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Stereotyping of women's images portrayed in prime time Chinese TV series from 1979 to 2008: Has the picture changed over time?

by

Zhuyi Zheng

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Journalism and Mass Communication

Program of Study Committee:
Thomas L. Beell, Major Professor
Barbara M. Mack
Anastasia H. Prokos

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how women were portrayed in prime time Chinese television series from 1979 to 2008. It investigates whether female characters' occupations and occupational status changed over time. It then compares the occupational distributions of the female characters on TV with female occupations in real life.

A content analysis of 63 prime time TV series depicting 298 women in contemporary Chinese society was conducted to determine whether the programs reinforced or challenged female stereotypes.

The findings show female characters in TV series had a variety of occupations over three decades. However, they were rarely portrayed as having top management power in the workplace. In addition, the variety and type of occupations shown in the TV series only partly reflect reality. The results suggest stereotypes of women on television have changed, showing them less dependent and with growing power in society.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Women in China have long been experiencing gender oppression and inequality, even after the founding of People's Republic of China (Curtin, 1975; Li, 1988; Pearson, 1995; Wei & Pan, 1999; Wallis, 2006). An evolution regarding women's social status may have occurred because of China's implementation of Deng Xiaoping's Open-Door Policy¹ in 1978 and hosting of the Fourth World's Conference on Women in 1995. With the deepening of China's cultural and economical reform, great changes have been found in the type of jobs available to women. A growing number of women are dedicated to seeking occupations that help with their personal development (Su, 2001). Television, a well-known storyteller, influences viewers' socialization of occupational identity by depicting people within a working environment (DeFleur, 1964). While studies revealed the distribution of occupational roles on TV do not represent the population statistics, they do provide "specific, consistent and often stereotypic messages about the world of work" (Seggar & Wheeler, 1973; Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001, p. 5). This study examines how women were portrayed in prime time TV series during a period of tremendous change in China. The objective is to demonstrate the relationship between women's occupations in reality and female characters' occupations portrayed in popular prime time TV series, and to find out whether television creates and reinforces stereotypes of the female gender roles.

1 The Open-Door Policy first introduced in 1978 changed "China's economy, politics, ideology and society" and took China "out of its self-imposed isolation and towards a rapprochement with industrialized countries in the West. A dramatic expansion of cultural and economic transactions between China and these countries followed" (Hong & Cuthbert, 1991, p. 141; Wu, 1985, p.242).

In China, mass media have long been a critical tool for promoting the government and party propaganda, and the mass media reform is indispensable to the success of China's political reform (Hong & Cuthbert, 1991; Wang, 1989). The television industry and broadcasting of TV programs began at about the same time in the 1950s (Li, 2010). In 1958, the newly launched Beijing Television Station televised a playlet called *A Mouthful of Vegetable Cake*, which was adapted from the novel of the same title, promoted the party propaganda of "mind past sufferings and think over the good times" and "save food as much as you can". The broadcasting of *A Mouthful of Vegetable Cake* was viewed as the birth of a brand new artistic form (Li, 2008). Before the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the TV stations of Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou, Wuhan, Xi'an, Harbin, and Changchun had broadcast approximately 80 TV series live to their audience (Zeng, 2009). Although the audience size at that time was relatively small, the number of prime time TV series in China experienced major growth. In the following years, the Cultural Revolution eventually took place after decades of political struggle within the Communist Party of China. Consequently, all kinds of literary and artistic creations were limited and restricted in their themes, plot and content. The Cultural Revolution was such a catastrophe for the development of the media in China that only three TV series were aired during the ten-year period (Li, 2008).

After the Cultural Revolution ended, the production of prime time TV series experienced a revival beginning with the debut of *Three Families in Harmony and Love* in 1978. From 1978 to 1984, TV stations nationwide produced and broadcast a total of 945 episodes of prime time TV series.

The production of TV series in China can be divided into six stages (Zeng, 2009). The stages are: first, the “live broadcasting” stage (from 1958 to 1966), during which 80 series were broadcast; second, the “wasteland” stage (from 1966 to 1976), in which three TV series full of political themes were produced; third, the “revival” stage (from 1978 to 1984), during which there were about 945 episodes. The themes of the TV series changed from depicting only “the nation’s heroes” and “good people and good deeds” to details in people’s daily life. For example, two of the series were *A Girl Selling Pancakes* and *There Is A Young Man*; fourth, the “developing” stage (from 1984 to 1990), when approximately 5,932 episodes were presented to the TV audience; fifth, the “television industrialization” stage (from 1990 to 1999), during which there were 7,978 series with 74,716 episodes produced; sixth, the “booming” stage (from 2,000 to the present), during which an astounding 10,000 to 20,000 episodes were produced each year.

During the fifty-year history of prime time TV series production in China, except for the period of the Cultural Revolution, it is proper to conclude that the nation’s TV drama production industry has been full of vitality and energy. The reason why the industry succeeded to some extent is that the TV series produced were largely connected to reality from 1958 to the present (Ma, 2008). Producers and other media practitioners have made a great effort to link the content of TV series with the era, generation, nation, and history.

Media content has drastically influenced socialization. Prime time TV series have been a significant source of the audience’s daily information. As Gerbner and his co-authors (2002) pointed out, “Its (television’s) drama, commercials, news, and other programs bring a relatively coherent system of images and messages into every home” (p. 44). Through

reinforcement of exposure, the content of TV series acts not only on an individual's life style, but also one's sense of worth (Ma, 2008).

Beginning in 1978, the Communist Party of China has emphasized the transition from the planned system to the market oriented system (Su, 2001). China entered into a transformation period announced as the "reform and opening-up epoch". Because of the drastic change in culture, economy, and politics, the Chinese people have developed a great interest in receiving new information and knowledge (Ming, 1987). Moreover, with the influence of the Western consumption culture, Chinese people seemed to change their self-identity. During the loss and reconstruction of their identity, people became even more anxious, which is more or less reflected in the media content (Hou, 2008). Women, as both audience members and as the subject of mass media programs, were also influenced by anxiety; females desire identity in reality as well as on TV (Zhang, 2005).

Female characters have always been depicted in media content, though that depiction has changed over the years. Due to the long existing feudal thought of "men are superior to women", the role of Chinese women has been described as "family-oriented, husband-centered, and having a lack of social ability". After 1978, there has been an increasing number of female characters in prime time TV series, regardless of how they are portrayed. Prime time TV series have produced different stereotypes of women in several aspects, including physical appearance, personality, ability, social division, and family role (Tao, 2006). For example, women are supposed to have fit and slim body figures, they should be tender to their husbands, and they should pay a lot of attention to family issues.

According to Pu (2001), stereotypes of gender roles found in media content in China are shown in four areas: first, from the proportion of males and females in social life, men are the soul of society while women are standing around the border; second, from occupation roles, men play a social-external role while women play a family-domestic role; third, from personal abilities, men are more stronger and more skillful than women; fourth, from characteristics, women are delicate and effeminate, while men are responsible and reliable in contrast to women (p. 29-34).

A few decades ago, DeFleur (1964) noted, “Few content analyses have attempted to show the degree to which television’s portrayal of society corresponds to or departs from reality” (p. 59). This is still true in the field of Chinese quantitative media research. Over time, to what extent do these traditional gender roles depicted in prime time TV series change? Do TV series continually create and reinforce stereotypes of women? To answer these questions, this study examined 70 prime time TV series produced by production units within the Chinese mainland after the Cultural Revolution, and analyzed changes in the image of female characters portrayed in those TV series. Specifically, this study identified changing trend of female characters’ occupations in TV series to illustrate stereotypes toward women over a longitudinal period.

Since there is no complete list of prime time TV series produced from the beginning to now, the present study is based on lists of series honored by the Flying Goddess Awards and China Golden Eagle TV Art Award, which are the only two awards aimed at the television industry.

The Flying Goddess Awards, hosted by the State Administration of Radio Film and Television, are recognized as the highest governmental awards for the television producing and broadcasting industry in China (Sources: official website of State Administration of Radio Film and Television). The awards were launched in 1980 and presented the first prizes in 1981. Because it is an official government honor, the Flying Goddess Awards has been highly valued by media practitioners and audience as well.

The China Golden Eagle TV Art Award, hosted by the Chinese TV Workers' Association and the China Federation of Literature and Art Circles, is the only award voted by TV viewers (Source: official website of Flying Goddess Awards). It debuted in 1983 and gave out prizes every year until 2005. After that, it presents prizes every other year till now. The prizes and rankings are always determined by audience votes.

Of the honored series, only those depicting contemporary Chinese society were examined in this study. Because these programs reflected the period in which they were produced, they should accurately portray the gender stereotypes of the period. In other words, the content (storyline or plot) of the TV series selected describe the attitude of society at that time.

Through a thorough content analysis of 63 prime time TV series followed by a comparison of occupational statistics, the findings of this study are expected to shed more light on how the female gender roles portrayed in prime time TV series have changed throughout the years, and how they may related to the changing stereotypes of women reinforced by television.

As Gerbner (2002) suggests, “The social function of television lies in the continual repetition of stories that serve to define the world and legitimize a particular social order” (p. 44). The findings of this study may be useful for media practitioners to understand the real image of women in Chinese society. Therefore, any misunderstanding of women’s gender roles shaped by television can be adjusted. Unnecessary stereotypes may also be eliminated in future TV production.

The study will differentiate itself from previous studies by providing empirical evidence of women’s portrayal on prime time TV series through a quantitative method. A baseline of data will be provided to assist future studies of how media messages may impact audience perception of female’s images in reality. Therefore, the study may add to the body of literature of the media research and contemporary feminist movement in China.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study contends that the content of Chinese prime time TV series has changed over time, and so has the portrayal of women on TV differed from the past. This chapter reviews how women and female occupations have been portrayed in TV series and discusses the theoretical framework that was used to conduct the present study. The body of literature concerning women's stereotypical portrayals on TV is West-centric. Many classic studies on the topic are either focused on the West or conducted by Western scholars, though there has been an increasing number of studies aimed at Asian countries. However, more research concerning television programming in China is clearly warranted.

Cultivation theory

The framework of the present study arises from the cultivation theory, which indicates television programming “cultivates a common view and common stereotypes” (Signorieslli & Kahlenberg, 2001, p. 7). Cultivation researchers suggested that it is “socially significant” to examine how women and minorities are depicted by television programs, particularly in a working environment (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000, p. 5690; Vande Berg & Streckfuss, 1992, P. 204). Originally, the cultivation theory examined audience effects. It is necessary to understand how cultivation occurs and to what extent it impacts an audience. However, this study focuses on providing a baseline of data by analyzing the content of prime time TV series, which may benefit future cultivation studies.

Television has built and maintained certain images of gender roles that are generally recognized by American society. The culture and people have mutual influence on each other

(Weitz, 1977). To some extent, television educates people in how a society is formed and works, as well as reflects and reinforces supporting social values (Furnham, Mak, & Tanidjojo, 2000).

According to Besley (2008), media exposure closely relates to the audience's value orientation. Appel (2008) suggests that fictional narratives on television tend to portray the world as a "just" place and found that television viewing time is positively related to audience's belief that the world is mean and scary, an effect predicted by cultivation theory.

Rouner (1984) observed that when there is greater cognitive processing of prime time television content, the possibility that perceptions are affected by television content is reduced. In the same vein, Carveth and Alexander's research (1985) showed that cultivation effects are stronger among audience members with strong motivations to be involved in the undemanding activity of watching TV. Thus, those who frequently select soap operas are more likely to be influenced by the content of those programs. Later, in 1986, Perse found that cultivation relates to the pattern of soap opera use. That is, the more audiences seek entertainment, information and escape through TV soaps, the more likely cultivation will result.

Cultivation research peaked in the 1980s, producing three trends: First, media effect studies were greatly related to social-psychological effects. Second, experimental research became the mode for studying issues related to television exposure. Third, the cognitive revolution had tremendously influenced cultivation studies (Ogles, 1987).

Researchers outside the United States provided different views of cultivation. For example, Reimer and Rosengren (1990) regard audiences as active parts of the cultivation process. Potter and Chang (1990) designed an experiment that examined four groups based

on different categories of television exposure rate. The authors suggest that it is more important to examine the impact of the type of program rather than the length of television viewing.

Potter (1991) suggested that factors other than viewing time may also influence the cultivation effect. In subsequent research, he points out that scholars need to “reconceptualize the effect and the relationship, develop a typology of effects, consider the context of other simultaneous influences, provide analysis over time, and examine the process of influence on individuals and on messages” (Potter, 1993, p 21).

Other scholars have considered mental processing strategies as one aspect of the cultivation effect. For example, Shrum (1995) applies heuristic processing to explain the relationship between heavy television viewing and high cultivation effect. In another study, Shrum (1996) tested the accessibility of information in memory to see if it causes cultivation. The results show that heavy viewers are highly cultivated by television content and can respond to the question more quickly than light viewers. In addition, the result indicates that soap opera viewing leads to high estimates of crime and fewer occupational choices rather than marital discord.

Following Shrum’s research, Busselle (2001) tested to see if television viewing and viewers’ cognitions of the real world are related to the accessibility of examples provided by television soap programs. The results show that respondents who answered questions about social problems are highly cultivated.

Oliver and Armstrong (1995) compared and contrasted the cultivation effects of reality-based crime shows and fictional crime shows. The finding offers a new perspective to cultivation research—that reality-based crime shows (rather than fictional crime shows)

created higher levels of cognitions of crime and justice. Reality-based crime shows were described as more attractive to younger viewers, those who have low education levels, and heavy television viewers.

According to Valkenburg and Patiwael (1998), there are five motivations why people watch *Court TV*: voyeurism, boredom-avoidance, entertainment, relaxation, and information. Of these, the entertainment motive was found to be the most important. Heavy watchers were more likely to perceive the world as full of crime. As Shanahan and Jones (1998) suggest, "Cultivation is sometimes taken as a return to a strong 'powerful effects' view of mass media. This view isn't completely incorrect, but it misses the point that cultivation was originally conceived as a critical theory, which happens to address media issues precisely and only because the mass media (especially television) serve the function of storytelling" (p. 58).

Cultivation is not only an individual cognition process, but also has the power to influence the masses. People perceive reality based on personal experience, interpersonal communication, or information gathered from the mass media. Shrum and Bischak's (2001) study of audience's estimation of crime in their own neighborhood and city shows that participants' estimation of crime in their city is related to TV exposure, but that people did not perceive high crime rates in their neighborhood.

Cultivation theory also suggests that people's beliefs about reality are also influenced by television viewing. According to Nabi and Sullivan (2001), exposure to television has an impact on both audience's predictions of reality and their reactions to the real world. TV crime shows were not the only programs that increased people's fear of crime; local TV news has the same effect on audiences (Romer et al., 2003).

Hetsroni and Tukachinsky (2006) tested the relationship between audience's perception of the real world and the "world" presented by TV. In this study, content analysis was applied to examine primetime and off primetime TV programs and a survey was conducted to test respondents' attitudes toward the TV-based world and reality. The results show that the heavier the television exposure, the more the audience is cultivated. Van der Bulck's (2004) suggests that the cultivation hypothesis is reliable enough to demonstrate the relationship between television viewing and fear of a mean world.

Stereotypical portrayal of women on television

A stereotype is defined as a group of people who share large similarities on characteristics or physical and mental attributes to be depicted in certain fixed ways (Liebert, & Sparfkin, 1988; Durkin, 1985). It is usually attached to negative racial and sexual evaluations toward the group (Abercrombie, N., Hill, S., & Turner, B. S., 1980). Greenberg and Heeter (1983) suggested, "Stereotypes often include negative generalizations which, if accepted as 'truth' may lead to negative prejudgment of entire groups people, or a poor self-image" (Greenberg & Heeter, p. 46). In addition, Dowling (1980) stated that "...stereotypes reinforce, reassert and capitalize on socially approved beliefs, and the women's movement" (p.3).

Television is a useful tool to establish norms, build frames, indicate proper behavior, and construct stereotypes. As Martel and McCall (1964) suggested, entertainment media are always dedicated to seek audience attention by depicting exaggerated reality, which differs from the audience's daily life. Heavier exposure to television causes stronger stereotypical belief (McGhee & Fruech, 1980). With exposure to fixed portrayals of women on TV, people

will constantly persuade themselves to think women in reality corresponds to what they see on TV (Siu, 1981).

Signorielli (1989) noted television viewing might cause biased evaluation toward women in reality. This suggestion had been previously supported by other studies. For example, Siu (1981) concluded that television programs sometimes cultivate viewers with a biased view toward women in society, and, therefore, lead audiences to perceive women with incorrect notions.

Regardless of various television content, females have been underrepresented for their knowledge, ability, and occupational status (Thompson, & Zerbions, 1995). Research shows that women depicted in television tend to pay more attention to interpersonal relationships in the workplace, and women are less likely to make high-level decisions in the workplace as well. McGhee pointed out in his research in 1975, women in prime time TV series usually performed as secretaries, nurses, entertainers, teachers, and journalists, but not lawyers, ministers, or doctors. Female characters are often portrayed as family-oriented, and less involved in decision-making procedures in workplace (McGhee, 1975). In 1980, studies provided evidence that women in TV series are less likely to make plans and they prefer to do housework related tasks (Greenberg, Richards, & Henderson, 1980; Henderson & Greenberg, 1980).

Similar phenomena exist in TV advertising. In Lysonski's (1985) study of women's portrayal in advertising, the findings suggest that women's image on screen is highly stereotyped as dependent, family-oriented, having good physical appearance, not reliable for decision making, and lacking of power. Women do housework and provide childcare more

often than men in TV ads. Women are continuously depicted as a major source of labor in the family to perform family related tasks without help from men (Kaufman, 1999).

Studies also show that women in early European ads were always placed in home settings (Furnham & Bitar, 1993; Furnham & Voli, 1989). Females were portrayed as information receivers rather than authority characters. However, female characters in western ads have been described as more powerful and independent figures with some authority as time goes by (Gunter, 1995). In contrast to the findings in previous research, Furnham, Mak, and Tanidjojo (2000) suggested that gender-role stereotyping in Asian ads had not decreased and became stronger than it was in European ads.

Female gender roles depicted by mass media

Understanding gender roles is critical for the present study. Cheng (1997) pointed out, "...gender roles are one of the most important indicators of codified behavior in all societies" (p. 295). Durkin (1985) defined sex roles as "collection of behavioral or activities that a given society deems more appropriate to a member of one sex than to a member of the other sex" (p. 9). He also suggested that some societies define sex roles strictly as a rule (Durkin, 1985). Different social values preset norms such as what each gender should look like (differ from the counterpart), communicate, and interact with the other part. Therefore, the fixed behavioral modes restrict the social thinking mode, interaction, and criticism (Leiss, Kline & Jhally, 1990).

According to Levinson's study (1975) on sex roles in cartoons, "Television's portrayal of the sexes in cartoons does not accurately mirror real world events, but it does reflect real world values concerning traditional gender-role assumptions" (p. 569). Portrayal

of women's roles in TV series typically focuses on their dependency on men and families. "Females were found to be more affectionate, sensitive, romantic, passive, submissive, timid, and emotional than males" (Busby, p. 692). Correspondingly, female characters were seldom described as having accomplishments in both the workplace and the domestic field. In addition, young women occupy a large proportion of the total number of female characters. That is to say, female characters who reached the ages of 30-50 may not be depicted continuously in TV series (Liebert & Sparfkin, 1988; Craig, 1991; Signorielli, 1991; Davis, 1990).

Women's occupational roles

DeFleur (1964) defined an "occupational portrayal" as "the appearance of a person on the television screen for at least three minutes, performing some kind of recognizable occupational duty" (p. 61). He added, "...television content that deals with occupational roles can be characterized as selective, unreal, stereotype, and misleading"(p. 74). As a result, the stereotypes toward certain occupational roles in the real world may be strengthened.

To attract a larger audience, television producers often takes advantage of stereotyped attributes of an occupation in reality to amplify the entertaining and untypical aspect when portraying it on screen (Defleur, 1964). For instance, females share only a small range of occupations, and the employment rate of women on TV series is lower than it is in reality (Seggar & Wheeler, 1973; Defleur, 1964). However, in contrast with previous findings, there is research showing that the proportion of female characters with occupational roles in a TV series is larger than the proportion of employed women in the real world. And compared with reality, women on TV rarely encounter family issues, financial difficulties, discrimination, or

sexual harassment (Huston et al., 1992). In addition, a recent study indicates a growing number of female characters has been depicted in professions in prime time television programs from the 1970s to 1990s, which differed from the early 1960s, when women were portrayed only as homemakers and clerical workers (Signorielli, 2001).

Feminist theories

Treichler and Wartella (1986) state that communication theories support the feminist theory by “(1) cataloging and analyzing the diverse representations of sexual differences in the media; (2) exploring how ideology and economics intersect to create and maintain existing practices within the communications industry; and (3) offering a variety of procedures for collecting and analyzing large quantities of data and thus checking the validity of certain observations and insights” (p. 5). Reciprocally, feminist theories assist the development of communication theories by “(1) a more sophisticated and pointed analysis of power relations; (2) a social theory which attempts to account for the social and cultural construction of sexual difference; (3) a commitment to lived experience that links differences of gender to those of class age, race, and ethnicity; and (4) an explicit agenda for social change” (p. 10).

Gallagher (1989) argues that a feminist perspective of communication is urgently needed in a male-oriented social sphere. Gender difference should be considered seriously when doing research because women, either psychologically or physiologically, are distinctive in communication. She urges communication scholars to examine the impact of women being depicted as dependent on male figures by the national and international media.

According to Lull, Mulac and Rosen (1983), some studies have been done with the goal of examining stereotypical gender roles portrayed by the mass media. The objective of their study was to test to see whether men and women develop different ideas of sex-roles portrayed on television. Using a survey to gather data, the authors found that female respondents who agreed with the ideals of the feminist movement have viewing habits different from other female respondents. They demonstrated unique television program selections and viewing time.

Venkatesh (1980) divided her focus group sessions into three parts— traditional, moderate and feminist, and observed that feminists are generally younger, more independent, and have higher educational level than other women. They also tend to be less involved in television viewing. Homemaker magazines are attractive to the traditional and moderate group, while national and international TV news was appealing to feminists. Feminists also were likely to think female characters in ads are “sexual objects” and are not sensitive to the changes in sex-roles in the mass media.

Approaches to contemporary feminist studies

Rakow (1986) argues that contemporary feminist studies could adopt any of the following approaches: the images and representation approach, the reception and experience approach, or the cultural theory approach. All three approaches assume that popular culture occupies an important role in hierarchical society, and future research can be conducted based on this assumption.

Feminist theories are often connected to communication theories. As Steeves (1987) notes, socialist feminism is the most efficient way to evaluate women’s roles in mass

communication. Historically, women have been recognized as "moral entrepreneurs" or "moral guardians" of society (Leong, 1991). In Steeves and Smith's (1987) research on prime time television entertainment, socialist feminist theory was applied in a content analysis. The findings suggest that the mass media help create a male-oriented society. Examining the top ten Nielsen-rated primetime television programs, they found that only a few programs relate to household and child care issues, with *The Cosby Show* and *Family Ties* as two exceptions. Women who are powerful in the workplace were portrayed as having reached their positions by marriage. The rest of the female characters were shown to be less powerful than male characters in the programs.

According to Steiner (1991), from the perspective of feminist ethics, the mass media should treat females **equally**. **Lont (1993) suggests that three approaches can be applied to study women in the media:** "content analysis of the portrayal of women, historical narratives of individual women as processors of media; and feminist critical analysis of media and society" (p. 241).

Van Zoonen (1992) examines the portrayal of the women's movement in the Netherlands mass media from the 1960s to 1970s. Applying discourse analysis, the author found that the public identity of the women's movement was influenced by public interests and journalists' preferences.

Recent trends of depicting women on TV

Television corrects stereotypical images by introducing programs with modified gender roles (Comstock, G. & Paik, H., 1987). Some studies show that corrections had been made to improve women's status depicted in TV programs. Fewer traditional gender roles

were portrayed; women's living quality and status had been improved; the range of occupational roles on screen had also been extended (Down, 1981; Durkin, 1985; Vande Berg & Streckfuss, 1992).

Except for some improvement in portraying women on screen since the 1980s, gender stereotypes continued to exist and were still typical in television programs until 1995. According to Thompson and Zerbions (1995), the recent trend of women's portrayal in cartoons was to describe female characters as "emotional, warm, romantic, affectionate, sensitive, frail, mature, and domestic" when compared with males (p. 668). The researchers also pointed out female characters shown frequently as caregivers rather than professional workers were still stereotyped by television. However, increasing number of women were shown with some masculine characteristics, such as independent, responsible, powerful, etc., which is opposite to traditional gender roles (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995).

Chu and McIntyre (1995) stated that the reason why it is difficult to eliminate sex role stereotypes is that females and males learn norms, codes and concepts similarly within the same social context, and one may have a stereotyped view toward someone within the same gender. The authors also added, "when females voluntarily take up the 'second sex' status, the socialization of women into 'second sex' encounters little or no resistance" (p. 211).

Media in China and women on Chinese television

The major functions of the mass media in China are to enforce State policies and Party interests, to teach appropriate values and behaviors, to indicate good behavior and to activate people's application of proper social norms (Siu, 1981). Every single element on the TV screen, including advertising, TV series, talk shows, etc., need to pass a strict preview

before its debut (Hong & Cuthbert, 1991). During the years before 1978, the development of China's local TV stations was largely limited because they were only allowed to broadcast programs had been already aired on the China Central TV station. After 1978, local TV stations gradually began to create and broadcast their own programs. As a result, the number of TV series produced in 1980s greatly boomed (Hong & Cuthbert, 1991).

The Chinese government began to promote its slogan "women hold up half of the sky" starting in 1949 to raise women's social status. As a result, the most significant change of women's status in Chinese society is that the employment rate of young female workers has been increased to almost 100% (regardless of categories or levels of jobs) since the establishment of the People's Republic of China to the mid-1980s (Li, 1988). Another indicator of the changed status of women is the growing number of women receiving school education (Cheng, 1997). Education is a necessary prerequisite for one to have a higher-level occupation. By 2010, the percentage of female children who enter elementary schools had reached 99.54% and nearly half of the college students are female (Xinhua News Agency, 2010).

Prejudice toward women is common in every social aspect, such as domestic issues, education, culture, politics, and economy (Pearson, 1995). Chinese people's traditional beliefs of ethics are "males are superior, females are inferior, a female should be a virtuous wife and a good mother, men mind the external affairs and women the internal affairs," and

“women have to follow the traditional Confucian norm -- ‘The Three Obediences’”².

Consequentially, women in China are more family-sensitive than men. They are mentally stressed out by work and domestic issues (Lai, 1995). According to Siu’s research in 1981, not all of the four concepts toward women were met in TV. Women’s images in TV series were not in accord with “females are inferior” and “The Three Obediences”. A female character as a daughter or wife on screen seemed to have rights to make decisions and afford her own life without support of any male. For “being a virtuous wife and a good mother” and “women mind the internal affairs”, TV series indicated that women should make an effort in both home and society (Siu, 1981).

Considering the foregoing literature, most theoretical formulations on the mass media’s portrayal of women are generated by empirical data from western countries, particularly the United States. Not much research has been done on the portrayal of women in Asian television programs (Furnham et al., 2000). The very limited literature on women’s portrayals on Chinese TV series indicates that female stereotypes are prevalent in China (Cheng, 1997; Siu, 1981; Ma, 2008).

In response to these concerns, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What were the occupations held by female characters in selected TV series from 1979 to 2008?

² The Three Obediences are: “A woman must obey her father before getting married; she must obey her husband while in a marital relationship; she must obey her son(s) if her husband died”.

RQ2: Has the portrayal of female images and occupational status in Chinese TV series changed over time?

RQ3: Among women employed outside the home, how does the occupational distribution of female characters portrayed in Chinese TV series compare with women's occupational distribution in real life?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the portrayal of females in prime time Chinese TV series and the media's reinforcement of stereotypical women's images. Particularly, the study analyzed the pattern, frequency, and attributes of women's occupational roles and looked at changes in the types of professional occupations held by female characters in prime time TV series. It then compared those occupations with those held by women in reality.

To gather data, a content analysis of female characters' various attributes in prime time TV series, including professional occupations, was conducted. This content analysis was made of all qualified TV series that were awarded the Flying Goddess Award or the China Golden Eagle TV Art Award. "Qualified TV series" means awarded TV series that depict people's contemporary social life at the time of the broadcast year, rather than future or historical years. After data gathering and analysis, results were compared to the statistics published in the *Observation Report on the Development of Occupations in China Society: 1978-2008*, *China Population and Employment Statistics Yearbooks (1988-2009)*, and China population census in 1982 and 1990 to determine whether stereotypes of women existed and how they changed over time.

Content analysis

As Berelson (1952) suggested, content analysis is "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p.18). According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), when a communication study needs to calculate and measure multiple variables, a content analysis is an ideal method because it

provides an empirical approach for determining “patterns, frequencies, and categories” and identifies correspondence of content and causal effect (Carlson, 2008, p. 102; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998; Stempel, 1981). Videos obtained online contain variables for measuring attributes such as changes of female character’s professional occupations, which can be clearly measured by a content analysis. Because of the absence of a complete list of all broadcast prime time TV series in China from 1958 to the present, the samples of this study were derived from prime time TV series that won the Flying Goddess Award or the China Golden Eagle TV Art Award. By reviewing the list of honored programs, the researcher determined there were 70 series that were suitable for this study. The study focused exclusively on contemporary programs that reflect life as it was during the broadcast years. Historical, science fiction, military, and Kung Fu dramas were excluded.

The sample

The sample for this study was selected from TV series that had been awarded the Flying Goddess Awards or the China Golden Eagle TV Art Award, which are the only two television awards made in China from 1979 to the present. From this group, the researcher selected 63 series based on the purpose of the study and the availability of videos. Only prime time TV series that are consistent with the years they were broadcast remained in the sample.

This study examines the changing stereotypes of women as they were shown in prime time television series from 1979 to 2008. According to Manganello and his co-researchers (2008), when analyzing sex-related issues in TV programs, seven episodes in each season is a reasonable sample size. However, because the present study attempted to get a more

comprehensive view of women's portrayal in Chinese TV series, the researcher examined all episodes in the 63 selected TV series. In sum, 298 female characters were examined in the content analysis.

Unit of analysis

The primary unit of analysis for this study is any female character who has a significant plot-functional role in prime time TV series. Levinson (1975) defined a character as “anything or anyone who has a speaking role or appearance outside a crowd, street, scene, audience” (Levinson, p. 563). In addition, DeFleur (1964) described “occupational portrayal” as “the appearance of a person on the television screen for at least three minutes, performing some kind of recognizable occupational duty” (p. 61). Based on the definitions, this study includes only female characters who appear in one or more episodes for more than three minutes, are listed by name in the cast of characters and play a plot-functional role with certain kinds of occupations. Any female character who is a teenager or small girl, or anyone who is too old to have a significant job in this series, is not counted.

Definition of variables and coding scheme

The overarching research question this study attempts to answer is: Is there any difference among the TV series broadcast from 1979 to 2008 in the way they portrayed women and women's social status? The study analyzed the image of the various female characters and compared their fictional occupations with women's occupations in reality. The following variables will be coded for a single female character: (1) broadcast year; (2) importance of the character; (3) age; (4) physical appearance; (5) personality; (6) living

region; (7) marital status; (8) role within or without the family; (9) educational level; (10) occupation; (11) occupational level; (12) changes of occupation; (13) occupation after change; (14) occupational level after change. Because there is little relevant research literature in China that used content analysis to examine women's portrayal in TV series, the researcher generated the coding scheme by reviewing Western scholars' studies and watching a number of sampled TV series.

Broadcast year

The thirty-year timeframe for the present study was separated into four parts to accommodate the selected TV series awarded the Flying Goddess Award or the China Golden Eagle TV Art Award. Because the first qualified TV series *There Is a Young Man* was broadcast in 1979 and the year of 1982 was the debut of the household contract responsibility system (Li, 2009)³, the first time period was set from 1979 to 1982. The occupational statistics were derived from the *Observation Report on the Development of Occupations in China Society: 1978-2008* and China population census in 1982, which reflect China's employment condition before the economic reform. The second time period is from 1983 to 1990, which was recognized as the initial starting of China's economic reform. The occupational statistics were based on *Observation Report on the Development of Occupations in China Society: 1978-2008* and China population census in 1990. The third period is from 1991 to 2000, which was the second ten-year period of China's economic reform and the forming stage of China's labor market. The employment data was obtained

³ The year 1982 is a critical boundary in dividing the time frame of this study. The "household contract responsibility system" in 1982 is the milestone of rural economic reform in China. Before that, there wasn't much floating population. Plus, the government conducted the third population census that year, when the country just started to recover from the great depression caused by the Cultural Revolution.

from *Observation Report on the Development of Occupations in China Society: 1978-2008* and the *China Population and Employment Statistics Yearbooks (1991-2000)*. The fourth time period is from 2001 to 2008, when the market economic system was formed in China and the country's economy experienced a major growth. The employment data was obtained from *Observation Report on the Development of Occupations in China Society: 1978-2008* and the *China Population and Employment Statistics Yearbooks (2001-2008)*. Coders entered codes for each female character examined according to the broadcast year of the TV series she was in.

Importance

All examined female characters were coded as **major** or **minor** based on their importance and proportion of performance in the series they appeared.

Generally, leading characters were coded as **major**, and other supporting characters were coded as **minor**.

Age

For this study, it was not necessary to determine an exact age of the character. Only a rough age range was coded as it related to the overall image of the character. The designed age groups are: **below 39, from 40 to 64, and above 65** (Elliot, 1984). The coders' personal judgment was the key to determine age range. In some circumstance, if a female character's age was vague to the coder, it was coded **not sure**.

Physical appearance

This term refers to a female character's facial features and her body figure. Three simple categories were employed. **Good looking** applies to anyone whose physical appearance is above average. **Average** means someone's physical appearance is fair and

acceptable. **Unlovely** refers to anyone whose physical appearance is below average. The coders determined the level of a female character's physical appearance by other characters' lines and their interactive activities. For example, if a female character receives certain compliments from others because of her appearance in the TV series, she is considered as **Good looking**. If a female character's physical appearance is never mentioned at any circumstance in the TV series, the coder considered it as **not sure**.

Personality

To determine personality, the researcher generalized and modified codes from a previous study analyzing Chinese TV series (Ma, 2008). Four pairs of opposite adjectives were used. They are “**self-governed/ independent verses dependent**”, “**optimistic verses pessimistic**”, “**fashionable/ extrovert verses constraint/ reversed**” and “**aggressive verses quiet/ soft/ weak**”. When coders were not able to distinguish a female's personality, it was proper for them to use **not sure**. For some characters having overlapping or combined personalities in the eight categories, coders selected the most representative and significant one that promoted the plot.

Location

Where the female characters live is determined by the scene's plot and it is obvious in many cases. However, some characters' living area changes. Coders identified those women who moved from a rural area to an urban area by employing a category named **migrants from rural area to urban area**. In some cases, a female character's accent was taken as an indicator of whether she lives or comes from the rural area.

Marital status

A female character who was not married (single, engaged or with a boyfriend) was included in the category **Not married. Married** consists of two types: a woman in a marriage, and a woman who was married but her husband has died. Any circumstances other than “not married”, “married” and “divorced” were categorized as **not sure**. If a female’s marital status changed in the TV series (e.g. from married to divorced, or from single to married), the coder coded her marital status based on her predominant role in the series.

Role within or out of the family

A role is specified as “a cluster of socially or culturally defined expectations that individuals in a given situation are expected to fulfill” (Basow, p. 34) . For the present study, this term refers to the major role a female character plays. It must be plot-functional. **Mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, sister and wife** are roles within family. If a female character has an extramarital affair, regardless whether she is married or not, her role was classified as **lover**, which is a role out of family. When a female has a combined role (e.g. a wife and a lover; a daughter and a wife), coders carefully examined the role to determine its proportion of presentation in the whole TV series and identify the predominant role a character plays based on the proportion.

Educational level

Five levels are applied to determine a female character’s education. They are: **never educated, elementary school to junior high school, high school to vocational-technical school, junior college to college, and above college**. A character’s educational level is mentioned but not specified, coders used **not sure**.

Occupation

This variable has twelve categories derived from the coded TV series and government statistics, which are: (1) **Manufacturing**; (2) **Transportation, Storage, Post and Telecommunications**; (3) **Wholesale and Retail Trade & Catering Service**; (4) **Finance & Insurance**; (5) **Real Estate Trade**; (6) **Social Service**; (7) **Health Care, Sporting and Social Welfare**; (8) **Education, Culture and Arts, Media**; (9) **Scientific Research and Polytechnical Service**; (10) **Government Agencies, Party Agencies and Social Organizations**; (11) **Farming, Forestry, Animal Husbandry and Fishery**; (12) **other**. If the female character is a college student who has no professional occupation, she was coded as **absent**. **Not sure** was applied when a character's occupation could not be determined by the examining the plot.

The variable occupation is the dependent variable to question RQ1-- "What were the occupations held by female characters in selected TV series from 1979 to 2008?", while **year** is the independent variable. Every qualified female character's occupation was examined. To answer RQ1, the exact occupation name was recorded and categorized to fit into one of the twelve listed categories.

Occupational level

Each of the various female characters' occupations was assigned to one of the eight levels (see Appendix B), with **level 1** the highest, **level 7** the lowest and **level 8** considered other (Classifications of Women's Occupations in China, 2003; Wang, 2005). Characters who have multiple jobs were categorized as **not sure**. Those who are recognized as students were classified as **level 8**. This variable, along with other variables listed above, will be dependent variables related to answer RQ2 -- "Has the portrayal of female's overall image and occupational status in prime time Chinese TV series changed over time?"

Change of occupation

This variable refers to whether **female characters' occupations have changed**. The coders used **yes** for those whose occupations changed and **no** for occupations that did not change. **Not sure** was applied for any circumstance that coders could not determine.

Occupation and occupational level after change

After a thorough review of the videos, coders identified whether a female character's occupation changed or not. If yes, the coders entered the specific occupation after the change. Similarly, the coders examined and coded the occupational level after change by duplicating the criteria of the occupational level.

RQ3 -- "Among women employed outside of home, how do the occupational distribution of female characters portrayed in Chinese TV series compare with women's occupational distribution in real life?" This question required comparison of data collected by the content analysis and data provided by government reports.

Intercoder reliability

Intercoder reliability is often used as a "standard measure of research quality" (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991, p. 248). A study with low agreement between coders needs to adjust its research methods. Due to the importance of intercoder reliability, two graduate students experienced in mass communication research were trained as coders. A pilot test was conducted after a training session was completed (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998). The two coders independently coded ten percent of the entire sample to ensure high intercoder reliability. The test series results were not included in the final sample. It was acceptable

when the percentage agreement researched at least 80% (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Brachen, 2002; Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Brachen, 2003).

The formula for calculating the percentage agreement is:

$$\text{Percentage agreement} = \frac{\text{number of agreements between two coders}}{\text{total number of units the two coders coded}}$$

Table 1 lists the variables coded in this study and the intercoder reliabilities achieved for each of these variables. The percentages of agreement reached suggested that the intercoder reliabilities are well within the ranges accepted by social science standards.

Table 1. Intercoder reliability for ordinal and nominal variables

Variable name	% agreement
Year	100
Importance	100
Age	90
Appearance	80
Personality	80
Location	95
Marital status	90
Role	90
Educational level	85
Occupation	90
Occup2	85
Change	100
Change2	90
Change3	90

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to examine the portrayal of women in Chinese prime time TV series from 1979 to 2008 and to compare the distribution of female characters' fictional occupations to the distribution of women's actual occupations in Chinese society. The social status of Chinese women, in terms of occupational levels, was expected to rise over the thirty-year period of the study, and in fact, women in China have experienced a major growth in the number and type of jobs available to them. Sixty-three contemporary prime time Chinese TV series that had been honored by the China Golden Eagle TV Arts Award and the Flying Goddess Award were selected for the present study. Content analysis was applied to analyze the changing content of these prime time TV series in their representation of women's image, type of occupations, and occupational levels.

The sample and content analysis

The thirty-year timeframe was divided into four periods based on the *Observation Report on the Development of Occupations in China Society: 1978-2008*, *China Population and Employment Statistics Yearbooks (1988-2009)*, and China population census in 1982 and 1990.⁴ The time frames are from 1979 to 1982, from 1983 to 1990, from 1991 to 2000, and from 2001 to 2008. A total of 298 female characters out of sixty-three selected prime time TV series (see Appendix C) was collected as the final sample of this study, in which 99

⁴ The Chinese government has conducted a population census for six times: 1953, 1964, 1982, 1990, 2000, and 2010. Among those years, employment data from 1982, 1990 and 2000 were examined to accommodate the present study. Employment statistics from 2008 were derived from the *China Population and Employment Statistics Yearbook 2008*.

characters played major roles and 199 played minor roles in TV series. Table 2 presents the frequencies of female characters in selected TV series in each time period.

Table 2. Frequency table of female characters in each time period

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1979 to 1982	9	3.0	3.0	3.0
1983 to 1990	32	10.7	10.7	13.8
1991 to 2000	114	38.3	38.3	52.0
2001 to 2008	143	48.0	48.0	100.0
Total	298	100.0	100.0	

In order to determine female characters' occupations and occupational levels, the coders thoroughly observed and analyzed the plots, lines, settings, and interpersonal relationships in those qualified contemporary TV series. A total of 135 different jobs were identified (college students and women too old to have occupations were excluded).

To meet the content analysis requirements, a large nominal data set had to be narrowed down for this particular study. Based on information obtained from the *Observation Report on the Development of Occupations in China Society: 1978-2008*, *China Population and Employment Statistics Yearbooks (1988-2009)*, and China population census in 1982 and 1990, an occupational classification by sector consisting of twelve categories was applied to the variable occupation. Table 3 shows the occupations by sector listed in the government reports and used for coding. Five categories do not appear on the coding sheet because no female character's occupation falls into them.

Table 3. Occupations listed in the government reports and used in the coding sheet.

Occupational Classification by Sector (in Government Report)	Occupational Classifications by sector applied to the present study
Farming, Forestry, Animal Husbandry and Fishery	Farming, Forestry, Animal Husbandry and Fishery
Mining and Quarrying	N/A
Manufacturing	Manufacturing
Production and Supply of Electricity, Gas and Water	N/A
Construction	N/A
Geological Prospecting and Water Conservancy	N/A
Information Transmission, Computer Service and software	N/A
Transportation, Storage, Post and Telecommunications	Transportation, Storage, Post and Telecommunications
Wholesale and Retail Trade & Hotel and Catering Service	Wholesale and Retail Trade & Hotel and Catering Service
Finance and Insurance	Finance and Insurance
Real Estate Trade	Real Estate Trade
Social Services	Social Services
Health Care, Sporting and Social Welfare	Health Care, Sporting and Social Welfare
Education, Culture and Arts, Media	Education, Culture and Arts, Media
Scientific Research and Polytechnical Services	Scientific Research and Polytechnical Services
Government Agencies, Party Agencies and Social Organizations	Government Agencies, Party Agencies and Social Organizations
Others	Others

Portrayal of women's occupations over time

RQ1 asks: What were the occupations held by female characters in selected TV series from 1979 to 2008? A total of 135 occupations were observed in selected TV series, and those occupations fall into twelve categories, according to employment statistics in government reports. Tables 4-1 to 4-12 indicate the female characters' fictional occupations detected from selected TV series under each of the twelve categories.

Table 4-1. Occupations under **farming, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery**

Farming, Forestry, Animal Husbandry and Fishery
Chicken farm owner
Hog farm owner
Peasant worker
General farm worker

Table 4-2. Occupations under **manufacturing**

Manufacturing
Engineer at aircrafts parts factory
Worker at aircrafts parts factory
General factory worker
Sales manager of garment plant
Worker at silk printing mill
Engineer of fan factory
Worker at towel factory
Vice manager of textile mill
Worker at thermos bottle factory
Supervisor of shoe factory
President of ironworks
Worker at manufactured meat plant

Table 4-3. Occupations under **transportation, storage, post and telecommunications**

Transportation, Storage, Post and Telecommunications
Post office employee

Table 4-4. Occupations under **finance and insurance**

Finance and Insurance
Banker
President of securities company
Manager of securities company

Table 4-5. Occupation under **real estate trade**

Real Estate Trade
Land agent
Supervisor of real estate company
President of real estate company
Employee of real estate company

Table 4-6. Occupations under **wholesale and retail trade & hotel and catering service**

Wholesale and Retail Trade & Catering Service	
Cook at canteen	Owner of tailor shop
Employee of import & export company	Manager of import & export company
Owner of decoration shop	President of multinational firm
Owner of cake shop	Vice manager of State-owned firm
Cashier of company	Owner of a small private business
Costume businesswomen	Technical manager of State-owned firm
Owner of bookstore	Owner of grocery shop
Owner of restaurant	Employee of drugstore
Supervisor of drugstore	Owner of drugstore
Owner of snack bar	Employee of snack bar
Political advisor of State-owned firm	Accountant of company
Sales personnel of pancake shop	Manager of pancake shop
Public relation representative of hotel	Sales personnel
Owner of costume shop	Owner of antique shop
Hotel manager	President of hotel
Assistant of company president	Engineer of computer company
Aquatic businesswomen	Secretary of import & export company
Hotel general staff	Employee of multinational firm
Manager of restaurant	

Table 4-7. Occupations under **social service**

Social Service	
Lawyer	Employee of law office
Worker at barber shop	Nanny
Chief of community service	Owner of beauty salon
Flight attendant	Cleaner
Gardener	Orphanage director
Employee of dry clean shop	Employee of travel agency

Table 4-8. Occupations under **health care, sporting and social service**

Health Care, Sporting and Social Welfare	
Doctor	Senior doctor
Hospital administrator	Nurse
Hospital service representative	Pharmacist
Counseling psychologist	Administrator of drug rehabilitation center
Clinical psychologist	

Table 4-9. Occupations under **education, culture and arts, media**

Education, Culture and Arts, Media	
Junior-high school teacher	Elementary school teacher
College professor	Piano instructor
Kindergarten teacher	Administrator of kindergarten
Vice president of the reformatory	Teacher at the reformatory
Political instructor at military school	Teacher of evening school
Journalist	Film director
News director	Editor
Administrator of troupe	Writer
Pop star	Dancer
Pop star agent	TV host
General employee of magazine	Manager of an advertising agency
Advertising representative of TV station	Fashion designer

Table 4-10. Occupations under **scientific research and polytechnical services**

Scientific Research and Polytechnical Services	
Researcher of State Academy of Sciences	Scientist of the State Institute of Design
Employee of research institute	

Table 4-11. Occupations under **government agencies, party agencies and social organizations**

Government Agencies, Party Agencies and Social Organizations	
General provincial government official	Secretary of provincial Party committee
Mayor	Chief executive of a township government
General city government official	Cadres in town and villages
County government official	Secretary of municipal Party committee
Official of procuratorate	Employee of procuratorate
Employee of administration of local taxation	Secretary of department of education
Official of department of education	Employee of department of education
Police officer	Political instructor of public security Bureau
Employee of department of stock market investigation	Employee of department of agriculture
Chief of federation of women	Director of bureau of finance

Table 4-12. Occupations under **others**

Others	
Sexual service	Homemaker
Drug trade	Illegal activity not identified
Blue films trade	

To determine whether there is a difference in female characters' occupations from 1979 to 2008, a Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted. The results, shown in table 5, indicate the portrayal of female characters' occupations in the examined TV series changed as time goes by ($\chi^2=10.068$; $df=3$; $p=.018<.05$; $mode=8.00$).

Table 5. Results of Kruskal-Wallis test (change of occupations over time)

	Occupation
Chi-square	10.068
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.018

During the thirty years from 1979 to 2008, the most popular occupations of female characters in TV series belong to the **education, culture and arts, media** category (56 out of 298). The second largest category is **wholesale and retail trade and catering** (54). Third most popular category is **manufacturing**, with 42 females. The occupation category with the least number of women (1 out of 298) is **transportation, storage, post and telecommunication**. Table 6 shows the change in the number of female characters' occupations in each category during four different time periods.

Table 6. Frequencies and numbers of changes of female characters' occupations from 1979-2008 (college students were categorized into absent)

Occupation	Year				Total
	1979 to 1982	1983 to 1990	1991 to 2000	2001 to 2008	
Other	0	1	7	10	18
Farming, Forestry, Animal Husbandry and Fishery	1	9	8	12	30
Government Agencies, Party Agencies and Social Organizations	0	1	7	15	23
Scientific Research and Polytechnical Service	0	0	0	4	4
Education, Culture and Arts, Media	0	7	21	28	56
Health Care, Sporting and Social Welfare	1	2	15	12	30
Social Service	0	2	10	15	27
Real Estate Trade	0	0	1	3	4
Finance & Insurance	0	0	1	3	4
Wholesale and Retail Trade & Hotel and Catering Service	4	5	19	26	54
Transportation, Storage, Post and Telecommunications	0	0	0	1	1
Manufacturing	2	4	23	13	42
Absent	1	1	2	1	5
Total	9	32	114	143	298

During 1979 to 1982, four female characters out of nine were working in **wholesale and retail trade & catering** occupations, which is approximately 44% of the total number. From 1983 to 1990, the predominant occupations female characters had are in **farming, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery** (9 out of 32), about 28% of the whole. From 1991 to 2000, the most significant category in terms of female characters is **manufacturing**, some 20% of the entire number. During 2000 to 2008, the largest number of women characters is in **education, culture and arts, media**, approximately 20% of the total. In contrast, the least

popular occupations constantly fall into **scientific research and polytechnical service** and **transportation, storage, post and telecommunication** in all four time periods.

As the table shows, there was an increase in each row, except in **health care**, **sporting and social welfare** and **manufacturing**. The number of women characters in these two categories decreased in the last two periods. These findings suggest the female characters in TV series held a wider variety of occupations from 1979 to 2008.

Among the 298 female characters analyzed, 35 (12%) changed their occupations during the run of the TV series in which they appeared. Thirteen people had occupations in **wholesale and retail trade & catering** after the change; nine people had occupations that could not be categorized to the other eleven categories; six people changed their occupations to the category of **education, culture and arts, media**; five of them had new occupations in **manufacturing**; two people changed to **social service**; one female had a new occupation under **finance & insurance**; another worked in **farming, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery** after the change.

Depiction of female images and occupational status

RQ 2 asks: Has the portrayal of female images and occupational status in Chinese TV series changed over time? Each female character's age, appearance, personality, living location, marital status, roles within and out of family, and educational levels were examined to answer the question of "has the portrayal of female images over time". Tables 7-1 to 7-7 present the correlations between time periods and each variable related female images.

From 1979 to 2008, prime time Chinese TV series portrayed more females below 39 years of age than any other age group. They comprised nearly 70% of the 298 female characters (mode=1.00).

Table 7-1. Change of portrayal of female characters' age over time

	Year				Total
	1979 to 1982	1983 to 1990	1991 to 2000	2001 to 2008	
Age Below 39	8	21	86	94	209
40 to 64	1	9	26	41	77
Above 65	0	2	2	8	12
Total	9	32	114	143	298

The standards of determining a female character's appearance are ambiguous, though dialogue between characters and compliments from others were applied as an aid. In most series, there was no way to objectively measure a character's attractiveness. Therefore, approximately 31% of the total number was coded as **not sure**. But, indirect measures suggest **good-looking** females constituted 45%, 56%, 52%, and 49% of all female characters in each time period (mode=1.00).

Table 7-2. Change of portrayal of female characters' appearance over time

	Year				Total
	1979 to 1982	1983 to 1990	1991 to 2000	2001 to 2008	
Appearance Good looking	4	18	59	70	151
Average	1	2	11	39	53
Unlovely	0	0	0	2	2
Not sure	4	12	44	32	92
Total	9	32	114	143	298

It is clear from table 7-3 that **self-governed/independent** females (144 out of 298, mode=1.00) dominated TV series from 1979 to 2008. The number of **quiet/soft/weak** females was comparatively low, about 14. **Constraint/reserved** females were also relatively popular in Chinese TV series, as were **dependent, optimistic, fashionable/extrovert, aggressive** females. Only three female characters were identified as **pessimistic**.

Table 7-3. Change of portrayal of female characters' personality over time

		Year				Total
		1979 to 1982	1983 to 1990	1991 to 2000	2001 to 2008	
Personality	Self-governed/Independent	4	18	47	75	144
	Dependent	0	2	9	7	18
	Optimistic	1	2	7	7	17
	Pessimistic	0	0	2	1	3
	Fashionable/extrovert	0	0	6	6	12
	Constraint/reversed	1	5	10	14	30
	Aggressive	1	1	10	7	19
	Quiet/soft/weak	0	3	15	23	41
	Not sure	2	1	8	3	14
Total		9	32	114	143	298

Over these decades, most female characters in prime time Chinese TV series were from **urban** areas (227 out of 298, mode=1.00). The proportions of **urban** females in each time period are 89%, 72%, 78% and 75%. Despite the small sample size during 1979 to 1982, other data indicate **urban** females were overwhelmingly represented in TV series. In addition, there is one fact worth noting: before 1990, there were no characters representing **migrants from rural area to urban area**. However, from 1991 to 2000, the number of **migrants** is even higher than females who live in **rural areas**.

Table 7-4. Change of portrayal of female characters' living location over time

	Year				Total
	1979 to 1982	1983 to 1990	1991 to 2000	2001 to 2008	
Location Urban	8	23	89	107	227
Rural	1	8	10	27	46
Migrants from rural area to urban area	0	0	12	9	21
Not sure	0	1	3	0	4
Total	9	32	114	143	298

The Kruskal-Wallis test shows the marital status of females changed significantly over the three decades of programs examined (mode=2.00; $\chi^2=13.093$; df=3; p=.004<.01). Total numbers of **married** and **not married** female characters are similar, with female characters **not married** at about 43% and female **married** at about 46% of the total. From 2001 to 2008, the number of **married female** characters exceeded the number of **not married** female characters by 33, the most for any of the period. Additionally, the proportions of **divorced** females are 0% during 1979 to 1982, 6% during 1983 to 1990, 4% during 1991 to 2000, and 5% during 2001 to 2008.

Table 7-5. Change of portrayal of female characters' marital status over time

	Year				Total
	1979 to 1982	1983 to 1990	1991 to 2000	2001 to 2008	
Marital Not married	9	15	55	49	128
Married	0	15	40	82	137
Divorced	0	2	4	7	13
Not sure	0	0	15	5	20
Total	9	32	114	143	298

The Kruskal-Wallis test indicates the role of female characters within and out of the family changed significantly from the first time period to the last (mode=99.00; $\chi^2=17.070$;

df=3; p=.001<.01). The most significant role portrayed is the **wife** (35% of the total). The second significant role is **mother**, with 12% the total. **Lover**, a role out of the family, constituted 0.7% of all female characters. The largest number of female characters (127) was rated not sure because they were not depicted as being related to any role within and out of family. For example, one is a friend of the leading female character, and appears with the leading character only in the work place; therefore, her family role could not be coded.

Table 7-6. Change of portrayal of female characters' role within and out of family over time

		Year				Total
		1979 to 1982	1983 to 1990	1991 to 2000	2001 to 2008	
Role	Mother	0	5	13	18	36
	Daughter-in-law	0	1	1	1	3
	Daughter	2	1	6	13	22
	Sister	0	0	1	4	5
	Lover	0	0	1	1	2
	Wife	0	10	27	66	103
	Not sure	7	15	65	40	127
Total		9	32	114	143	298

From 1979 to 2008, 37% of female characters received **junior college to college** education (mode=4.00), 16% of them had **high school to vocational-technical school** education, 9% of them attended only **elementary school or junior high school**, 7% of them got their master's or doctoral degrees (**above college**), and 3% were **never educated**.

When female characters' educational level was not mentioned, their educational levels were coded as **not sure**. In addition, no female characters was identified as having graduated from **college or junior college** in any TV series from 1979 to 1982, and only one female received education higher than college (**above college**) during the same period. In

contrast, from 1983 to 1990, the number of females who received **high school to vocational-technical school** education is the greatest compared to other dimensions. No one was shown to have a master's or doctoral degree at that time.

Table 7-7. Change of portrayal of female characters' educational level over time

		Year				Total
		1979 to 1982	1983 to 1990	1991 to 2000	2001 to 2008	
Education	Never educated	0	4	4	0	8
	Elementary school to junior high school	1	1	10	16	28
	High school to vocational-technical school	2	9	17	20	48
	Junior college to college	0	7	38	65	110
	Above college	1	0	3	17	21
	not sure	5	11	42	25	83
Total		9	32	114	143	298

To study whether female's occupational status in prime time Chinese TV series changed over time, the 135 existing occupations plus college students and homemakers were categorized to eight levels, from highest to lowest social status. Table 8 presents the classification and stratification of female groups in China (*The Classifications of Women's Occupations in China, 2003; The Disintegration and Stratification of the Female Group in China, 2005*).

Table 8. The classification and stratification of female groups in China

The Classification and Stratification of Female Groups in China (Social prestige descends from level 1 to level 7)	
Level 1 (Highest)	Senior managerial personnel of government, large enterprise, or social organization; Well-known elite in various circles of society; any other powerful personnel
Level 2 (High)	General managerial personnel of government, social organization, or technical staff; Private entrepreneur; college faculty; senior doctor; labor contractor, etc.
Level 3 (Middle to high)	General employees of party and government organizations; general technical staff; small employer; managerial personnel of medium or small enterprise; supervisor of labor force; teacher of elementary, junior-high, or high school, etc.
Level 4 (Middle)	Technical staff; freelancer; nurse; kindergarten teacher; owner of small private business (housewife included); secretary, etc.
Level 5 (Low to middle)	Worker of labor-intensive and skill-intensive industry; sales personnel; train attendant; and any other service personnel
Level 6 (Low)	Manual worker; peasant-worker with certain technical knowledge mainly doing physical work; peasant-worker doing only physical work; nanny, etc.
Level 7 (Lowest)	Unemployed individuals; individuals exist on government payouts
Level 8 (Other)	Other (retired personnel, students and individuals involved in criminal or illegal activities are included)

A Kruskal-Wallis test was applied. The results, shows in table 9, suggest females'

occupational status changed greatly from 1979 to 2008

($\chi^2=18.863$; $df=3$; $p=.000<.01$).

Table 9. Results of Kruskal-Wallis test (change of occupational levels over time)

	Occup2
Chi-square	18.863
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

To show the tendency of change, frequencies of female characters' occupations in each of the eight levels were presented from the first time period to the fourth period.

Table 10. Frequencies of occupations in each level over time (see Appendix B for explanations of the levels)

		Year				Total
		1979 to 1982	1983 to 1990	1991 to 2000	2001 to 2008	
Occup2	Level1	0	0	1	2	3
	Level2	0	3	12	32	47
	Level3	1	7	36	51	95
	Level4	0	3	25	19	47
	Level5	4	8	19	13	44
	Level6	3	9	14	14	40
	Level7	0	1	1	2	4
	Level8	1	1	6	10	18
Total		9	32	114	143	298

During 1979 to 1982, the largest number of female characters falls within **level 5** (45%), which indicates most females in TV series are involved in labor-intensive and skill-intensive work, such as shop assistant, sales person, or textile mill worker.

From 1983 to 1990, 9 out of 32 (28%) of the female characters examined fall into **level 6**, suggesting females in TV series worked mainly as manual workers or peasant workers at that time. For example, some females were portrayed as nannies or peasants living in poor conditions.

From 1991 to 2000, the number of female occupations in each level experienced a major change. Most characters fall into occupational level 3 (36 out of 114), or 32% of the. Women were depicted as managerial personnel in companies, high school teachers, government employees, or secretaries. The second significant category is level 4, with 25 females in it. These findings show that the occupational level of TV females rose from the

labor oriented level (during 1983 to 1990) to managerial or owner level during (during 1991 to 2000).

From 2001 to 2008, 36% of the total population falls into level 3. The findings suggest large numbers of female characters had the chance to do managerial tasks and be involved in decision-making as time goes by. The second most popular level is 2, with 32 out of 143 females, or 22% of the total. Women characters began to have access to upper level government positions. In addition, they were portrayed as senior engineers, college professors, or doctors. Overall, from the first time period to the fourth time period, most of female characters had occupations in level 3 (mode=3.00), and the lowest number of females had occupations in level 1.

Among the 298 female characters, 35 of them changed their occupations in the TV series in which they appeared. Twelve out of 35 (34%) females had new occupations with in lower than before, 12 (34%) women raised their occupational level by changing jobs, and 11 (31%) of them kept their original occupational levels after changing job.

To examine whether certain types of female characters were engaged in a typical occupational levels (see table 8), a series of cross-tabulations are shown. Table 11-1 to 11-8 present the relationships between occupational levels and each variable describing different attributes of female characters.

Within the entire sample of 298 female TV characters, 99 of them were recognized as major characters, while 199 were coded as minor characters. Among the major ones, 37 out of 298 (12%) had level 3 occupations, which means they held certain occupations with middle to high social prestige. Only one female portrayed as a major character falls into level

7, which indicates her social status was the lowest. Among the minor characters, most of them (58 out of 298, 12%) belong to level 3, with middle to high social prestige. No character has a level 1 occupations, which suggests the TV series did not depict any powerful minor characters holding managerial occupations.

Table 11-1. Cross-tabulation of occupational level and importance

Occup2	Major		Minor	
	N	%	N	%
Level 1	3	1	/	/
Level 2	20	7	27	9
Level 3	37	12	58	12
Level 4	13	4	34	11
Level 5	15	5	29	10
Level 6	6	2	34	11
Level 7	1	.3	3	1
Level 8	4	1	14	5
Subtotal	99	33	199	67
Total	298			

During three decades, women below 39 years of age were the most popular group being depicted by TV series. Seventy-one females out of the total (24%) were shown as having level 3 occupations with middle to high social prestige. None of these young women had managerial occupations in government or well-known corporations. For those middle-aged women between 40 to 64 years of age, 22 (7% of the total) were portrayed as having level 2 occupations with high social prestige and considerable managerial power. It is worth noting that all characters having level 1 occupations belong to the 40 to 64 age group. In this age group, no one was depicted as being in level 7, which is the lowest level. Most women in the above 65 age group fall into level 3 in terms of occupation. No females in this group have level 1 or level 5 occupations, which means older women were not portrayed in either powerful positions or low to middle level positions.

Table 11-2. Cross-tabulation of occupational level and age

Occup2	Below 39		40-64		Above 65	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Level 1	/	/	3	1	/	/
Level 2	24	8	22	7	1	.3
Level 3	71	24	18	6	6	2
Level 4	38	13	8	3	1	.3
Level 5	34	11	10	3	/	/
Level 6	23	8	15	5	2	.6
Level 7	3	1	/	/	1	.3
Level 8	16	5	1	.3	1	.3
Subtotal	209	70	77	26	12	4
Total	298					

Females with attractive appearance were the most popular group depicted in TV series over the years. Fifty-seven out of 298 (19%) female characters had positions with middle to high social prestige (level 3). Most of the women with acceptable physical appearance engaged in middle to high-level occupations in TV series. Unlovely women were portrayed having either high social prestige or middle to high social status, with a certain degree of power at work. Physical attractiveness of women having the highest social prestige was never specified in the TV series.

Table 11-3. Cross-tabulation of occupational level and appearance

Occup2	Good-looking		Average		Unlovely	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Level 1	/	/	/	/	/	/
Level 2	22	7	9	3	1	.3
Level 3	57	19	18	6	1	.3
Level 4	27	9	6	2	/	/
Level 5	18	6	7	2	/	/
Level 6	12	4	9	3	/	/
Level 7	2	.6	1	.3	/	/
Level 8	13	4	3	1	/	/
Subtotal	151	51	53	18	2	.6
Total	298					

Most of the independent women were portrayed as having level 3 occupations (56, 19% of the total), with middle to high social status. There are three independent female characters engaged in level 1 occupations, which means all the powerful women in TV series were independent. Dependent women were distributed across levels 3 to 6. Most optimistic females had level 5 occupations, with low to middle social prestige. One of them fell into the lowest level. Most of the extrovert females had level 3 occupations (6, 2% of the total), with middle to high social prestige. For those reserved women, most of them engaged in occupations with low social status. Most of the aggressive female characters (7, 2% of the total) had level 6 occupations. Among those quiet and soft women, 13 of them (4%) were portrayed as having occupations with middle to high-level social status.

Table 11-4. Cross-tabulation of occupational level and personality

Occup2	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Level 1	3	1	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Level 2	35	12	1	.3	1	.3	1	.3	1	.3	/	/	1	.3	6	2
Level 3	56	19	4	1	2	.6	1	.3	6	2	6	2	3	1	13	4
Level 4	22	7	5	2	3	1	/	/	2	.6	3	1	4	1	6	2
Level 5	12	4	4	1	7	2	/	/	2	.6	3	1	4	1	7	2
Level 6	8	3	3	1	2	.6	/	/	/	/	14	5	7	2	6	2
Level 7	/	/	/	/	1	.3	/	/	/	/	3	1	/	/	/	/
Level 8	8	3	1	.3	1	.3	1	.3	1	.3	1	.3	/	/	3	1
Subtotal	144	38	18	6	17	6	3	1	12	4	30	10	19	6	41	14
Total	298															

1=Self-governed/ Independent

2=Dependent

3=Optimistic

4=Pessimistic

5=Fashionable/ extrovert

6=Constraint/ reversed

7=Aggressive

8=Quiet/ soft/ weak

The vast majority of female characters in the examined TV series, 227 out of 298 (76%), came from urban areas. Most of them were engaged in level 3 occupations, with middle to high social prestige. Only two of them had level 7 occupations, which is the lowest level. All of the women having the greatest power grew up, lived and worked in urban areas. Twenty-eight female characters from rural areas had level 6 occupations, with low social prestige. Among those migrants from rural areas to urban areas, most of them (7, 2% of the total) engaged in level 6 occupations, having low social status.

Table 11-5. Cross-tabulation of occupational level and location

Occup2	Urban		Rural		Migrants	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Level 1	3	1	/	/	/	/
Level 2	43	14	4	1	/	/
Level 3	82	27	8	3	4	1
Level 4	37	12	4	1	5	2
Level 5	40	13	1	.3	2	.6
Level 6	5	2	28	9	7	2
Level 7	2	.6	1	.3	1	.3
Level 8	15	5	/	/	2	.6
Subtotal	227	76	46	15	21	7
Total	298					

An equal number of married and not married women were portrayed in the series. Forty-two (14% of the total) of the women not married women, 38 (13% of the total) of the married women and 8 (3% of the total) of the divorced women were portrayed as having level 3 occupations, which indicates most female characters had occupations with middle to high social status, no matter what their marital condition was.

Table 11-6. Cross-tabulation of occupational level and marital status

Occup2	Not married		Married		Divorced	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Level 1	/	/	2	.6	/	/
Level 2	16	5	27	9	1	.3
Level 3	42	14	38	13	8	3
Level 4	21	7	20	7	2	.6
Level 5	23	8	18	6	1	.3
Level 6	15	5	24	8	1	.3
Level 7	2	.6	2	.6	/	/
Level 8	9	3	6	2	/	/
Subtotal	128	43	137	46	13	4
Total	298					

“Mother” and “wife” are the two most popular groups portrayed in the selected TV series. For those who were recognized as mothers, 12 of them (4% of the total) were shown to hold level 3 occupations with middle to high social prestige. Of those who were portrayed as wives, 28 of them (9% of the total) had level 3 occupations. Women having the highest social status were all depicted as wives in the TV series examined for this study.

Table 11-7. Cross-tabulation of occupational level and role within and out of family

Occup2	Mother		Daughter-in-law		Daughter		Sister		Lover		Wife	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Level 1	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	2	.6
Level 2	6	2	/	/	5	2	1	.3	/	/	22	7
Level 3	12	4	1	.3	5	2	2	.6	/	/	28	9
Level 4	7	2	1	.3	1	.3	2	.6	1	.3	11	4
Level 5	4	1	/	/	5	2	/	/	/	/	15	5
Level 6	4	1	/	/	2	.6	/	/	/	/	20	7
Level 7	1	.3	/	/	1	.3	/	/	/	/	1	.3
Level 8	2	.6	1	.3	3	1	/	/	1	.3	4	1
Subtotal	36	12	3	1	22	7	5	2	2	.6	103	35
Total	298											

Only eight women in all of the TV series never went to school, and their occupations fell into level 6. This means they were mainly peasants or manual workers with the lowest social prestige. Most of the women who had elementary school to junior-high school educations (21, 7% of the total) were shown to have level 6 occupations with the lowest social status. Twenty female characters (7% of the total) who had high school to vocational-technical school education had level 5 occupations, with low to middle social status. Sixty-three females in the TV series (21% of the total) went to junior college or college, and their occupational level was level 3, with middle to high social prestige. All of the women who had a level 1 occupation were portrayed as having a junior college or college education. Most of the female characters with an advanced education (17, 6 % of the total) had occupations in level 2, with high social status and a certain degree of managerial power.

Table 11-8. Cross-tabulation of occupational level and educational level

Occup2	Never educated		Elementary to junior-high school		High to vocational-technical school		Junior college to college		Above college	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Level 1	/	/	/	/	/	/	3	1	/	/
Level 2	/	/	/	/	/	/	27	9	17	6
Level 3	/	/	1	.3	9	3	63	21	4	1
Level 4	/	/	2	.6	12	4	12	4	/	/
Level 5	/	/	1	.3	20	7	/	/	/	/
Level 6	8	3	21	7	4	1	/	/	/	/
Level 7	/	/	2	.6	/	/	/	/	/	/
Level 8	/	/	1	.3	3	1	5	2	/	/
Subtotal	8	3	28	9	48	16	110	37	21	7
Total	298									

Occupational distributions of women in TV series and reality

RQ3 asked: Among women employed outside the home, how does the occupational distribution of female characters portrayed in Chinese TV series compare with women's

occupational distribution in real life? To answer this question, both of the occupational distribution of female characters in TV series and in reality were calculated and compared by categories in each of the time periods. The formula applied were:

1. For female occupational distribution in TV series

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{Total number of females in one single category in the period}}{\text{Total number of females examined in the period}}$$

2. For female occupational distribution in reality

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{Total number of females in one single category in the period}}{\text{Female population in the period}}$$

Table 12 shows percentages obtained from the above formula (continued on page 57).

Table 12. Percentages of females in each category in reality (R) and in TV series (T) over time

		1979-1982	1983-1990	1991-2000	2001-2008
Manufacturing	R	11.93	12.76	38.83	30.24
	T	22.22	12.5	20.17	9.09
Transportation, Storage, Post and Telecommunications	R	0.9	0.75	3.98	4.04
	T	0	0	0	0.7
Wholesale and Retail Trade & Hotel and Catering Service	R	2.94	4.14	13.57	8.1
	T	44.45	15.62	16.67	18.18
Finance & Insurance	R	0.14	0.29	2.3	3.99
	T	0	0	0.88	2.1
Real Estate Trade	R	0.48	0.95	0.53	1.06
	T	0	0	0.88	2.1
Social Service	R	0.97	1.71	4.01	2.93
	T	0	6.25	8.77	8.39
Health Care, Sporting and Social Welfare	R	0.87	0.95	4.81	6.97
	T	11.11	6.25	13.16	8.39
Education, Culture and Arts, Media	R	1.92	2.15	11.7	17.42
	T	0	21.87	18.42	19.58
Scientific Research and Polytechnical Service	R	0.19	1.84	1.11	1.57
	T	0	0	0	2.8
Government Agencies, Party Agencies	R	0.72	1	4.7	7.43

and Social Organizations	T	0	3.12	6.14	10.49
Farming, Forestry, Animal Husbandry and Fishery	R	51.64	66.1	4.2	3.83
	T	11.11	28.12	7.01	8.39
Others	R	0.05	0.01	0.67	0.89
	T	0	3.12	6.14	6.99

Of the twelve categories discussed in this study, the occupational distributions of female characters' in six of the TV series examined generally correspond with women's occupational distributions in real life. In the rest of the categories, the occupational distributions of female characters' on TV are inconsistent with women's occupational distributions in real life. Table 13 presents the relationship of female characters' occupational distributions in TV series and reality.

Table 13. Relationship of female characters' occupational distributions in TV series and reality

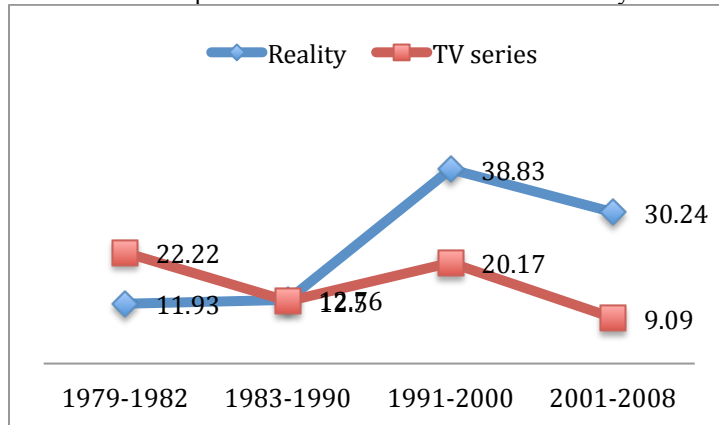
Consistent	Inconsistent
Manufacturing	Transportation, storage, post and telecommunications
Finance & insurance	Wholesale and retail trade & hotel and catering service
Government agencies, Party agencies and social organizations	Real estate trade
Social service	Health care, sporting and social welfare
Farming, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery	Education, culture and arts, media
Others	Scientific research and polytechnical service

Tables 14-1 to 14-12 specify the trends and relationship of female characters' occupational distributions and women's occupational distributions in real life for each category.

The first category is **manufacturing**, in which the two lines show a similar trend. During 1979 to 1982, the percentage of females doing manufacturing related work in TV series is much higher than it is in reality. However, during the next period from 1983 to 1990, the percentage of females doing manufacturing related work in TV series overlaps the

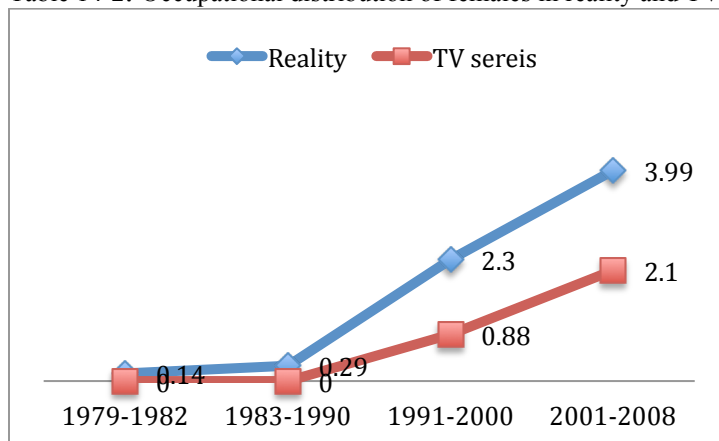
percentage in reality. Starting from this point, the two lines show a similar trend, in that they both climb to a peak and then fall.

Table 14-1. Occupational distribution of females in reality and TV series in manufacturing sector



The second category is **finance & insurance**. The two lines present similar trends. The number of females working in finance and insurance field was extremely low during the first and second time periods. After 1990, both of them soar. Yet, the overall proportion of finance and insurance sector is very small.

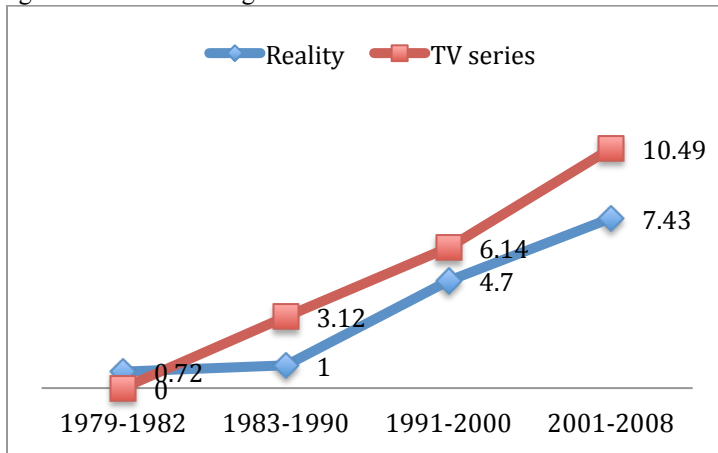
Table 14-2. Occupational distribution of females in reality and TV series in finance and insurance sector



The third category is **government agencies, party agencies and social organizations**. During 1979 to 1982, the percentages of occupational distribution of women in reality and in TV series started at very low points. Both of them rise steadily after that

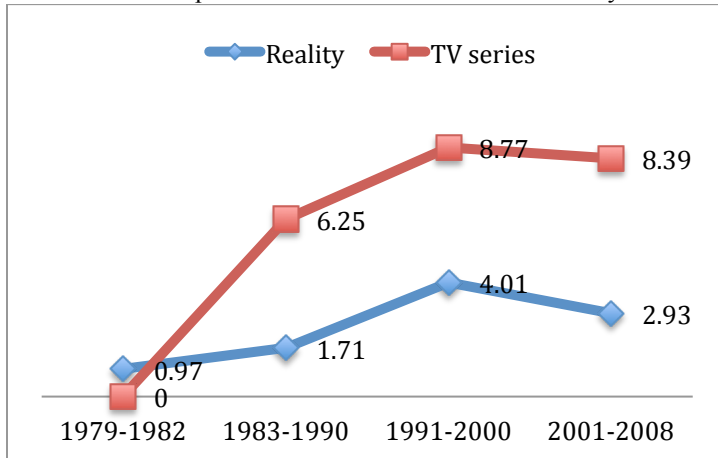
until the fourth period. Overall, the occupational distribution of female TV characters in this category reflects what was happening in the real world.

Table 14-3. Occupational distribution of females in reality and TV series in government agencies, party agencies and social organizations sector



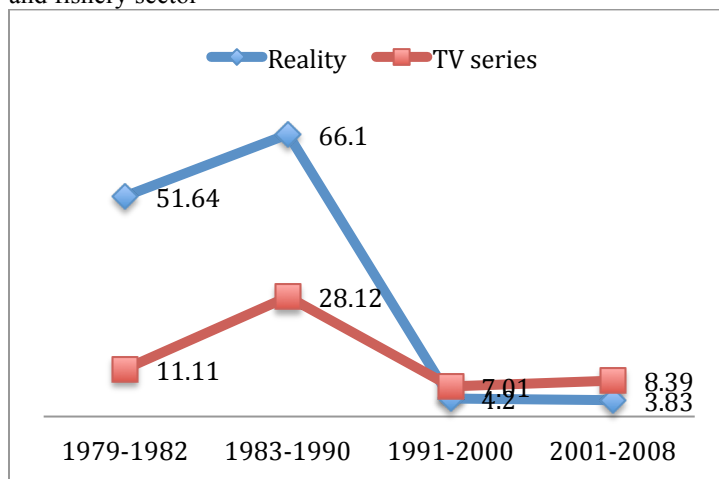
The fourth category that shows a similar trend is the **social service** category. The percentage of female characters' occupational distribution starts at 0 in the first time period, and then increases sharply in the second and third time periods. It drops slightly in the fourth time period. In contrast, the percentage of females working in the social service area in reality starts at a higher point. It climbs during the second and third period, and then declines in the fourth period. Overall, the difference between the TV series and reality is obvious.

Table 14-4. Occupational distribution of female in reality and TV series in social service sector



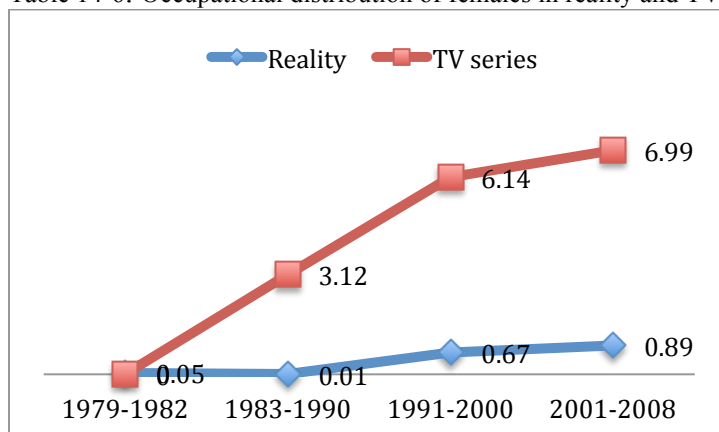
The fifth category with similar trend lines is **farming, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery**. The two lines are wide apart at the starting point in the first period. And then they both rise in the second period, with the percentage of female's occupational distribution in reality going up sharply. Both lines decline rapidly in the third period, and then overlap each other and flatten out in the fourth period.

Table 14-5. Occupational distribution of females in reality and TV series in farming, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery sector



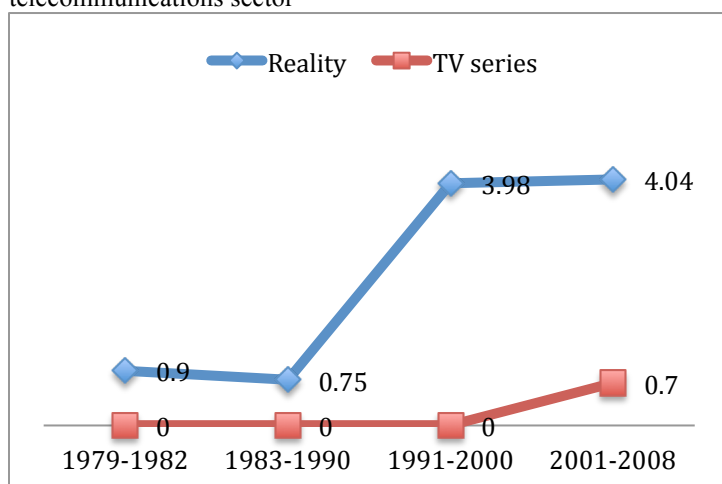
The sixth category is **others**. From 1979 to 1982, both lines start at the very bottom. The occupational distribution in reality holds steady in the second period while the occupational distribution in the TV series soars. After that, both lines show an upward trend.

Table 14-6. Occupational distribution of females in reality and TV series in others sector



The following six categories are the ones in which female characters' occupational distribution is inconsistent with women's occupational distribution in reality. The first one is **transportation, storage, post and telecommunications**. In reality, the proportion of this sector is small within the total female population. However, it still presents some differences from one time period to another. In contrast, the TV series ignored this occupational category entirely until the last time period, when one female character held a job as a postal employee.

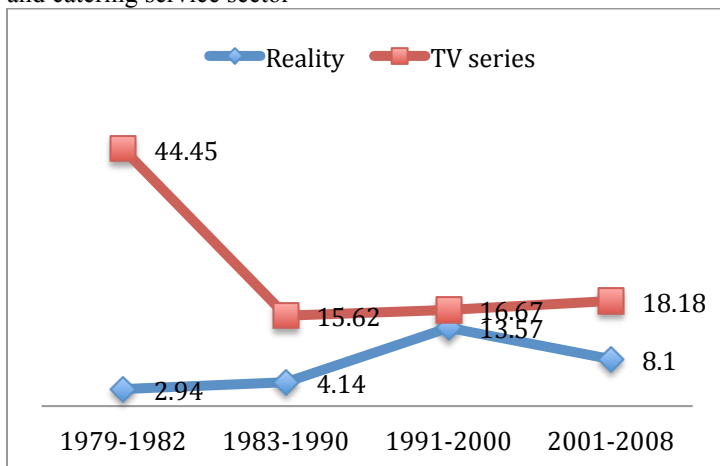
Table 14-7. Occupational distribution of females in reality and TV series in transportation, storage, post and telecommunications sector



The second category is **wholesale and retail trade & hotel and catering service**.

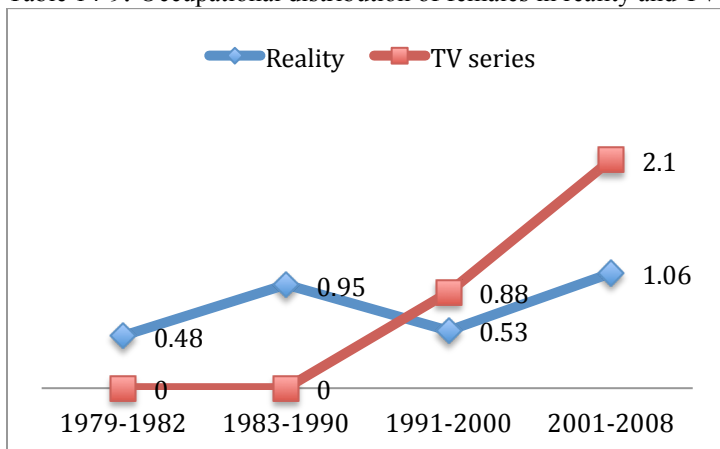
The percentage of females in TV series in this category starts at a very high point in the first period and drops sharply in the second period. After that, it recovers slightly. The percentage of females in reality in this category does not change much during the first two periods, peaks in the third period, and declines in the fourth period. Still, there are more women in this occupational category represented on television than in reality.

Table 14-8. Occupational distribution of females in reality and TV series in wholesale and retail trade & hotel and catering service sector



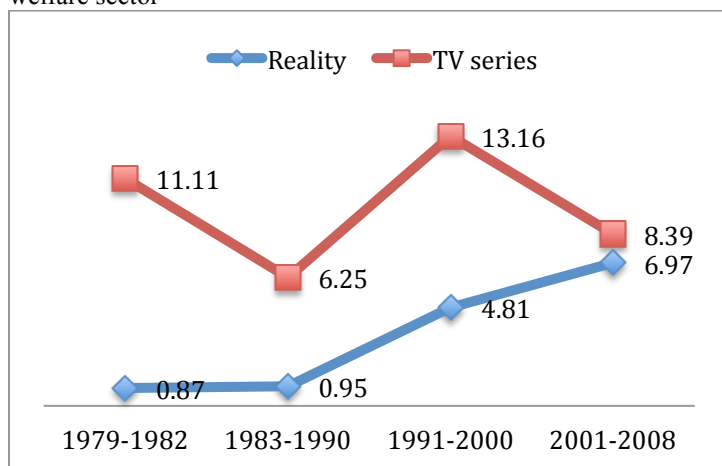
The third category is **real estate trade**. Here the two trend lines present an “X” shape. In the first and second time periods, the percentage of females in reality in this category is higher than the percentage of females in TV series. However, during the third period, the percentage of females in TV series increases and exceeds the percentage of females in reality, and it keeps soaring until the fourth period. The percentage of females in reality grows slightly in the fourth period. The lines trend in the same direction during this period, which means that reality is catching up with the TV portrayal of women in this occupational category.

Table 14-9. Occupational distribution of females in reality and TV series in real estate trade sector



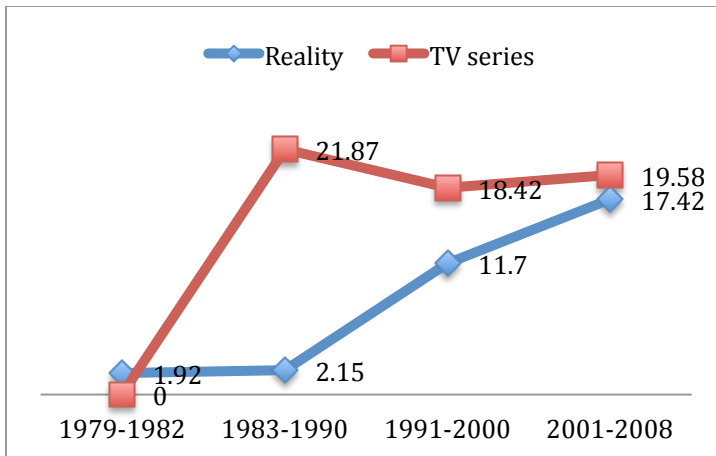
The fourth category in which the occupational distribution of females in TV series conflicts with women's occupational distribution in reality is **health care, sporting and social welfare**. In the TV series, the percentages of females working in this category changed drastically over the four periods, and the percentage at each time period is greater than the percentages in reality. Of particular interest is the fact that the number of women in this occupational category declined sharply in the TV series during the 2001 to 2008 time period, while in reality more women were entering the category.

Table 14-10. Occupational distribution of females in reality and TV series in health care, sporting and social welfare sector



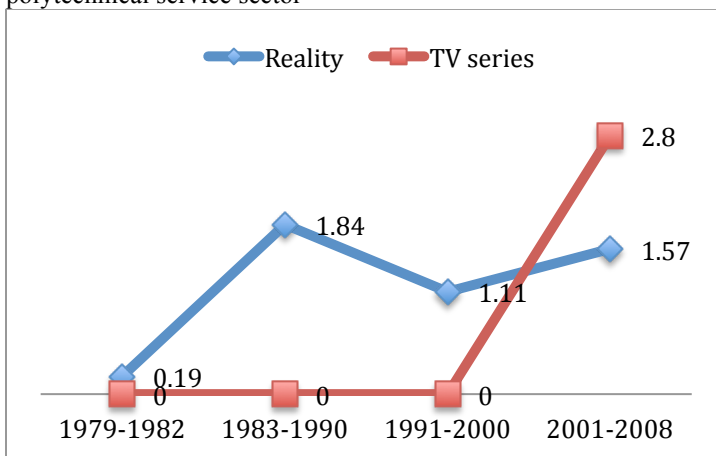
The fifth category is **education, culture and arts, media**. The two lines almost meet each other at the first and fourth periods. However, the percentage of females working in this category in TV series soars in the second period, while in reality the percentage remains very small. During the third period, the percentage in reality climbs, but the percentage in the TV series drops. In the fourth period, the percentage of women increases slightly, while in reality, the percentage continues to climb.

Table 14-11. Occupational distribution of females in reality and TV series in education, culture and arts, media sector



The sixth category is **scientific research and polytechnical service**. In reality, the percentage of women having occupations in this category starts from a very low point during the first period and then increases sharply during the second. After that, it falls to half of the previous period. Later, it grows slightly again. In contrast, there were no women portrayed in this area in TV series before the fourth period. However, during the fourth period, the percentage soars to a point higher than the percentage in reality.

Table 14-12. Occupational distribution of females in reality and TV series in scientific research and polytechnical service sector



In general, the number and type of female occupations portrayed in the TV series only partly reflect the occupations females held in real life. There was similarity in about half

of the twelve occupational categories considered, and inconsistency in the remaining categories.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to determine the portrayal of women's image and social status in prime time Chinese TV series from 1979 to 2008, and compare the occupational distribution of female characters on screen and women in reality during that period. To detect any change in the portrayal of women's occupations and occupational levels prime time television programs, sixty-three Chinese TV series that had been presented the Flying Goddess Award or the China Golden Eagle TV Art Award were examined through a content analysis. A total of 298 female characters was selected as the final sample for this study and 135 different occupations were coded. The 135 occupations were then grouped into twelve main categories developed by the Chinese government. Because China has passed through and continues to experience dramatic social and economical transformation, the thirty-year timeframe was divided into four periods: first, from 1979 to 1982; second, from 1983 to 1990; third, from 1991 to 2000; fourth, from 2001 to 2008.

Three research questions were asked: (1) What were the occupations held by female characters in selected TV series from 1979 to 2008? (2) Has the portrayal of female images and occupational status in Chinese TV series changed over time? (3) Among women employed outside the home, how does the occupational distribution of female characters portrayed in Chinese TV series compare with women's occupational distribution in real life?

Occupational portrayal of Chinese women in TV series

A total of 135 occupations held by 298 female characters was observed in 63 selected prime time Chinese TV series. This indicates women in TV series had a wide variety of occupations available to them. The 135 occupations were placed in twelve categories based on occupational statistics provided in government reports. The occupational portrayal of female characters changed significantly over three decades. The most popular categories from the first time period to the fourth in orders are **wholesale and retail trade & catering, farming, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery, manufacturing and education, culture and arts, media**. The least popular categories in all four time periods are **scientific research and polytechnical service and transportation, storage, post and telecommunication**.

Although female TV characters were shown in a wide range of occupations, they were never portrayed as working in the most advanced and sophisticated areas in each category. In addition, there are five categories listed in the government reports that did not appear in the TV series selected for this study. They are: **production and supply of electricity, gas and water, mining and quarrying, geological prospecting and water conservancy, information transmission, computer service and software, and construction**. This suggests that the TV series perpetuate the stereotype that women cannot perform certain traditional male jobs.

Portrayal of female images and their occupational status

According to the findings, several key words (based on frequency tables) could be used to summarize female images over the four time periods. Those words are: age, appearance, personality, living location, marital status, family role and educational level.

It was found that the cluster of attributes changed over the decades. From 1979 to 1982, female characters in TV series were identified as being young, attractive, independent, urban citizen, single, daughter, with a high school to vocational-technical school education. From 1983 to 1990, women were portrayed as young, attractive, independent, urban citizen, either married or not married, wife, and with a high school to vocational-technical school education. In the decade of 1991 to 2000, females were depicted as young, attractive, independent, urban citizens, single, wife and with a junior college to college education. Finally, from 2001 to 2008, female TV characters were presented as young, attractive, independent, urban citizen, married, wife, with a received junior college to college education.

During the four time periods, the least frequently portrayed female group had these characteristics: aged, ugly, illiterate, pessimistic migrants who were divorced and women who had extramarital affairs.

In sum, females who were considered as good-looking, independent, urban, young adults were prevalent in TV series over the three decades of the study. However, after 1991 an increasing number of married or well-educated women appeared on the TV screen.

In the first two time periods, the most popular occupational levels were 5 and 6, which suggests female characters at that time did not have any management or decision-making authority. They were mainly depicted as workers in a labor-intensive and skill intensive industry, manual workers or peasant workers, with low to middle or low social

prestige. However, this situation changed as time goes by. More women began to have authority to some extent.

Females with top authority in society were the least frequently portrayed group over time. There were no women having level 1 occupations until 2000. The first powerful, rich, respected woman was depicted as the president of a State-owned ironwork. The second least portrayed group had level 7 (lowest level) occupations, doing mainly manual work.

Over the three decades, on average, the most frequently portrayed occupational level is level 3, which includes general employees of Party and government organizations, general technical staff, small employers, managers of medium or small enterprises, supervisors of a labor force, and teachers in elementary school, junior-high school, or high school. These women had middle to high social prestige because of their working conditions and authority.

This study also found the most powerful women were always portrayed as major characters. They were between 40 to 64 years of age. All of them were independent. They lived in urban areas. Two out of three were married and portrayed mainly as wives. They all had college educations.

Female characters having the lowest social prestige were mainly minor characters, young adults, attractive, reserved, living in urban areas, and possessing an elementary to junior-high school education.

Overall, level 3 was the most popular occupational level when considering female characters' age, appearance, personality, living location, marital status, family role, and educational level. These characters had middle to high social prestige.

The Chinese government started to promote its slogan of “Women hold up half of the sky” in 1949. It was in contrast to the traditional Confucius thoughts about women. Female characters in the TV series examined no longer reflected the Confucius view that “Females are inferior compared to males ” or “Women mind internal affairs”. But the series still conveyed the idea that women do not have top power and cannot be considered successful unless they give enough attention to both family and career.

Comparison of women’s occupational distributions in TV series and reality

Of the twelve categories discussed in this study, the distribution of female characters’ occupations in TV series was consistent with women’s actual occupational distributions in half of them. They are **manufacturing, finance & insurance, government agencies, Party agencies and social organizations, social service, farming, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery, and others**. In the rest of the categories, the occupational distributions of female characters in TV series differed from women’s occupational distributions in the real world. Those differences were found in the **transportation, storage, post and telecommunications, wholesale and retail trade & hotel and catering service, real estate trade, health care, sporting and social welfare, education, culture and arts, media, and scientific research and polytechnical service** categories.

The findings show the prime time TV series did not consistently reflect reality in terms of occupational distribution. This may be because television programs often try to attract audiences by depicting dramatic irony, something not normally found in the daily life

of most audience members. Consequently, the content of popular TV programs may have less to do with reality and more with what can arouse an audience's interests.

Implications of the findings to theory and practice

Segger and Wheeler (1973) concluded women in TV series share only a small range of occupations. The present study found the opposite -- that females in prime time Chinese TV series were engaged in a variety of occupations over the three decades examined. Vande Berg and Streckfuss found similar results in their 1992 study, which suggested portrayal of occupational roles in TV series differed from occupations in the past, in terms of number, types and availability. In the present study, a Kruskal-Wallis test also showed that occupations available to women in TV series changed significantly over time.

Davis (1990) found that most TV series featured young women, and that female characters faded out of a series when they grew older. The findings of this study are consistent with Davis's by showing that the majority of women portrayed in TV series in China were 39 years of age or younger. Young women were a major aspect of prime time Chinese TV series over the three decades examined.

With the cultural, political, and economic transformation taking place in China, Chinese women have been delivered from "The Three Obediences", which have trapped women in traditional roles and blocked the women's movement for thousands years. Nowadays, female images on TV are often portrayed as positive and energetic. This study found that the majority of female characters in TV series was depicted as independent and self-governed. They were able to keep calm when encountering emergencies, instead of

resorting to their male partners for help. In addition, a growing number of female characters in TV series were portrayed with college degrees or even advanced degrees, which placed women on an intellectual level with men. It is fair to generalize that TV series have been an essential driving force in the growing liberation of women in China.

Thompson and Zerbions (1995) posited women on screen have been underrated for their knowledge, ability, and occupational status. They are less likely to be involved in high-level decision-making in the workplace (McGhee, 1975). This is supported by the present study. Most women in prime time Chinese TV series are portrayed as having **middle to middle to high level** occupations. The majority of them did not engage in any management-related tasks in TV series. Although three out of 298 female characters were depicted as powerful leaders, their faults were always pointed out by male characters in the TV series.

The foregoing literature concluded that television programming “cultivates a common view and common stereotypes” (Signorieslli & Kahlenberg, 2001, p.7). Heavy exposure to television leads to stronger stereotypical prejudgments (McGhee & Fruech, 1980). The present study found that over three decades, the portrayal of female characters’ occupational status had been concentrated on middle to high level, never quite reaching the highest status level. It seems possible that after constantly viewing this kind of female images, women television viewers in China may believe what they see reflects reality, thereby having a poor or limited self-image. Consequently, women could hesitate to use their power to make decisions. Another consequence of this limited view of women’s abilities may be to discourage the women’s movement in Chinese society.

Some scholars argued that stereotypes have an important social value and should not be eliminated from dramatic creations, such as television programs. To do so, they contend, could cause programs to lose a large share of their audience. That said, even if depicting exaggerated reality is a feature of TV series, media practitioners could resolve to build positive female images that would overcome long-established stereotypes and educate women in the audience to be more confident of their abilities.

Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

The sampling of this study is restricted by the absence of a complete list of TV series broadcast during the designed timeframe and the limited availability of online videos. The sampling for this study was based on the list of TV series honored by the China Golden Eagle TV Arts Award and the Flying Goddess Awards, which may have been influenced by the Communist Party propaganda and political interests. In addition, the criteria of the two awards may limit the types of TV series honored and thus limit the types of females portrayed in the various series. Perhaps future studies will be able to employ more systematic probability sampling techniques to explore a greater variety of programs drawn from a comprehensive list showing audience ratings.

This study also encountered difficulty in relating women's occupations on TV with those in the real world. In order to compare TV occupations with reality, 135 occupations identified in the series had to be narrowed down to the twelve categories established by the government and reported in the *Observation Report on the Development of Occupations in China Society: 1978-2008*, *China Population and Employment Statistics Yearbooks (1988-2009)*, and China population census in 1982 and 1990. However, these limited categories

could not reflect the detailed changes that took place in women's occupations over three decades. Future studies may focus on a wider range of occupations when more comprehensive and detailed employment statistics of women are available.

The results of this study provided a baseline of data for future cultivation studies of media content. Further efforts should be made to examine to what extent audiences are cultivated by the content of TV series. Discourse analysis of the plots and dialogues is also recommended, so that how Chinese TV series cultivates viewers by narration may be revealed. In addition, longitudinal studies of TV series are warranted because social norms and people's sense of worth change over time.

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APPENDIX A:
CONTENT ANALYSIS CODING SHEET

Variable number	Variable name	Variable label	Values	Code
1	Coder	Coder's name	1=Zhuyi Zheng 2=Ni Zhang	
2	Year	Year TV series was on air	1=1979 to 1982 2=1983 to 1990 3=1991 to 2000 4=2001 to 2008	
3	Character ID	Character ID number		
4	Importance	Importance of the character	1=major 2=minor	
5	Age	Character's age	1=below 39 2=40-64 3=above 65 99=not sure	
6	Appearance	Character's physical appearance	1=good looking (above average) 2=average 3=unlovely (below average) 99=not sure	
7	Personality	Character's personality presented on TV	1=self-governed/ independent 2=dependent 3=optimistic 4=pessimistic 5=fashionable/ extrovert 6=constraint/ reversed 7=aggressive 8=quiet/ soft/ weak 99=not sure	
8	Location	Character's living location	1=urban 2=rural 3=nigrants from rural area to urban area 99=not sure	

9	Marital status	Women's marital status	1=not Married 2=married 3=divorced 99=not sure	
10	Role	Women's major role within/out of the family	1=mother 2=daughter in law 3=daughter 4=sister 5=lover 6=wife 99=not sure	
11	Educational level	Education women received	1=never educated 2=elementary school to junior high school 3=high school to vocational-technical school 4=Junior college to college 5=above college 99=not sure	
12	Occupation	Character's occupation	0=Absent 1=Manufacturing 2=Transportation, Storage, Post and Telecommunications 3=Wholesale and Retail Trade & Catering Service 4=Finance & Insurance 5=Real Estate Trade 6=Social Service 7=Health Care, Sporting and Social Welfare 8=Education, Culture and Arts, Media 9=Scientific Research and Polytechnical Service 10=Government Agencies, Party	

			Agencies and Social Organizations 11=Farming, Forestry, Animal Husbandry and Fishery 12=other	
13	Occup2	Character's occupational level	1=level1 2=level2 3=level3 4=level4 5=level5 6=level6 7=level7 8=other 99=not sure	
14	Change	Whether female character' s occupation change	1=yes 2=no 99=not sure	
15	Change2	Character's occupation after change	0=Absent 1=Manufacturing 2=Transportation, Storage, Post and Telecommunications 3=Wholesale and Retail Trade & Catering Service 4=Finance & Insurance 5=Real Estate Trade 6=Social Service 7=Health Care, Sporting and Social Welfare 8=Education, Culture and Arts, Media 9=Scientific Research and Polytechnical Service 10=Government Agencies, Party Agencies and Social Organizations 11=Farming, Forestry, Animal Husbandry	

			and Fishery 12=other	
16	Change3	Character's occupational level after change	1=level1 2=level2 3=level3 4=level4 5=level5 6=level6 7=level7 8=other 99=not sure	

APPENDIX B:**CODING GUIDE FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS**

Operational definitions of occupation variables:

The eight levels of occupations in China society are derived from *The Classifications of Women's Occupations in China* and *The Disintegration and Stratification of the Female Group in China*. According to the articles,

Level 1 (Highest)

Working conditions: government official at the highest level or any other senior managerial personnel (e.g. Chief Executive Officer of cooperation, owner or stakeholder of multinational, private entrepreneur), well-known Certified Public Accountant, well-known barrister, well-known performing artist

Explanations: the term “government officials of highest level” refers to those who of bureaucratic level and higher

Level 2 (High)

Working conditions: government officer of middle and lower level or any other managerial personnel, (e.g. senior technical staff, manager of projects, supervisor of technical staff, private entrepreneur having relatively less employees, board member of small company), college faculty, senior doctor, labor contactor

Explanation: middle and lower level of government officer refers to those who of departmental level and lower; division of military personnel and policemen will be based on actual rank

Level 3 (Middle to high)

Working conditions: general employees of party and government organizations, general technical staff, small employer, managerial personnel of medium or small enterprise, supervisor of labor force, secretary, teacher of elementary, junior-high, or high school

Level 4 (Middle)

Working conditions: technical staff, freelancer, owner of small private business

Explanation: housewife is included.

Level 5 (low to middle)

Working conditions: worker of labor-intensive and skill-intensive industry, sales personnel, train attendant, and any other service personnel

Level 6 (Low)

Working conditions: manual worker, peasant-worker with certain technical knowledge mainly doing physical work, peasant-worker doing only physical work (including restaurant and construction field), nanny

Level 7 (Lowest)

Working conditions: unemployed individuals, individuals exist on government payouts

Level 8 (other)

Working conditions: other

Explanation: retired personnel, students and individuals involved in criminal or illegal activities are included.

Appendix C:**LIST OF EXAMINED PRIME TIME CHINESE TV SERIES**

There Is A Young Man
A Girl Selling Pancakes
Rough Years
A storm is coming tonight
Back to the Past
New Star
Snow City
Fence, Women and Dog
Social Girls
Desire
Stories From The Editorial Board
Rural Girls in City
Ancient ship woman and net
Full Love In the Pearl River
Addiction
A Girl and Three Soldiers
A Doctor's Story
Growth Ring
Man In the Gulley

Sinful Debt
Heroes Never Regret
Western Policemen
Woman Crossing the Man River
Workshop Director
Deep Love
Red Cross
Emergency Call 110
Hand-In-Hand
Red Recipe
Mother-in-Law, Wife and Sister-in-Law
Never Close the Eye
The Nature of Criminal Police
Zhang Daming's Happy Life
28 Nannies at Professor Tian's House
Traceless snow
Red Carnation
Jin Zhu, A Party Member, Is a Little Bit Busy
Never Give Up
Loyalty
Empty Mirror

Field Full of Hope
Secretary of provincial Party committee
Tin Wedding
The Romance
Great Parents
A Family Tree
Pink Ladies
Jade Goddess of Mercy
Be The Banker
Absolute Power
Expecting Happiness
Chinese Style Divorce
Tears
As a Man Sows and So He Shall Reap
Yellow Cinnamon
Beautiful Field
Mom's Tears
Migrants In the City
Intimate Brothers
Well-done
Guo Hai's Family Affairs
Struggle
Golden Wedding