves [10]; Xiaoqin Zhong from the arrangement of parents, to the courage to end inappropriate marriage, the choice of life in their own hands. But on the whole, the characters in the show are still not completely free from the control of the patriarchal society. Women's self-independence consciousness is still influenced and restricted by male thinking, male society and male discourse [11].

Jia Gu, as an independent woman in the drama, takes the initiative to choose a school when her child is about to enter kindergarten, and hires a childcare teacher for her child, while Huanshan Xu, as a husband, only needs to struggle for his career outside, believing that educating children is mainly the responsibility of women, which also reflects the stereotype of both men and women raising offspring in society. Traditional men are more inclined to think that female characters should bear the main responsibility in the process of raising offspring and need to sacrifice part of their own interests. When Xiaoqin Zhong became pregnant, she voluntarily gave up the opportunity of promotion and put her family before her career development [12]. This is a compromise that women are willing to make to assume the function of family reproduction, and it is also a subconscious recognition of women's choices.

When a woman is in a family relationship, even if her personality is independent, she still needs to bear more reproductive functions and self-career sacrifice. When Manni Wang returned to her hometown, she was arranged to have a blind date with a man with a stable job, which was considered to be "dependent". Xiaoqin Zhong obeyed her parents' arrangement and married Wang Yu, who showed honesty [13]. Everyone agreed that such a man was dependable and reliable. It seems that in the relationship between men and women, women are in a more passive position, lacking the opportunity to make active choices, and women's personal career development is not valued.

#### 5. Conclusion

Through the research and analysis of female images, it can be learned that the three heroines in *Just Thirty* show the spirit of realizing the value of life, daring to pursue and breaking prejudice and injustice, which is the affirmation and praise of the female subject value, and also the creator's recognition of the female group's yearning for freedom and pursuit of independence in real life. In order to successfully create a full and three-dimensional female image, the creator needs to enter the female group, understand the real demands and ideas of women, and close to the reality of life, so as

to have the opportunity to show the women who constantly strive for life and bravely pursue self-independence in the face of difficulties and anxiety to more audience groups, causing the audience and the society to reflect and think deeply [14]. Overall, as a representative TV drama of “She-theme”, *Just Thirty* had made breakthroughs in shaping female images, reflecting the independent side of women. However, they had not escaped the control of male discourse power and have a stereotype of female images. The author hopes that with the development of “She-economy”, the female images portrayed in her film and television works can truly break away from the framework of a patriarchal society and reflect the value of women.

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