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MEDIA LITERACY AND CHINESE FEMALE PROTAGONIST TELEVISION DRAMA

ABSTRACT

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Television drama has been a significant part of Chinese people's life. With the popularization of online video websites, it is attracting increasing numbers of audiences. During last decade, female protagonist television dramas obtained an outstanding success of viewing in China. In 2018, *Story of Yanxi Palace* reached the breakthrough of the record. It has gained exceptional attention and created hundreds of millions in profit for its production company, which was regarded as phenomenal by the press.

Audience is a frequently discussed subject in the field of media education. It is crucial to understand the media literacy of audiences and the social context of the communication. Female protagonist television drama is a recently emerged but greatly influential genre. There are very few articles can be found on it and there are no studies that link it with media literacy. However, as a remarkable phenomenon of contemporary Chinese society, it should be paid attentions to by media researchers. Thus, this study can contribute to the understanding on media literacy of television audiences, especially in the Chinese context.

The master thesis consists of two parts – a manuscript of an academic article and reflective text, which focus separately on the social context and media literacy of the audience of Chinese female protagonist television drama - *Story of Yanxi Palace*. This reflective part of thesis investigates the questions: "How do audiences of *Story of Yanxi Palace* use media literacy when watching the television drama?" and "How can the female protagonist television dramas be utilized in media education?"

This study has conducted a qualitive case study which uses focus group interviews to collect empirical material and content analysis method for evaluation. Sixteen young female audiences from four different cities participated the focus group interviews. The article and the reflective text analyse the responses from different perspectives.

We discovered the findings in the manuscript of article on feminism, female's work life and generation gap. In this reflective part of the thesis, we found that the audience could use media critically, while creative production is lacking. The interest and pleasure of the television drama can motivate spontaneous learning and developing media literacy. It also shows potential to raise discussions on social issues and connect different learning. The findings support the previous theories, but also contributes new knowledge to the field of media education.

Keywords: media literacy, audience, television drama, female

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Media occupies people's lives significantly in modern societies. There are large groups of media audiences who watch television dramas every day. With the popularization of online video websites in China, television dramas are attracting increasing numbers of audiences nowadays, not only from television, but also from the Internet. Audience is always an important subject discussed in the field of media education. To apply media education in different settings and contexts, it is crucial to understand the media usage of audiences and the social context of communication. Planning and implementing media education should be established on the deep understandings of the audiences, especially on their media literacy. Therefore, the need for studying the everchanging audiences is recognised as central in the field of media education. This thesis aims to investigate the social context of the Chinese female protagonist drama audience and give light to understand how the television audience use and develop media literacy, especially in the context of China.

Since 2011, female protagonist television dramas have become a rising star at the stage of Chinese television market. High ratings and public discussions are also motivating more productions of this genre. In 2018, *Story of Yanxi Palace* (yan xi gong lue) which tells a story set in Qing dynasty about a girl who is searching for revenge for her murdered sister, has gained outstanding attention and created hundreds of millions in profit for its production company. *Story of Yanxi Palace* not only has been the most popular television drama in mainland China in 2018, but also showed its impact worldwide. According to the publication of Google Trend, *Story of Yanxi Palace* topped the list of the most Google searched television shows in 2018.

Female protagonist television dramas have obtained unprecedented success during last ten years. They differentiate from other genres of televisions dramas that had been popular before, such as family ethics drama and youth idol

dramas, because they emphasize on a female character, who is usually powerful or extraordinary. Female protagonist television drama is a recently emerged genre. There are very few studies can be found on it and there are no studies that link it with media literacy. However, as a remarkable phenomenon of contemporary Chinese society, it should be paid attentions to by media researchers. Even among international researchers, the main approach of studying Chinese media has been focusing on the 'texts' instead of the viewers (Keane, 2015). Thus, to fill the research gap in media study field, this study will take a unique perspective of media education to investigate the audience of female protagonist television drama. It aims to contribute to the understanding and knowledge on media literacy of television audiences, especially in the Chinese context.

The master thesis consists of two parts, which are a manuscript of an academic article and a reflective part. They both base on the data that derives from the focus group interviews with the audiences of Chinese female protagonist television drama, while they obtain different emphasises and perspectives:

In the manuscript for an academic article, the paper focuses on the context of communication. The research questions are: "How do the audience of the popular female protagonist television drama understand and imagine the society through the television drama?" and "What symptomatic features of female's situations in China can be spotted?" The purpose of the academic article manuscript is to answer these questions. It tries to explore the social or discursive context by understanding the media audiences. It also aims to help to update the media studies of television dramas and to fill the research gap by analysing the remarkable social phenomenon with the latest empirical data. Through the interpretation of the audiences, we try to understand the Chinese females' status in the contemporary social life and their expectations of a better reality. In other words, this study explores Chinese female social lives from both realistic and spiritual levels.

In this reflective part of the thesis, we will further discuss the questions: "How do audiences of *Story of Yanxi Palace* use media literacy when watching the television drama?" and "How can the female protagonist television dramas be utilized in media education?" It aims to search for possible adoption of female protagonist television dramas in developing media education in different settings.

The reflective part of the thesis functions as a supplement of the manuscript, in which the research is explained more in details. Discussion is carried on more from the perspective of media education.

This chapter consists of three parts. It will firstly introduce and describe the manuscript of academic article briefly, then link the manuscript with this reflective part of the thesis. Finally, it will explain the theoretical frameworks and important concepts of this reflective part of the thesis. At the end, it will also restate the research questions of the article manuscript and the reflective part.

1.1 Description of the manuscript of academic article - Audience of Chinese Female Protagonist Television Drama

Media audiences living in the society reflect the changes of the society. China is a country where a relatively conservative perspective on gender is widely applied. With the voice of females is increasingly heard, arising issues on such as gender stereotype, prejudice and female identities, have raised the attentions of researchers. In recent years, female protagonist television dramas obtained incredibly high popularity in China. As the main audiences, female's opinions are standing out and showing greater influence. At the same time, the dramas themselves and the interpretation of audiences depict the Chinese society on the women's situations in China.

The objective of the article is to answer these questions: "How do the audience of the popular female protagonist television drama understand and imagine the society through the drama?" and "What symptomatic features of female's situations in China can be spotted?" Through the exceptional popularity of female protagonist television dramas, we aim to investigate and understand the social surroundings where ever-changing audiences are living in.

Social imaginary (Taylor, 2002) and utopian sensibility (Dyer, 1981) as theoretical frameworks are used in the article. Social imaginary implies the ways that people imagine and expect their social existence (Taylor, 2002). On the other hand, the categories of utopian sensibility (abundance, energy, intensity, transparency and community) are related to certain tension/inequality/absence (scarcity, exhaustion, dreariness, manipulation and fragmentation). It is common among western researchers to study on television drama audiences by using

qualitative methods. However, qualitative methods have not been paid much attentions to in Chinese media studies. This research intends to fill the research gap found from previous studies. This study explores how do the audience of Chinese female protagonist television dramas understand the meanings of the drama, and how do they articulate their social imaginations as modern females through the drama.

This study has conducted a qualitive case research, which aims to unfold the reality of Chinese society by analysing the articulations of the viewers. The qualitative study utilizes focus group interviews method to collect empirical data. The groups are the same as in the analysis of reflective part of the thesis. However, we analyse the answers to different questions in the manuscript of article and reflective part of the thesis. 16 young female audiences from 4 different cities participated the focus group interviews. The interviews were semi-structured with the important themes of the drama and the keywords of public discussions. The participants were required to sign a consent paper to give their permissions of recording their interviews and analysing the data.

The answers about feminism, female's work life and generation gap were chosen to be analysed further by using content analysis method. The voice recordings of the interviews were transcribed into text by software and manually, which then were categorized into smaller groups by the researcher. The common topics or opinions of interviewees were put together. According to the research objectives, the researcher chose the most typical categories and drew the findings together with interpretation and discussion.

As discovered in this study, gender issues such as sexual assaults, inequality and discrimination are important problems that the interviewees discussed about. Fast-paced modern working life brings changes on people's choices of television dramas. The gap of values between young people and last generation are also noticed. According to our findings, the audience reached collective understanding in their social imaginaries. At the same time, utopian sensibilities are related to specific social tensions or inadequacy. Therefore, the findings support the theories we employed. In addition, the study also contributes new knowledge to social and culture studies of China. The study investigates Chinese contemporary society with a focus on young female viewers of specific genre, which differs from other similar researches.

The manuscript of academic article is included in the appendix at the end of this thesis. It will be sent to the journals in the field of media studies later for publication. However, it is still at the preliminary stage and in the progress of improvement currently. It will continue to be modified and prepared for publishing according to the requirements of different academic journals after submitting the master thesis. The potential journals for future publishing could be the journals in the fields of media and communication or culture studies, such as Media, Culture & Society, Communication & Society, Global Media Journal, Journal of Asian Pacific Communication, International journal of communication (Online) and so on.

1.2 Reflection on media literacy of television audience

After the manuscript of academic article is finished, it is important to reflect on the study and link the research with the field of media education. Therefore, this reflective part of the thesis is provided together with the manuscript of article according to the requirements of a master thesis from the University. This would be also helpful for improving future researches and explore possible topics for further studies.

This reflective part of the thesis focuses on media literacy of television audience. The reflective part is based on the manuscript of academic article. It functions as a supplement for the manuscript of academic article. It explains and reflects the parts that could not be included in the manuscript due to the length limit. On the other hand, it expands the topic by asking the research questions of "How do audiences of *Story of Yanxi Palace* use media literacy when watching the television drama?" and "How can the female protagonist television dramas be utilized in media education?". It further discusses the subject from the perspective of media education.

The manuscript of article and the reflective part of thesis also connect with each other. To understand media literacy of female protagonist television drama audience, it is beneficial to investigate the context. The manuscript of academic article provides a context of communications for the reflective part of the thesis to analyse media literacy of television audience. It helps to understand the social context where the audience develop their media literacy and present a different

view of the audience. Moreover, the findings of media literacy in the reflective part of the thesis can also support the understanding of the audience and the society where they are living in.

1.3 Theoretical framework for the reflective part of the thesis

This study is based on the theory of communication, which provides us a general view of the communicative world. As James W. Carey (2009) suggests, communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed. In other words, reality is an immense production that is created and maintained by human through communication. Human comprehends the world and produce reality by the construction, apprehension, and the utilization of symbolic forms. We first produce the world by symbolic work and then residence in the world we have produced.

The object we investigate in the manuscript of academic article is the reality or the social context of communications (concrete theoretical frameworks are presented in the manuscript). However, in this reflective part of the thesis, the object we focus on is the community of young female audiences. We try to understand how they comprehend the social reality created by the symbolic form – television drama. As Carey (2009) claims, reality can be mapped by visual-audio symbolic forms. Symbolic forms created and used by television dramas or the producers present and create reality for its audiences. It can be pointed out that the television dramas represent people's life and be apprehended by the audiences through mass communication.

The audiences as a community are able to reach a collective understanding or a common thought. Thought is predominantly public and social, which involves building and utilizing a model of an environment. Our mind and lives are shaped by the representations of communication. (Carey, 2009) We should realize that people's thoughts can be moulded by the representations of reality showed by television. In this research, we try to understand the relationship of people's media literacy and television drama.

Drama is a major genre in radio, film, television, and other media. For Plato and Aristotle, drama was about imitation or representation of reality and involves showing rather than telling. A drama serial consists of sequential episodes of an

ongoing narrative aired in a regular time slot. (Chandler, Munday, 2011) The drama this study focuses on could be defined as a television drama serial, which tells a story of a woman in loyal palace who struggles to achieve her goals by 70 episodes.

In active audience theory, audience are readers, viewers or listeners as determinations of the meaning of texts. (Chandler, Munday, 2011) Television audiences are regraded not as passive consumers of meanings but as actively negotiating meanings for themselves. (Bignell, 2012) We believe that young audiences nowadays not just simply accept messages and meanings from the media, but also actively participate in defining meanings by themselves.

This research studies on television audience from the perspective of media education. According to Buckingham (2003), media education is the process of teaching and learning about media, which aims to develop both critical thinking and active participation. Media literacy is the outcome of media education. Media literacy refers to the knowledge, skills and competences that are required in order to use and interpret media (Buckingham, 2003). Media literacy is not simply a functional literacy, but more importantly a form of critical literacy, which involves analysis, evaluation and critical reflection. It involves a broader understanding of the social, economic and institutional contexts of communication, and how these affect people's experiences and practices (Luck, 2005).

In 1970s, 'television literacy' curricula were introduced in the United States (Anderson, 1980). Nowadays, the term of 'media literacy' is still frequently used and has become a very important topic in the field of media education. However, media literacy has not been paid much attentions to in China compared to the western countries. Media education in China is still at its preliminary stage, which makes this study meaningful for the development of media education in Chinese context.

Therefore, we aim to link television drama and media literacy in this study. This research includes two parts. Different emphasises are put in the manuscript of academic article and the reflective part of the thesis while using same data collected from the interviews. The research questions of the manuscript are: "How do the audience of the popular female protagonist television drama understand and imagine the society through the television drama?" and "What symptomatic features of female's situations in China can be spotted?"

On the other hand, the research question of this reflective report of the thesis which emphasizes on the perspective of media education are: "How do audiences of *Story of Yanxi Palace* use media literacy when watching the television drama?" and "How can the female protagonist television dramas be utilized in media education?" We try to answer different questions in these two parts. However, they are also connected with each other and support the understanding of the other. At the end, the findings will be discussed with previous studies or theories and recommendations of the researcher.

2 METHODS

The master thesis including both a manuscript of an academic article and a reflective part uses qualitative research method. At the same time, this study is also a case study, taking one of the most popular female protagonist television dramas as a case. The main data derives from the focus group interviews. Focus groups are small groups of selected people representing larger social groups who participate in discussions on a topic chosen for investigation. (Bignell, 2012) Participants as representation of young female audience communities can express their opinions in a more natural social setting when discussing in a focus group. The manuscript of academic article and the reflective part of the thesis use same groups of interviewees, while analyse responses for different questions separately.

This chapter consists of three parts. In the first part, the general framework of the research method is explained. In the second part, the implementation of the data collection is introduced in detailed. At the end, the third part demonstrates the data analysis methodology.

2.1 Qualitative study

This study is a qualitative case study, which conducts focus group interviews in Chinese context. Qualitative case-study research is useful for investigating a contemporary phenomenon in its natural context (Houghton, Casey, Shaw & Murphy, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Qualitative research is using the methods of investigating phenomena, which can be any interpretive method which focuses on understanding meanings, typically includes focus groups, interviews, ethnography, etc (Chandler, Munday, 2011).

The objective of the reflective part of the thesis is to understand the media use of Chinese young female audience. It aims to investigate how those audience use media literacy during viewing and how can this genre of television drama be

possibly utilized for further educational purpose. The qualitative method is chosen according to its flexibility of qualitative material and its compatibility with the research goals. By using qualitative method, relationship between the media texts and its interpreters can be studied in-depth in the particular context.

Focus group interviews with background collections will be the most important and main source of empirical material for this study. Focus groups are small groups of selected people representing larger social groups who participate in discussions on a topic chosen for investigation (Bignell, 2004). Participants as representation of young female audience communities can express their opinions in a more natural social setting when discussing in a focus group.

Combing the research interests and the important aspects discussed in the drama and by the public, qualitative analysis in this study will focus on the themes of media literacy in this reflective part of the thesis, and focus on feminism, female's work life and generation gap. The qualitative data used by the manuscript of academic article and the reflective part of the thesis was collected in same interviews, while they analyse different answers for different questions.

2.2 Implementation of focus group interviews

At first stage, one typical Chinese female protagonist television drama was chosen according to the viewing figures and public discussions. In this case, the drama chosen is *Story of Yanxi Palace* (2018). The researcher constructed the semi-structured interview questions by analysing the main themes of the drama and the keywords of public discussions. According to these, the thematic interviews mostly constructed with the topics on media literacy, female protagonist, female leadership and so on. However, those are just preliminary categories, which will be adjust during analysis. Besides the questions provided in advance, other questions are also followed up by the answers from the interviewees to the open questions given.

At second phase, focus group interviews were conducted with Chinese young female audience to ask about their opinions and experiences. They were asked to watch a 7-min synopsis video of the drama together to remind them of the whole 70-episode story. The video was chosen due to its objectivity and less reproduction or comments from the author of the video. There are five focus

groups (16 participants in total) from four different cities, which are Tampere in Finland, Beijing, Shanghai and Fuzhou in China. Participants are women whose age are 18-30 years old and who like to or spend much time on watching television dramas. Each 3- 4 participants form a focus group to carry on a 1.5 to 2 hours interview. The thematic interviews were conducted face to face. The audio of the interviews was recorded for further analysis with the permission from the participants. After the interviews, a background data collection form was distributed to everyone for collecting basic information, such as age, occupation, education level, etc.

It is an effective way to investigate the research problems because the interviews can be open and provide some inspirations to the researchers. However, there are also ethical challenges of this method. To deal with this, researchers need to protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants. All the participants will be asked to sign a consent paper to give their permissions of recording their interviews and analysing the data. The participants will be clearly informed of the procedure, confidentiality and the risk of this study. They will have the rights to refuse or withdraw from the study, and rights to ask questions and report concerns.

2.3 Data analysis methodology

With the data collected from focus group interviews, the next step is data analysing. The viewpoints of Ien Ang (1985) provide our data analysis a basic principle. She suggests that what people say or write should be regarded as texts or discourses people produce to express themselves, which cannot speak for themselves directly. They should be read 'symptomatically': "we must search for what is behind the words, the presuppositions and accepted attitudes concealed within them" (Ang, 1985).

To sort out useful information from the large amount of empirical material, we need to apply content analysis - a method of analysing written, verbal or visual communication messages (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Cole, 1988). It can be used for many purposes, such as coding open-ended questions in surveys and revealing the focus of individual, group, institutional, or societal attention (Weber, 1990).

The analysis processes are represented as three main phases: preparation, organizing and reporting. Despite this, there are no systematic rules for analysing data; the key feature of all content analysis is that the many words of the text are classified into much smaller content categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Weber, 1990; Burnard, 1996). In this study, the interviews were structured by several themes in advance. The voice recordings of the interviews were transcribed into text by software and manually, which then were categorized into smaller groups by the researcher. The common topics or opinions of interviewees were put together. According to the research objectives, the researcher chose the most typical categories and drew the findings together with interpretation and discussion.

The great flexibility of this method suits the characteristics of qualitative data collected from interviews and fits mostly to our research purposes. However, one challenge of content analysis is that there is no simple right way to do it. Researchers must judge what methods are most appropriate for their research problems (Weber, 1990). Ruddock (2001) also suggested that focus group interviews might face problem in transcript analysis, which is how to establish criteria for selecting and interpreting significant comments. Researchers must be aware of the challenges and improve their skills to minimize the limitation of method.

3 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The findings of the manuscript of academic article aim to answer: "How do the audience of the popular female protagonist television drama understand and imagine the society through the television drama?" and "What symptomatic features of female's situations in China can be spotted?" While the findings of the reflective part of the thesis intend to answer: "How do audiences of *Story of Yanxi Palace* use media literacy when watching the television drama?" and "How can the female protagonist television dramas be utilized in media education?"

The chapter is divided into two parts – findings in the manuscript of academic article in brief and findings on media literacy in detailed. The interview questions were semi-structured by selected themes. The answers are analysed and categorized with the focus chose by the researcher according to the research goals. This part is worked as a supplement of the finding chapter in the manuscript of academic article. The interview questions can be found in the appendix.

3.1 Findings in the manuscript of academic article

The findings in the manuscript of academic article depict a context of communications for our further study on media literacy in the reflective part of the thesis. Social relationship and social context can be important and beneficial for understanding media literacy of particular groups of people. As Buckingham (2003) claims, literacy is concerning the production of symbolic meanings which contain and enact relationships of power. Individuals produce meanings through their participation in social networks or 'interpretive communities' which encourage and value certain forms of literacy. Silverstone (1999) also indicates that media literacy requires a wider understanding of the social, economic and historical contexts where texts are created, distributed and used by audiences.

Therefore, the findings of the manuscript of academic article is helpful for understanding of media literacy.

3.1.1 Resistance of feminism

The responses of the interviewee reflect feminism thinking in several ways. As Bignell (2004) claims, feminism is the political and theoretical thinking reviewing the roles of women and femininity in society and culture, often with the purpose of evaluating current roles and improving them.

Firstly, the audiences' concerns about justice in female sexual assaults stands out. One of the interviewees relates this drama to the recently frequent news of sexual assaults or crimes in China and 'Me too' movement on the Internet. She suggested this drama uncovers the problems in the reality. And implies that how the ancient society reacts to the female sexual assaults is in a similar way of the contemporary society. She refers to a word 'he xie' (harmonize) which has been frequently used to represent the authority's suppression on unacceptable contents. The repression not only occurs in the society within family.

Many interviewees agree that female viewers feel good to see the rise of such character is because there have been various kinds of women who have encountered discrimination or been treated unfairly or sexually abused in recent years. This drama shows an imagination of justice and defence for females who ever suffered from concealed sexual assaults. The unfairly manipulation of the patriarchal society as a social tension is provided with a utopian solution of transparency in the drama. That could be one of the reasons why the drama which depicts a fairer world for women has become popular among female viewers.

The other key aspect discussed is equality in gender roles. The female protagonist in this drama is often regarded as a distinguishing character by most of the interviewees. She is independent and tough. Most importantly, she can obtain success on her own as a man can do. The features of the female protagonist meet the values of modern women in China. The female protagonist in this drama provides an imagined image of a women contrary to the stereotypes and expectations created by the patriarchal values, which pleases the audience

who expect that females can have more possibility of seeking for a different gender role and being treated with more open attitudes.

3.1.2 Female's working life

Working life is an important part of Chinese female's lives. It has been widely discussed online and even by the press that this drama reflects the patterns of real workplace. The process how the female protagonist become an empress represents the promotion in work, while the palace represents the workplace. However, opinions on this topic are divided. Some think they share similarities in the structure, identity symbols, reliance and hierarchy. Some disagree that it implies the real workplace because it seems more like an ideal imagination.

The first tension of working life the interviewees discussed is fast pace and high pressure. One of the social tensions noticed in female's working life is dreariness, which here refers to monotony of the fast life in the metropolis. It is more discussed among the interviews from Beijing and Shanghai, where people usually spend much more time on commuting than other cities. That explains why the audiences obtain pleasure from intensity and excitement from this drama when they have to 'squeeze out' their time to watch television dramas.

Relieving the pressure from work is also a frequently mentioned reason why the viewers enjoy this drama. *Exhaustion* from high working pressure is treated by *energy* from this drama, in which the resisting protagonist can accomplish unusual achievements. Even though the audience understand the story might not be realistic, they still got pleasure from realization of the things that they want to do but not be able to do.

The other social problem is the balance of work and family for females. When discussing about women and work, family was an inevitable topic in the interviews, which is also considered as one of the biggest problems for females to obtain their promotion in career. Having children could even be a serious burden in female's working life, which might cause the loss of working position. Some mentioned that when a company recruiting female employees, they will ask them about marital status and plan of having children. These might have an impact on whether they can get admitted to a job or what kind of tasks or position they will be assigned to. Even though they might not be asked directly by

employers, the concerns usually still exist. Females are put into the dilemma between work and family involuntarily. This social tension has been developed by the *manipulation* of the stereotype and discrimination for female workers. However, it was not been provided with a utopian solution in this ancient palace drama.

3.1.3 Generation gap

Most of the interviewees acknowledge that the values implied in this drama correspond to the values of younger generations to some extent. Rebellions against the traditional values can be traced in the changes of young people's values. Some interviewees even regard the female protagonist as radical character. Some suggest that her behaviours might not be against the ethics according to the traditional virtues.

The first difference from elder generation is that young people value romance and loyalty less. The values of this drama are in favoured by many of the interviewees. What is quite different from previous popular television dramas is that romantic relationship or love is less valued in this drama and by young people. The interviewees feel encouraged and empowered to pursue what they desire and choose what suits them better instead of insisting on romance or loyalty.

Loyal love has always been eulogized in Chinese culture. In most of the television dramas targeted female audience, romantic relationship is taken for granted as priority of a female protagonist's life. Loyalty as a virtue sometimes also accompanied with sacrifice and suppression. While in this drama, the males in the love relationship with the female protagonist have been changing when their interest relations changed. Instead of showing ideally romantic relationships as many other dramas do, it carries a more realistic value which emphasizes female's own benefits and desires.

The second change is the growth of individualism. One of the interviewees explained that the transition of tastes on television dramas is showing the transformation of the values between different generations. Many of women from last generation have sacrificed their own pursuit of life or professional pursuits for their family. However, young people nowadays focus more on their own personal

development rather than their family. Therefore, they are gradually disapproving the love-oriented values. The preference on different genres of television dramas shows what kinds of values female audience support or resonate with. When audiences of last generation showed great interests on family and marriage, the family ethics dramas which show the secular family and marriage of common people's life became popular at the beginning of 21st century. However, family-centred themes have been replaced by strong female' stories since 2011 with the rise of individualism among nowadays young people. They are looking forwards to break out from the traditional values, explore more diverse life opportunities and pursue their personal advancements rather than sacrifice themselves to the family.

3.2 Findings of media literacy in the reflective part of thesis

3.2.1 Critical use of media

Almost all of the interviewees said they do not totally believe that everything in the drama is real history. It shows that they do not view the television drama as passive consumers and totally swallow the messages they received. Instead, they are negotiating with the meanings actively. Someone can construct a reality with representations, even though they never experience it in their real life. As one said, the feeling:

> I feel that even if we have not experienced the real life of the Qing Dynasty, we can still feel it that, in such an environment, what should be said, what should not be said, when should we speak, and when should we remain silent. (Film and television producer, 23, Beijing)

The participants are not afraid to hold or express their opposite ideas or opinions. Someone can even hold a totally negative opinion on the drama:

> It may not be able to record complete historical facts. I feel that I didn't believe anything in the drama from beginning to end anyway. (Actor agent, 23, Beijing)

People's critical thinking is not only reflected in their opinions on the reality showed by the drama, but also in their use on various media. The interviewees who try to find more information of the history after watching use different media

critically. They utilize various kinds of resource to help them obtain more information and justify the drama.

Firstly, searching on Internet has gained most popularity among these participants, even though it is not regarded as the most credible. On the other hand, historical literature was considered as the most authoritative. However, only few people read historical literature, because searching on the Internet is a far more convenient way to get information.

Many of them who searched on the Internet mentioned about Baidu Baike (Chinese Wikipedia). They believed to be more reliable than other websites, but still cautious on academic use:

> Because I think Baidu Baike will summarize things most neatly, and it will write the most things that you need to know most clearly, but some other websites are very messy…I will read it when I go online to search, but I will not quote it if I want to use in academic aspects. (Journalism student B, 20, Shanghai)

Social media is the other most important channel on the internet where the interviewees search for information, such as Wechat and Weibo. As young people are actively using social media nowadays, the related contents can easily reach them through social media. Some of them even use it like a search engine for searching information.

> Usually it was other people shared to me. Many people shared Wechat public account articles at that time. (Art management student, 22, Beijing)

> Because this drama was popular, there were a lot of popular science. I remember that one day there was trending topic (on Weibo), which said the emperor did better in the reality than in the drama, and then I searched for it. It was first spread out on Weibo, then I searched on Weibo. It said that it was discussed in the program *Lecture Room*, and then I searched for the program. (Internet operator, 24, Beijing)

As well as *Lecture Room* mentioned above, many interviewees got to know about other mainstream television programs from the Internet, such as *Files of National Treasures* by CCTV. They believed those programs produced by the mainstream channels were mostly trustful. Particular genres of television programs are regarded as more serious and trustworthy, such as documentary, official news and so on. However, they also admitted that there might be still a bit subjectivity exist:

> After all, it is a program. It must also do some editing or adaptation to capture the viewer, but it will definitely not change history too much. (Operator, 28, Tampere)

For most of the participants, impacts of the drama on their opinions and values is regarded to be mild. Even though they agree and show preferences on some opinions of the drama, many of them show a rather critical attitude to the meanings provided by the drama:

> There is no change or influence. Because I feel that the group who watched this drama already longing for this kind of personality, so they will not be changed, but only strengthen their point of view. (Internet promoter, 24, Fuzhou)

> Because I think some things cannot be changed by watching a TV serial. I just watch for entertainment. (English teacher, 24, Fuzhou)

As we discovered, most of the young female participants are quite media literate. They have very clear cognition of manipulation from the media industry. They understand how entertainments function and try to cater the taste of audiences. Therefore, most of them hold a careful and rational attitude instead of accepting or agreeing everything displayed by the television drama.

3.2.2 Knowledge of media

The interviewees show their knowledge of media when justifying or commenting the television drama from different aspects. Many of them show confidence when discussing their opinions on this drama using their media knowledge. They also provide various reasons for their criteria of justification. For example, from producing or technical side:

> I mainly look at the plots. If I like it or feel it is okay, there is no problem for watching it in leisure and entertaining time. If considering deeper about the value of this television serial, I may more tend to consider, for example, composition of the picture, the acting, and the ups and downs of the story line. I will probably dig deeply on these. But most of time is usually about plots. (Art management student, 22, Beijing)

The interviewee used the words like 'plot', 'composition of picture', 'acting' and 'story line'. She extends her knowledge of television drama production or utilize the existing knowledge in the case when justify it. One the other hand, many

people also commented on the marketing strategies of the television drama as a commercial product:

> I think it has a good rhythm. There will be something every week, then people on Weibo will start to discuss it again, or there will be a pleasing plot, then everyone will start discussing. They will not miss it every week. (Art management student, 22, Beijing)

> I think because they spent a lot of money or energy to promote, including publishing Weibo topics endlessly, so that everyone is interested. Marketing is done very well. If there is no marketing, I do not believe this drama can be so successful. (Operator, 28, Tampere)

> I think that its large ratings may be related to its schedule and releasing platform. It was broadcasted in the summer holidays time. There must be a lot of young students during summer vocations. (Chinese literature student, 24, Shanghai)

Many of the audiences are aware of the commercial process of media industry when they analyse this television drama serial. From the quotations above, we can find that they are able to explain how television dramas plan their strategies to attract more viewers and raise discussions, then finally makes to commercial success. Especially because this drama has gained such great success in the market, marketing has become more eye-catching topic in the discussions.

During their analysis of the media, they are actually using their media knowledge or theories. The knowledge can be gained previously or from watching this television drama. They deepen it through commenting, debating or justifying the drama.

3.2.3 Self-production attempts remain few

Self-production is not popular among our participants. Even though fan content is well-known on the internet among these young people, there was only one of the interviewees have produced media self-content for this drama by themselves, but many of them have used the contents produced by other audiences, such as stickers.

> I have edited a picture by Photoshop and posted it on Weibo. (Art student, 17, Tampere)

Some have tried self-production for creating contents of some celebrities they liked before. They mostly learnt the skills in their study already then applied it to their interests, instead of learning new skills for this purpose. One interviewee mentioned that she had many friends around had produced media contents of celebrities by themselves:

> Because they like it, and they also have the technical skills. Because I am studying in journalism, for my friends or schoolmates, the skill of using like PS, PR, AE is necessary. They will use their own skills to produce related videos and pictures, just because they like. (Journalism Student A, 18, Shanghai)

The participants who have produced self-content are usually who already have previous knowledge or technical skills. For most of the people, they do not show much interest or passion on production when being asked whether they would like to try it in the future. Someone suggested that it requires too much efforts to learn technical skills for producing their own contents, but she does not have time or energy to devote into it. Especially for the people who have never use media producing software previously, self-production could be difficult to start. Lack of motivations or obstacles of technical problems can be the reasons that withdraw people from producing self-content.

3.2.4 Inspiration of learning history

Besides media literacy abilities, this television drama also shows its impact on extension of audience's knowledge. *Story of Yanxi Palace*, as a historical television drama, bases its story on the real history of Qing Dynasty. The characters in this television drama mostly really exist in the history. The drama also refers to the real history in many ways, such as the story, costume, setting and so on.

Even though there are obviously dramatic imaginations in the historical story, it seems to motivate the audiences to develop their historical knowledge to some extent. As some of the participants describe:

> I do not know much about Chinese history. I only searched for it after I watched this drama, like who is the real character in history, the queen in the history. I went to read this and got to know it. (Journalism student, 20, Shanghai)

> Watching this drama might raise my interests, it made me go online to find out if these people were real, and then let me know the relationship between the people at that time. (Operator, 28, Tampere)

As many interviewees suggest, they tried to search about some parts of history that they are interested in on the Internet after viewing the television drama. They decide which parts of the drama is 'realistic' by reading information from different source, whereby they found their understanding on the history. The initiation of learning was spontaneous.

In addition, some people found other historical science television programs when they searched on the Internet, such as Lecture Room and Files of National Treasures produced by mainstream channels, which introduced and discussed about the same period of history as this television drama. From those more 'official' programs, the audience obtained more history knowledge through diverse media. The television drama provides a start point for the audience to learn.

4 DISCUSSION

This chapter further discusses the findings of the social context and media literacy of the female protagonist television drama audiences. The discussion will be also connected with previous theories and studies. From the analysis, we can discover that many of the findings can support the previous studies with similarities in the outcomes, but there is also some new knowledge and information that can contribute to the field.

By analysing and arranging the findings, we will discuss more deeply the media usage of the television audience in Chinese context. In addition, we also propose various recommendations for developing media literacy to media educators, government and media industries, and give suggestions for further studies.

4.1 Critical literacy

In this study, the interviewees could be considered as media literate, who are able to use and evaluate media critically. Firstly, they are all young female from 18-30 years old, who use media frequently on daily base. Secondly, almost all of them are well-educated with bachelor's degree, and even some of them graduated from media related field. Therefore, the finding can be also related to their backgrounds or experiences, such as their working or study field, interests and so on.

Media literacy is a form of critical literacy, which involves analysis, evaluation and critical reflection. The aims of media education often develop critical abilities (Buckingham, 2003). Critical judgements about the television is or is not 'realistic' was discussed not only by the participants from this study, but also by the project of Buckingham. We have found similar outcomes as him. As he suggests, those critical judgements can enable the audience to present themselves as sophisticated viewers with powerful social identities (Buckingham,

2003). The participants of this study also seem to identify themselves as more media literate viewers who have typical taste or criteria on television dramas, especially among the people who have study previously in media-related degree. In the findings of the manuscript of academic article, it is also discovered that the participants also reflect their gender identities in the critical analysis. For example, they criticized the female stereotypes in the television drama and articulated their imaginations of females in the society.

To be critical is to be powerful. Critical discourse reflects a sense of 'empowerment'. It enables us to think in more systematic and rigorous ways (Buckingham, 2003). In this case, the audience are enabled to express their opinions and participate in debates instead of remaining silence. They were able to analyse the television drama from different perspectives using their media knowledge. Moreover, they recognised and seemed to understand the complexity of their pleasure, as they pointed out how this drama has succeeded to attract them and keep them watching it. They were also aware of the commercial process of media industry, which prevents themselves from accepting all the meanings from the drama.

We can conclude that being critical should be a very crucial component in media literacy. The young audience investigated have abundant access to diverse sources of information. At the same time, they show abilities on using the media critically. They view the television program in a rational way and from different perspectives. With the growth amount of information reaching out to the young people nowadays, critical literacy will be even more significant for their social life.

Even though China has a great number of media users and the age of using media is younger too, media education is often neglected by schools or parents. Instead, they tend to rather provide solutions by strengthening the media censorship. We suggest that abilities of critical thinking should be paid more attentions to by educators, parents and the policy maker in China, not matter in school or outside classroom. In addition, as Buckingham (2003) suggests, critical analysis need to be combined with creative production, which we will discussion more later.

Though we have studied the social context of the communication in this research, there are still questions remained regarding critical literacy, such as

"how audience produce or construct meanings on gender issues in the social context?" and "How can media education be implemented in Chinese context to develop people's critical abilities?". In addition, the participants might give their responses based on what they consider as "correct" things to say, especially regarding gender issues. These would require further researches and investigation.

4.2 Creative production

Besides, critical analysis, production is the other important part of media education. The rich and complex practices that characterize young people's media production are inseparable from the development of media literacy (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012). Buckingham (2003) also emphasizes the value of practical work, where he suggests media education should combine critical analysis with creative production. However, the finding of this study does not show a very positive result. Even though user-generated content is popular among young people, most of the participants failed to produce their own media content. There are many reasons given, such as lack of technical skills, time or motivation.

Considering within the context of media education, teacher's guidance should always be provided to help students to overcome the difficulties in production. With the development of technology, digital equipment simplifies the process of media production. For example, mobile phone nowadays can be used for video shooting and editing. Most of young people are frequent media users too. It is easier for them to acquire necessary skills for production. Western countries provide many examples of how the practice of production can be implemented in schools. For example, media studies course in British secondary school requires student to take at least two production projects as part of their examination, such as produce a video, website or radio show. They are also asked to write a self-evaluation text to explain their goals, reflect the producing process, theories and critical knowledges they have learned in the course. (Buckingham, 2003)

On the other hand, a television drama serial with a genre that students are interested in can function as a start point for them to develop their media literacy

in practice. Julian Sefton-Green (1995) conducted a study of project on soap opera with thirteen- to fourteen-year-olds students, whereby the value of working within a given genre with which students are already familiar was pointed out. During the process, the students learnt how meaningful narratives be generated, and used the conventions they already knew to explore the representations of the social issues.

In this study, the female protagonist television drama as a historical soap drama shows its own conventions. This genre of television dramas is popular and well-known among Chinese audience. Therefore, there can be a potential for it to work as a start point and reference for creative production of student. Through creative production and self-evaluation, students can actively use the knowledge they acquire from critical analysis, reflect the process and connect practice with theory. However, this would require further study to investigate the practical implement. This practice can possibly face with many difficulties in China. There are still lack of resources in many poorer areas, which not only means the shortage of facilities, but most importantly means the lack of media educators who are qualified.

There are still some things interesting that could be studied further considering creative production of the audience. For example, researchers can investigate the media production of audiences to explore how they construct or represent their gender identities, which can possibly provide a different view for researcher than the responses from focus group interviews. However, in this case, we do not have available examples as the participants are lack of producing experience.

4.3 Connecting learning with pleasure

Many of the interviewees mentioned that they were attracted by this television drama due to its dramatic plots, excitement, fast- progressing rhythm, suspense or production quality. As Silverston (1999) suggests, pleasure and play are central aspects of our relationship with the media. Most of the participants admitted that they were interested in this television drama and perceived pleasure from viewing it, which motivated them to comment, to criticize, to search for more related information and to learn.

Ito et al. (2013) argued that connecting academic learning to what the students themselves find interesting might be beneficial to them. During the audience's critical judgement of the television drama, they utilize their media knowledge and analyse it from different perspectives. The learning process is spontaneous because they have strong interests in it and received pleasure. The pleasure in the use of media give motivations in media literacy development, which should not be neglected in media education no matter in schools or outside classrooms.

In addition, we discovered that a television drama or genre that audience are interested in is beneficial not just for developing media literacy but also for learning other subjects. In this case, some interviewees suggest that they tried to search about the part of history that they are interested in after viewing the television drama. When they searched the information from other media, they figured out whether the drama is empirical realistic by their own judgements, which develops their critical thinking. At the same time, they obtained history knowledge during their critical use of media. Similarly, we can assume that there can be possibilities on other subjects with the help of different genres of television dramas. Guidelines can even be provided if needed to develop learning while entertaining. Distinguished from educational programs, television drama serials are designed be to more attracting or entertaining. It makes the media practice more feasible even outside classrooms as it provides self-driven motivations for students to learn.

In the findings, we also discovered that the female protagonist television drama can provoke discussions on female issues. The participants reflect the social context and gender identities. This genre of television drama can be useful in engaging people's participation in social discussions and communication. It shows that it not only has educational function, but also has its social functions. To show it impact in public discussion, pleasure from viewing the drama is the central key that leads and opens the door.

However, the potential of educational values of television dramas is often neglected, which more likely be regarded as simply meaningless entertainment. Compared to programs especially designed for educational use, television drama serials provide more pleasure which can satisfy the basic needs of audiences. Through different genres or themes, television drama can trigger people's

interests on related topics, especially on social issues. It can function as a start point for social discussions and practices of using media. Though there can be limitations on this method and there are still lots of questions remained to be studied further. For example, the practical use and educational functions of female protagonist television drama should be further studied.

5 CONCLUSION

The objectives of this research to study the media literacy and social context of the television audience of Chinese protagonist television drama - *Story of Yanxi Palace*. In the manuscript of academic article, we aim to answer the questions that "How do the audience of the popular female protagonist television drama understand and imagine the society through the television drama?" and "What symptomatic features of female's situations in China can be spotted?" In the reflective part of the thesis, we intend to answer, "How do audiences of *Story of Yanxi Palace* use media literacy when watching the television drama?" and "How can the female protagonist television dramas be utilized in media education?"

In the manuscript of academic article, we found that gender issues such as sexual assaults, gender inequality and discrimination are important social problems that the interviewees discussed about. Through this female protagonist drama, they reflect the social issues of female's situation and the gender identities. The fast-paced modern working life brings changes on those young people's choices of television dramas. They tend to show preference on the television drama with intensity, pleasure and energy to relief their pressure, exhaustion and dreariness. The gap of values between young people and last generation are also recognised. The young participants show less value on romance and royalty, and growth of individualism.

In the reflective part of the thesis, we discovered that the audience could use media critically. They negotiate the meanings by searching information, discussing and judging the television drama. However, creative production is still lacking among the participants. On the other hand, the interest and pleasure of the television drama can motivate spontaneous learning and developing media literacy. It shows potential to raise discussions on social issues and connect different fields of learning.

The goals of this study have been pretty much achieved, as the research questions are answered by the findings and discussion. Many of the findings are

found to be supportive to previous theories and studies, but also contribute new information on understand the young audience in the contemporary Chinese society.

However, there are also some limitations of this study. For instance, the scale of the participants is quite small. Sixteen participants from four different cities found the five focus groups. In addition, the backgrounds of the audience are not very diverse. Most of the participants are well-educated. The occupations or study fields of many people are related to media, which can possibly affect the results.

There are also many problems should be solved in further research, such as the practical implementation of female protagonist television drama in media education in Chinses context. For media educators and policy makers, we suggest that they should pay more attentions of developing student's media literacy and put media education into curriculum or classroom practice which combining critical analysis and creative production.

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Audience of Chinese Female Protagonist Television Drama

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Abstract

Wen Ouyang: Audience of Chinese Female Protagonist Television Drama
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Chinee female protagonist television dramas have gained exceptional attentions in recent years. This article aims to investigate and understand the social context of the female protagonist television drama audience in China. It takes the audience of *Story of Yanxi Palace* - the most popular television drama in 2018 as the investigation subject. We try to answer: "How do the audience of the popular female protagonist television drama understand and imagine the society through the drama?" and "What symptomatic features of female's situations in China can be spotted?"

This study has conducted a qualitive case research which uses focus group interviews to collect empirical material and content analysis method for evaluation. Sixteen young female audiences from four different cities participated the focus group interviews. The answers about feminism, female's work life and generation gap were chosen to be analysed.

As discovered in this study, the participants reflect the social issues and the gender identities through this drama. Secondly, with the fast pace and high pressure of modern working life, they tend to show preference on the television drama with intensity, pleasure and energy. Thirdly, the gap of values between young people and last generation are showed on less-valued romance and royalty, and growth of individualism. The findings support the previous theories, but also contributes new knowledge to social and culture studies of China.

Keywords: female, television drama, audience

1. Introduction

Since 2011, female protagonist television dramas have become a rising star at the stage of the Chinese television market. High ratings and public discussions are also motivating more productions of this genre of television dramas. In 2018, *Story of Yanxi Palace* (yan xi gong lue) which tells a story sets in Qing dynasty about a girl who searching for revenge for her murdered sister, has gained outstanding attentions and created hundreds of million profits for its producing company. *Story of Yanxi Palace* not only has been the most popular television drama in mainland China in 2018, but also showed its impact worldwide. According to the publication of Google Trend, *Story of Yanxi Palace* topped the list of the most Google searched TV shows in 2018.

Female protagonist television dramas have obtained unprecedented success during last ten years. It differentiates from other genres of televisions dramas that had been popular before, such as family ethics drama and youth idol dramas. It articulates the emphasis on a female character, who is usually powerful or extraordinary. The transformation of the tastes of the television audience and industry is implying what is happening in the Chinese society currently, especially regarding the situation of females.

This paper conducts a qualitative study on the audience of the most popular television drama in 2018 - *Story of Yanxi Palace*. Through the interpretation of the audience, we try to understand the Chinese females' status in the contemporary social life and their expectations of a better reality. In other words, this study explores Chinese female social lives from both realistic and spiritual levels.

1.1   Purpose of the study

China is a country where a relatively conservative perspective on gender is widely applied. With the voice of females is increasingly heard, arising issues on such as gender stereotype, prejudice and female identities, have raised the attentions of researchers. In recent years, female protagonist television dramas obtained incredibly high popularity in China. As the main audience, female's opinions are also shaping the media industry. At the same time, the dramas themselves and

the interpretation of audiences are telling about the Chinese society on the women's situations in China.

How do the audience of the popular female protagonist television drama understand and imagine the society through the drama? What symptomatic features of female's situations in China can be spotted? The purpose of this paper is to answer these questions. The study is trying to explore the social or discursive context by understanding the media audiences. It also aims to help to update the media studies of television dramas and to fill the research gap by analysing the remarkable social phenomenon with the latest empirical data.

1.2   Context of the research

'Female protagonist television drama' (da nu zhu) is a term that the Chinese press uses to describe a television drama that takes a female's perspective in the main storyline and shows her inspiring life. One of the typical kinds of female protagonist television drama is the historical dramas that named after the female protagonist name, such as *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace* (ru yi zhuan). Since the female protagonist television drama *Empresses in the Palace* (zhen huan zhuan) won its success in 2011, there was a hit of 'powerful female' television dramas. In 2017, many female protagonist dramas targeting female audience appeared in the Chinese market and gained high ratings. Female protagonist television dramas as a new genre of content have been very popular among women in China. In the August of 2018, an extremely hot historical female protagonist television drama named *Story of Yanxi Palace* exceeded 15 billion clicks on the Internet.[1] It has been the most popular television drama in China in 2018. This drama as a case is selected as the discussion topic in the interviews of this study.

According to *2018 Chinese television drama industry report*, contemporary realistic themes among television dramas are rising with audiences' preference and policy encouragement. There are more 'female workplace dramas' showing females work lives. In 2017, more than half of the top rating television dramas are female protagonist dramas. From 2010 to 2017, more than half of the top10 rating

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[1] Data from the exclusive online releasing platform of *Story of Yanxi Palace*– Iqiyi. (http://www.iqiyi.com/lib/m_215237614.html)

television dramas are female protagonist dramas. 53.8% of television drama audiences on the Internet are females, and 44.9% of them are 26-30 years old and 24.6% are aged 18-25 years old. Considering the statistics, this study looks for the female audience who are between 18 to 30 years old to participate the interviews.

Compared to the previous popular television dramas, women prefer more independent and mature female characters instead of innocent or naive girls. We can see the needs of Chinese women have changed - from romantic story to work life, from relationship to career success. Leadership has become a significant factor in many of the popular Chinese female protagonist television dramas, in which female protagonists dominate the central story line and show great influences on other characters around her.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Social imaginary

Female protagonist television drama and its audience are obviously the consequences of the modern society, which means the questions of this research also lead to the problem of modernity: "the new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization); new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality); and new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution)" (Taylor, 2002).

Charles Taylor (2002) suggests that modernity is inseparable from a certain kind of social imaginary, which he described as:

> the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and other people, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations.

Social imaginary is so fundamental in human society that it makes our daily existence meaningful and enables our social practices. It is rooted deeply in the material world and affected by people's ways of understanding the world. It implies how people understand and 'imagine' the society that they are living in.

Therefore, social imaginary can be a key for us to open the doors of the collective understandings of the modern people. Under the light of social imaginary, we could explore what kind of pictures that audiences form about the contemporary society, especially about the situations of females.

Taylor (2002) demonstrates that the way people "imagine" their social surroundings is often contained in images, stories, legends, etc. In this case, the female protagonist television drama provides a starting point for social imaginary. The television drama containing people's imaginations is not only a choice by producers or the television industry, but also a preference of audience whose needs show a great impact on the market. Audiences select and enjoy the television dramas that conform to their imagination – the better world and the ways of living they expect.

Audiences for particular media genres often comprise separate "interpretative communities" that share much the same forms of discourse and frameworks for making sense of media. (Morley, 1992; Seiter, Borchers, Kreutzner, & Warth, 1989) The audiences are not only interpretative, but also can be regarded as "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991). Television audiences, working as a collective agency, are able to reach a common mind and social imaginary by engaging in the discussions through various forms of media even though their personal experiences and backgrounds can be diverse. While their interpretation and discourse can be in unlimited forms, which can be difficult to generate and conclude, it is significant to recognise that social imaginary is shared by big groups or communities of audiences.

2.2 Utopian Sensibility

Whenever there is dissatisfaction with the reality, people will expect or imagine a better world. To fulfil this need, they will look for the entertainments such as television dramas which offer the image of 'something better' to escape into, or something they want deeply that the real lives do not provide. Alternatives, hopes and wishes are the stuff of utopia (Dyer, 1981).

Richard Dyer (1981) suggests that the utopianism is contained in the feelings it embodies. "It presents what utopia would feel like, rather than how it would be organized. Therefore, it works at the level of sensibility". The categories

of the utopian sensibility are related to specific inadequacies in society, such as scarcity, exhaustion, dreariness, manipulation and fragmentation. As the Table 1 shows, he has stressed the relationship of the utopian sensibility (abundance, energy, intensity, transparency and community) and social tension/inequality/absence (scarcity, exhaustion, dreariness, manipulation and fragmentation).

TABLE 1.   Categories of the utopian sensibility

Social tension/inadequacy/absence	Utopian solution
Scarcity (actual poverty in the society; poverty observable in the surrounding societies, e.g. Third World); unequal distribution of wealth	Abundance (elimination of poverty for self and others; equal distribution of wealth)
Exhaustion (work as a grind, alienated labour, pressures of urban life)	Energy (work and play synonymous), city-dominated (*On the Town*) or pastoral return (*The Sound of Music*)
Dreariness (monotony, predictability, instrumentality of the daily round)	Intensity (excitement, drama, affectivity of living)
Manipulation (advertising, bourgeois democracy, sex roles)	Transparency (open, spontaneous, honest communications and relationships)
Fragmentation (job mobility, rehousing and development, high-rise flats, legislation against collective action)	Community (all together in one place, communal interests, collective activity)

From Dyer's theory, we can understand how entertainment works and how they offer utopian solutions for social inadequacy. Entertainments such as television dramas respond to the real demands of the society. Enzensberger (1972) believes that consumption as spectacle is the anticipation of a utopian situation. The exceptional consumption of a specific genre of television drama is also reflecting the social tensions, what are absent from the contemporary society, and what are needed and expected by people.

With this useful framework of Table 1, we will discuss more examples of this case and find out how is the utopian world that audiences are searching for

through viewing the female protagonist television drama like and what kind of social inadequacy bring about these needs of entertainment.

2.3   Previous studies

Ien Ang (1985) used melodramatic imagination to study on the popular American soap opera *Dallas*. She suggests that melodramatic imagination should be regarded as a psychological strategy to overcome the material meaninglessness of everyday existence. She put her research focus on aspects of pleasure and ideology, where she suggests that the pleasure of *Dallas* comprises in the recognition of ideas that fit in with the audiences' imaginative world. "They can "lose" themselves in *Dallas* because the programme symbolizes a structure of feeling which connects up with one of the ways in which they encounter life." (Ang, 1985) In addition, she discussed pleasure from the perspective of feminism: All feminist struggles are related in some way to the imaginary Utopia of a future where women will not anymore be dominated by patriarchal structures and sexist practices (Ang, 1985).

However, instead of pleasure and ideology, this study emphasizes rather on the social inadequacy through analysing the social imagination and utopian sensibility of some groups of audiences. In other words, we do not take the perspective of psychological well-being as a study of melodramas usually do but pay attentions to the relationship between the popularity of a specific television drama genre and the social tensions.

Story of Yanxi Palace as a female protagonist television drama, distinguishing itself from the western melodramas, has its own social and cultural context. This genre was categorized by the press and has only appeared for few years. The research gap has been noticed in this field with the limited number of related literatures and researches on female protagonist television dramas in China. Most of the articles related are from social media or news, instead of scientific articles. There are 24 articles founded on CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), which is the most commonly used database of Chinses academic articles. All the related academic articles were published on magazines and newspapers. There are no essays or theses on this particular topic. In addition, all those articles analysed Chinese female protagonist

television dramas from the contents or commercial aspects, but there is no article that has done researches on audiences and analysed this phenomenon from the perspective of cultural studies. Furthermore, even among international researchers, the main approach of studying Chinese media has been focusing on the 'texts' instead of the viewers (Keane, 2015). This article can contribute in filling the components that have been missing from the previous researches.

3. Empirical methodology

3.1 Qualitative case study

This study is a qualitative case study, which conducts focus group interviews in Chinese context. Qualitative case-study research is useful for investigating a contemporary phenomenon in its natural context (Houghton, Casey, Shaw & Murphy, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Qualitative research is using the methods of investigating phenomena, which can be any interpretive method which focuses on understanding meanings, typically includes focus groups, interviews, ethnography, etc (Chandler, Munday, 2011).

The method fits the objective of this study, which is to unfold the social context of the interviewees through their interpretation of the drama. We try to investigate the female's situation in China by analysing the audience's negotiation of the meanings of television programmes, which is affected not only by membership of a national culture but also by the social status of the viewer in that culture (Bignell, 2004).

Focus group interviews with background collections will be the most important and main source of empirical material for this study. Focus groups are small groups of selected people representing larger social groups who participate in discussions on a topic chosen for investigation (Bignell, 2004). Participants as representation of young female audience communities can express their opinions in a more natural social setting when discussing in a focus group.

Combing the research interests and the important aspects discussed in the drama and by the public, qualitative analysis in this study focus on the themes of feminism, female's work life and generation gap. This study will explore how do the audience of Chinese female protagonist television dramas understand the

meanings of the drama, and how do they articulate their social imaginations as modern females through the drama.

3.2 Implement of data collection

At first stage, one typical Chinese female protagonist television drama was chosen according to the viewing figures and public discussions. In this case, the drama chosen is *Story of Yanxi Palace* (2018). The researcher constructed the semi-structured interview questions by analysing the main themes of the drama and the keywords of public discussions. According to these, the thematic interviews mostly constructed with the topics on female protagonist, relationship, female leadership and so on. However, those are just preliminary categories, which will be adjust during analysis. Besides the questions provided in advance, other questions are also followed up by the answers from the interviewees to the open questions given.

At second phase, focus group interviews were conducted with Chinese young female audience to ask about their opinions and experiences. They were asked to watch a 7-min synopsis video of the drama together to remind them of the whole 70-episode story. The video was chosen due to its objectivity and less reproduction or comments from the author of the video. There are five focus groups (16 participants in total) from four different cities, which are Tampere in Finland, Beijing, Shanghai and Fuzhou in China. Participants are women whose age are 18-30 and who like to or spend much time on watching television dramas. Each 3- 4 participants form a focus group to carry on a 1.5 to 2 hours interview. The thematic interviews were conducted face to face. The audio of the interviews was recorded for further analysis with the permission from the participants. After the interviews, a background data collection form was distributed to everyone for collecting basic information, such as age, occupation, education level, etc.

It is an effective way to investigate the research problems because the interviews can be open and provide some inspirations to the researchers. However, there are also ethical challenges of this method. To deal with this, researchers need to protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants. All the participants were asked to sign a consent paper to give their permissions of recording their interviews and analysing the data before the interview started. The

participants were clearly informed of the procedure, confidentiality and the risk of this study. They have the rights to refuse or withdraw from the study, and rights to ask questions and report concerns.

3.3   Analysis methodology

With the data collected from focus group interviews, the next step is data analysing. The viewpoints of Ien Ang (1985) provide our data analysis a basic principle. She suggests that what people say or write should be regarded as texts or discourses people produce to express themselves, which cannot speak for themselves directly. They should be read 'symptomatically': "we must search for what is behind the words, the presuppositions and accepted attitudes concealed within them" (Ang, 1985).

To sort out useful information from the large amount of empirical material, we need to apply content analysis - a method of analysing written, verbal or visual communication messages (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Cole, 1988). It can be used for many purposes, such as coding open-ended questions in surveys and revealing the focus of individual, group, institutional, or societal attention (Weber, 1990).

The analysis processes are represented as three main phases: preparation, organizing and reporting. Despite this, there are no systematic rules for analysing data; the key feature of all content analysis is that the many words of the text are classified into much smaller content categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Weber, 1990; Burnard, 1996). In this study, the interviews were structured by several themes in advance. The voice recordings of the interviews were transcribed into text by software and manually, which then were categorized into smaller groups by the researcher. The common topics or opinions of interviewees were put together. According to the research objectives, the researcher chose the most typical categories and drew the findings together with interpretation and discussion.

The great flexibility of this method suits the characteristics of qualitative data collected from interviews and fits mostly to our research purposes. However, one challenge of content analysis is that there is no simple right way to do it. Researchers must judge what methods are most appropriate for their research problems (Weber, 1990). Ruddock (2001) also suggested that focus group

interviews might face problem in transcript analysis, which is how to establish criteria for selecting and interpreting significant comments. Researchers must be aware of the challenges and improve their skills to minimize the limitation of method.

4. Analysis

Many scholars have argued that current television dramas, depending on the genre, offer viewers the opportunity to imagine and fantasize their life and social order in modern China. This makes it significant to investigate not only the individual television drama, but also the whole genre system and – as in our case study – articulations of viewers. Articulation is a process of creating connections that can make a unity of two different elements such as the articulated discourse and the social force, under certain conditions (Hall, 1986). We utilize articulation as a theory and method in cultural studies, which provides a way of 'contextualizing' the object of analysis (Morley & Chen, 2006).

It is noticed that the problems of contemporary Chinese context have been always discussed about throughout the conversations. Richard Dyer (1981) has associated five social tensions - scarcity, exhaustion, dreariness, manipulation and fragmentation with five utopian solutions - energy, abundance, intensity, transparency and community. The interviewees articulate their social imaginaries and social context, either with help of the utopian solutions provided by the drama or their own imaginations. Dyer's framework offers an opportune guide for organizing our findings. As the drama is responding to the demands and expectations of the society, we can not only understand how entertainment works by creating a utopian world, but most importantly reveal what social problems or situations rooted behind the social imaginations. In the analysis, we will try to connect viewers' articulations with social tensions or inadequacy. The articulation areas are chosen according to the popularity of discussions and research interests.

4.1 Resistance of feminism

As Bignell (2004) claims, feminism is the political and theoretical thinking reviewing the roles of women and femininity in society and culture, often with the purpose of evaluating current roles and improving them. The responses of the interviewee reflect feminism thinking in several ways, from which the important ones can be divided into two parts.

4.1.1 Justice in female sexual assaults

One of the interviewees relates this drama to the recently frequent news of sexual assaults or crimes in China and 'Me too' movement on the Internet. She suggested this drama uncovers the problems in the reality, as she describes:

> Wei's sister, she actually suffered a sexual assault in the workplace. It was a man from the royal family who was drunk and assaulted her. Then all of her efforts and outstanding achievements in work were buried (Chinese literature student, 24, Shanghai).

Moreover, she also feels that it is implied in the drama that how the ancient society reacts to the female sexual assault is in a similar way of the contemporary society:

> The rapist's mother killed her and sent her home. Everything related to her is forbidden to talk about in the palace. It is like today's 'he xie' (harmonize). Then at that time, including her sister's father, their family felt that this incident was shameful, even though it was not their daughter's fault. Fortunately, she has a sister who wanted to fight for justice (Chinese literature student, 24, Shanghai).

As the interviewee said, this might be why the female viewers feel good to see the rise of such character, which another interviewee also agrees with:

> In recent years, there have been various kinds of women who have encountered discrimination or been treated unfairly or sexually abused. Considering our current 'Me too' activities, and more and more feminist movements, I think it actually caters to the thoughts of people in contemporary society. (Journalism student A, 18, Shanghai)

When female sexual assault news or feminism movements disseminated, the dissatisfaction of the society and the awareness of feminism rise in the discussions. At the same time, this drama exposes the violation of females. The

success of the female protagonist in punishing the criminal is perceived as a metaphor of defending female rights.

This drama shows an imagination of justice and defence for females who ever suffered from concealed sexual assaults. The unfairly manipulation of the patriarchal society as a social tension is provided with a utopian solution of transparency in the drama. That could be one of the reasons why the drama which depicts a fairer world for women has become popular among female viewers.

4.1.2 Equality in gender roles

The female protagonist in this drama is often regarded as a distinguishing character by most of the interviewees. She is independent and tough. Most importantly, she can obtain success on her own as a man can do:

> In normal ancient dramas, especially palace dramas, you will see that women usually rely on men to promote, but this drama does not (Journalism student B, 20, Shanghai).

> She did not rely on the male protagonist at all, and even did not please him. Instead, she used the him to complete her final goal of revenge (English teacher, 24, Fuzhou).

The features of this ancient female character are actually close to the values of the modern females. This also matches the ideas of the producer of this drama, as he said, 'She is very in line with the awareness of modern women. The logic behind all her behaviours carries anti-feudal consciousness. She emphasizes monogamy. She insists on getting along with the emperor on an equal basis.'

The traits of the female protagonist meet the values of modern women in China. The female protagonist in this drama provides an imagined image of a women contrary to the stereotypes and expectations created by the patriarchal values, which pleases the audience who expect that females can have more possibility of seeking for a different gender role and being treated with more open attitudes.

4.2 Female's working life

It has been widely discussed online and even by the press that this drama reflects the patterns of real workplace (zhi chang). The process how the female protagonist become an empress represents the promotion in work, while the palace represents the workplace. Opinions on this topic are divided.

Some think they share similarities:

> In fact, the structure of the palace is quite similar to workplace. Different positions will have different salaries, different identity symbols, different reliance. All kinds of these things are actually like the hierarchy of workplace (Journalism Student A, 18, Shanghai).

Some disagree that it implies the real workplace:

> Even if we think this drama is like a workplace drama, it is only based on the knowledge of those workplace dramas we watched, then feel like the promotion mode of this drama is a bit like the workplace dramas, but it is still (different) than the workplace in real life (Internet operator, 24, Beijing).

4.2.1 Fast pace and high pressure

One of the social tensions noticed in female's working life is *dreariness*, which here refers to monotony of the fast life in the metropolis. It is more discussed among the interviews from Beijing and Shanghai, where people usually spend much more time on commuting than other cities. That explains why the audiences obtain pleasure from *intensity* and excitement from this drama.

> The time we watch tv dramas or entertain is all squeezed out. For example, when you are on the way commuting to work. There is not much time left between arriving home and going to sleep, and you also try to take more rest. Therefore, we actually like things that are short and fast, and it is better that exciting pointes come quicker (Internet operator, 24, Beijing).

> I found that she actually has a point in each episode, which makes you feel very good. It is not like a lot of TV dramas, that one plot or story might continue in several episodes, and the female protagonist may be suppressed for a long time. But this drama will progress very quickly, and the female protagonist will quickly rise after being suppressed. So I feel that there will be a point in almost every episode (Art management student, 22, Beijing).

Relieving the pressure from work is also a frequently mentioned reason why the viewers enjoy this drama. *Exhaustion* from high working pressure is treated by *energy* from this drama, in which the protagonist can accomplish unusual

achievements. Even though the audience understand the story might not be realistic, they still got pleasure from realization of the things that they want to do but not be able to do:

> I think the reasons why the audience feels very good, for example, those of us employees also encounter the pressure from bosses at work, but we never dare to say no, never dare to resist, but when we see Wei rebelled and got good results, we are very happy inside (Film and TV producer, 23, Beijing).

4.2.2 Balance of work and family

When discussing about women and work, family was an inevitable topic in the interviews, which is also considered as one of the biggest problems for females to obtain their promotion in career. Having children could be a serious burden in female's working life:

> For a woman, how to plan the part of your family in the future, how to balance family and career, is a big problem (Chinese literature student, 24, Shanghai).

> The society's requirement for women is really high, especially when a woman has a child, then everyone will ask you to take care of the child, but at the same time, you also have to have a position in the workplace. Or if you are off track a little bit, you will be kicked out by this team. Therefore, there are actually many women who don't have children.' (Actor agent, 23, Beijing)

Some mentioned that when a company recruiting female employees, they will ask them about marital status and plan of having children. These might have an impact on whether they can get admitted to a job or what kind of tasks or position they will be assigned to. Even though they might not be asked directly by employers, the concerns usually still exist. Females are put into the dilemma between work and family involuntarily. This social tension has been developed by the *manipulation* of the stereotype and discrimination for female workers. However, it was not been provided with a utopian solution in this ancient palace drama.

4.3 Generation gap

Most of the interviewees acknowledge that the values implied in this drama correspond to the values of younger generations to some extent. Rebellions

against the traditional values can be traced in the changes of young people's values. Some interviewees even regard the female protagonist as radical character. Some suggest that her behaviours might not conform ethics according to the traditional virtues:

> In fact, I think Wei is a bit like the heroines in American dramas, because she is a little bitchy. Other female protagonists all obey the Chinese traditions: they must have some nature of goodness. She might have some, but not so obvious (Actor agent, 23, Beijing).

4.3.1 Less-valued romance and loyalty

The values of this drama are in favoured by many of the interviewees. What is quite different from previous popular television dramas is that romantic relationship or love is less valued in this drama and by young people. The interviewees feel encouraged and empowered to pursue what they desire and choose what suits them better instead of insisting on romance or loyalty.

> In Wei's life value, she may feel that love is not a very important part. So, she may send a message to women that we do not need to be bounded too much by other people, we are able to pursue what we want (Journalism student B, 20, Shanghai).

> I think that the previous TV dramas often praised some girls who insisted (one relationship) for a lifetime, and then they lived poorly, but now there is a new person Wei who tells you that you can choose the one who suits you better. She made her choices that more suitable for her at that situation and insisted to the end. I think it is also very right (Chinese literature student, 24, Shanghai).

Loyal love has always been eulogized in Chinese culture. In most of the television dramas targeted female audience, romantic relationship is taken for granted as priority of a female protagonist's life. Loyalty as a virtue sometimes also accompanied with sacrifice and suppression. While in this drama, the males in the love relationship with the female protagonist have been changing when their interest relations changed. Instead of showing ideally romantic relationships as many other dramas do, it carries a more realistic value which emphasizes female's own benefits and desires.

4.3.2 Growth of individualism

One of the interviewees explained that the transition of tastes on television dramas is showing the transformation of the values between different generations:

> The reason why we are gradually disapproving (love-oriented value) now is because some of the audience who watched dramas, no longer have love-oriented value in their real life. Therefore, I think this is also a change of the audiences. Because like my mother, a housewife, their values are more family-oriented, or that the husband, child and families are at the first place. Because many of these housewives have sacrificed their own pursuit of life or professional pursuits. Their focus is all on the family, or some women's centre is in love, so the previous dramas are especially popular among those people (Internet operator, 24, Beijing).

The preference on different genres of television dramas shows what kinds of values female audience support or resonate with. When audiences of last generation showed great interests on family and marriage, the family ethics dramas which show the secular family and marriage of common people's life became popular at the beginning of 21st century. However, family-centred themes have been replaced by strong female' stories since 2011 with the rise of individualism among nowadays young people. They are looking forwards to break out from the traditional values, explore more diverse life opportunities and pursue their personal advancements rather than sacrifice themselves to the family.

5. Conclusion

The objective of this study is to answer these questions: "How do the audience of the popular female protagonist television drama understand and imagine the society through the drama?" and "What symptomatic features of female's situations in China can be spotted?" Through the exceptional popularity of female protagonist television dramas, we aim to investigate and understand the social surroundings where ever-changing audiences are living in. This study has conducted a qualitative case research utilizing focus group interviews, which succeeded to unfold the reality of Chinese society with the theories of social imaginary (Taylor, 2002) and utopian sensibility (Dyer, 1981).

As discovered in this study, gender issues such as sexual assaults, gender inequality and discrimination are important social problems that the interviewees

discussed about. Through this female protagonist drama, they reflect the social issues of female's situation and the gender identities. The fast-paced modern working life brings changes on those young people's choices of television dramas. They tend to show preference on the television drama with intensity, pleasure and energy to relief their pressure, exhaustion and dreariness. The gap of values between young people and last generation are also recognised. The young participants show less value on romance and royalty. There is also a growth of individualism among the young audience, who focus more on their own life pursuit instead of scarifying themselves for the family.

According to our findings, the audience were able to reach collective understanding in their social imaginaries. At the same time, utopian sensibilities are related to specific social tensions or inadequacy. Therefore, the findings support the theories we employed. In addition, the study also contributes new knowledges to social and culture studies of China. The study investigates Chinese contemporary society with a focus on young female viewers of specific genre, which differs from other similar researches.

The limitation of this study is inevitable subjectivity of qualitative method. The researcher plays an important role in the process of interviews and analysis. The language translation could also have a possible impact on understanding and interpretation. Besides, the number of focus groups is limited due to practical conditions. It can be improved by increasing more groups in future studies.

There are still many aspects of Chinese society have great potentials of academic values for further research, such as female leadership, pleasure, socializing and so on. How is female leadership depicted in television dramas? How Chinese audiences understand female leadership? Such questions are meaningful for further research in the field of cultural studies.

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Interview questions

General question:

1.   Do you like to watch television dramas? What kind of dramas do you like to watch?

2.   Do you like *Story of Yanxi Palace*? What do you like/dislike about?

Female protagonist:

1.   What do you think of the female protagonist (Wei Yingluo)? What kind of person you think she is? What do you think of her personalities (for example, tough, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, 'Revenge is the biggest thing in my life') and ways of doing things (for example, lying or setting traps for revenge)? (Key words discussed online: protagonist halo, Mary Sue, Anti-Routine/ anti-tradition)

2.   What do you think that after episode 40, she became not so sharp as before, and decided to become king' wife, just like other women? (an outstanding person becomes normal)

3.   What do you think are the differences between this female protagonist and the traditional ones?

Pleasure:

1.   Regardless of other factors, do you think this drama gave you pleasure when viewing? Why?

2.   Do you think pleasure is a crucial factor that you will consider when you watch a television drama?

Relationship:

1.   What do you think of her relationship with other women? (the queen - Fu Cha, her enemies - Gao, Erqing & Xian) Do you like to watch dramatic relationship between women? （fight in palace）

2.   What do you think of her relationship with other men? (the king – Qian Long, queen' brother (her lover) - Fu Heng) What do you think that she finally married to the man she doesn't love?

3.   Who do you think she has the most important relationship with? Why?

Leadership:

1.   What is her role in the drama? How does she affect other people?

2.   Why do you think she can be a leader?

3.   Do you prefer to watch a drama with a female protagonist who has outstanding leadership? Why?

4.   Which do you think is more important to you when watching a female protagonist television drama, strong leadership or romantic relationship or other things?

5.   How does this drama change or affect your opinions or attitudes on women's leadership? Do you think leadership is important for women?

6.   What do you think are the differences/similarities between female leaders in tv dramas and in real life? Do you think the palace reflects the work place in real life? What kinds of difficulties did she meet in the drama? And what kinds of difficulties a female leader can meet in real work place? (glass ceiling, prejudice, gender stereotype)

Media Literacy:

1.   Did you see anything not 'real' to you in this drama? How do you justify whether the content is real history or not?

2.   Did you search for the history after watching historic tv dramas? Where? What did you learn?

3.   What are the most key factors when you evaluate a drama? (for example, from drama itself from technical and aesthetic aspect: quality of story, casting, setting, lines or even things like plagiarism and reputation. Or from personal perspective: how it benefits you?)

4.   How do you think of the comments of this drama? Why do you think this drama gained such an amazingly high rating?

5.   Have you joined any community of the drama? (For example, fan's club, online forums, etc.) Who do you usually discuss with?

6.　　Have you produced any content related to this drama? (For example, sticker, photo, video, etc.)

7.　　What social group or phenomenon do you think the drama is representing? (gender, stereotype, representation)

8.　　What social meanings/values do you think the drama promotes?

Background Information

1. Name:

2. Age:

3. Education:

4. Occupation:

5. School/Company:

6. Field:

7. Location:

(if in Finland, how long have you been there? _____)

8. What media do you often use?

☐TV

☐Internet

☐Radio

☐Newspaper

☐Other _____

9. What social media platform(s) do you often use?

☐Facebook

☐Twitter

☐Instagram

☐Snapchat

☐Wechat

☐Weibo

☐Other _____

10. How often do you watch tv dramas?

☐Several times each day

☐Daily or almost daily

☐At least every week

☐At least every month

☐Hardly ever

☐Never

11. What device do you usually use to watch tv dramas?

☐TV

☐Mobile phone

☐Computer

☐Tablet

☐Other _____

12. Where do you usually watch tv dramas?

☐Home

☐Transportation (e.g. metro, bus, train)

☐School

☐Company/ work place

☐Other _____

13. Who do you usually discuss about tv dramas with?

☐Family member

☐Friend

☐Classmate

☐Colleague

☐Other _____

Consent to Participate in Group Interview

Topic of Study: Television Audience and Media literacy: Audience of Chinese Female Protagonist Television Drama

Objective: to study how the audiences interpret and understand Chinese female protagonist television dramas

Researchers: Wen Ouyang (Ouyang.wen.x@uta.student.fi), Iiris Ruoho (iiris.ruoho@uta.fi)

- Participation to the interview is voluntary. The interviewee has the right to terminate the interview at any time or to decline to answer any question.

- The interview will take 1.5-2 hours. The interview will be audio recorded and subsequently transcribed into a text file.

- The confidentiality of the interview will be ensured by the procedure whereby researchers and research assistants processing the recordings will sign an undertaking of confidentiality. The recordings will only be accessible to individuals with specified user accounts. Participants' personal data will not be shared to outsiders at any time.

- A transcribed text file will be produced of the interview. During transcription, the name of the interviewee and any third parties mentioned in the interview will be removed or replaced by pseudonyms. If need be, place names and other proper names (e.g. names of workplaces) will also be removed or altered in order to prevent any risk of identification.

- The audio recording will be erased after the interview is transcribed.

- Publications or presentations on the interviews will be written in a manner that no interviewee or third parties mentioned in the interview will be identifiable.

- Research publications may include direct quotations from the interviews. The gender, age and occupation of the interviewee will be mentioned in connection with the quotation.

- After the research is completed, the interview transcripts will be stored permanently at the Finnish Social Science Data Archive for research purposes OR for research, teaching and study purposes. If necessary,

further identifying information will be edited or removed from the transcripts during archiving (anonymization).

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above.

Participant's Signature:_____   Date:

Researcher's Signature:_____   Date:

                             _____   Date: