

The Construction of Female Characters and Their Social Impact in the Context of Digital Media

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Abstract:

In the digital age, visual media increasingly permeates social life, while the global interplay of cultural homogenization and differentiation influences the production and dissemination of content. Within this context, public attention paid to female characters has intensified, while the interplay between consumerism and the media environment renders Asian female characters more susceptible to being typified. This paper explores the primary representations of Asian women in digital media, investigates the continuity in character construction and dissemination logic between traditional Hollywood cinema and digital platforms such as TikTok, and evaluates the role of commercial and algorithmic factors in shaping the depiction and cultural significance of these characters. By integrating Arjun Appadurai's media landscape theory and Jörg Schweinitz's fixed schema theory, this study examines film/TV and short-video content. The findings suggest that in traditional media, Asian women are frequently represented through the "Lotus Blossom" and "Dragon Lady" archetypes. Such stereotypical depictions both restrict the range of identity expression and remain open to cultural evaluation. While stereotypes such as the delicate homemaker and assertive career woman persist on digital platforms, greater diversity in female characters can be fostered through creator practices, algorithmic design, and cross-media collaboration, affecting cultural views.

Keywords: Global Culture, Homogenization and Heterogenization, Gender Representation, Visual Media, Identity Construction

1. Introduction

With the advancement of globalization and digital media, visual media has evolved beyond being merely a tool for information dissemination, and has thereby emerged as a crucial arena for shaping social consciousness, gender identity, and cultural cognition. Film and television industries across the world, especially Hollywood, share cultural ideas that are easily recognized everywhere through common story structures and visual styles. Local creators often utilize the digital storytelling framework to construct compelling female characters that not only preserve cultural authenticity but also challenge traditional gender norms, fostering social impact and engaging younger audiences through social media platforms. [1]. The rise of digital media has further amplified this dynamic. Algorithms and traffic-driven logic foster repetitive and formulaic content patterns, perpetuating stereotypes within identity formation and cultural construction [2-4]. In particular, short-video platforms often recommend symbolic female archetypes like “delicate” or “dominant,” deepening the cycle between consumerism, the media landscape, and stereotypes, and sparking widespread public debate about the representation of female roles [5]. And existing studies primarily look at the conflict between cultural sameness and local differences in globalization, and how common patterns in film and TV influence the way gender and race are shown. However, studies on Asian female representations in the digital media environment remain scarce, particularly lacking analysis of how cross-media dissemination logic, algorithmic mechanisms, and audience interaction collectively contribute to the typification of characters. Therefore, this paper explores how Asian women are mainly portrayed in digital media. It also examines how character types from Hollywood films continue in short-video platforms, and how commercial interests and algorithm recommendations affect the spread of these symbolic and common roles. By utilizing film/TV text analysis, digital platform case studies, and relevant statistical and documentary materials, this study analyzes Asian female representations in Hollywood films and Douyin short videos, and reveals the interactive mechanisms of commercial, technological, and cultural logics within the digital media environment and explore pathways for shap-

ing diverse female characters.

2. Asian Female Representations in Digital Media

2.1 Portrayal of Women in Hollywood

Early Hollywood films and television productions established two stereotypical portrayals of Asian women through fixed tropes: the Lotus Blossom (characterized by fragile and submissive) and the Dragon Lady (defined by dominant and cold-hearted). These archetypes show how common media images work and strengthen lasting gender and race stereotypes [2,3].

Specifically, Lotus Blossom women were typically portrayed as dependent on white men, gentle, and submissive, with romanticized and sexualized characteristics. This type appeared alongside U.S. military and political actions in Asia in the early 20th century, with Hollywood often using romantic stories to ease real cultural and social pressures. For example, the character in *Madama Butterfly* shows weakness and obedience, and the story reflects a white male view that romanticizes sexual and power roles [6-8]. Directors reinforce the character’s dependency through soft lighting, slow camera movements, and detailed portrayals of facial expressions, affecting the emotional responses of audiences while solidifying typified visual symbols. In contrast, the Dragon Lady archetype portrays women as strong, rational, and strategic, often accompanied by sexualized depictions. In the context of digital media, female characters often possess simplified backgrounds and are portrayed merely as foils or obstacles to the male protagonist, reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting their social impact [7]. This image can be seen as a mirror image of the fragile type, reflecting cultural anxieties within cinematic narratives about female power and perceived threat. In modern works such as *Charlie’s Angels 2*, such characters exhibit greater independence and capability, yet their assertiveness remains frequently linked to threatening behavior. Using fast cuts, pale makeup, and action scenes, films show the characters’ power and danger while downplaying their psychological and social sides, limiting how audiences see their full identities [8]. These two archetypes show how

recurring tropes and visual symbols work in films. Movies send gender and racial messages through familiar patterns, which can limit the complexity and diversity of Asian female characters

2.2 Symbolic Representation in Digital Media

Digital platforms grant Asian women greater creative autonomy, yet the convergence of algorithms, traffic-driven logic, and traditional stereotypes leads to highly symbolic characters that continue Hollywood's typecasting patterns in how they are shared [4,5]. The "short, flat, and fast" nature of digital media like short videos compels creators to convey character traits within limited timeframes, leading to reliance on recognizable visual symbols and label-driven narratives.

In the "soft and beautiful" type, a version of the Lotus Blossom trope, characters usually appear as homemakers, beauty influencers, or food bloggers. These portrayals emphasize gentleness, domestic devotion, and refined aesthetics, reinforced through video filters, background music, and dialogue. Platform algorithms often promote this kind of typical content, helping it spread widely among users. This perpetuates the Lotus Blossom stereotype, demonstrating how digital platforms, driven by consumer logic, tend to favor traditional and standardized roles for female characters, thereby limiting their complexity and social impact [4]. In contrast, the assertive type, called the Dragon Girl, usually appears as career-focused women or martial arts fans, showing skill and independence through conflict or fight scenes. However, the psychological backgrounds and social contexts of these characters are often simplified, and their assertive traits are frequently linked to threatening behaviors, perpetuating the stereotype that "strength equals danger" [5]. Short-video platforms' algorithmic mechanisms further amplify this phenomenon. Through recommendation systems and traffic allocation, they create a closed loop of "creation-recommendation-consumption," which keeps stereotypes strong. Thus, inherits Hollywood's visual stereotypes and amplifies them through algorithms and distribution channels. This phenomenon shows how visual symbols, narrative patterns, and platform mechanisms interact in modern media, illustrating how Asian female characters are reproduced within the creative-recommendation-user consumption

cycle [2].

3. The Communication Logic and Functions of Female Character Representation

3.1 Communication Logic and Mechanisms

The representation of Asian women in digital media emerges from the combined effects of commercial value, algorithmic logic, and cultural accumulation. It reflects continuity between traditional film and television and digital platforms, forming a closed loop from creation to user consumption. Early Hollywood films, which aimed to lower barriers to audience comprehension and secure box office returns, tended to utilize familiar fixed archetypes such as the Lotus Blossom and the Dragon Lady [2]. The former portrayed traits of fragility, submissiveness, and dependence on white male figures, while the latter presented strength, rationality, and strategic cunning, albeit accompanied by sexualized depictions [7]. Long-term dissemination and cultural accumulation fostered cognitive inertia among audiences, making character personalities and motivations easily comprehensible while enhancing the commercial value of film and television works [8].

In the digital media era, algorithms on short-video and social platforms amplify stereotypical representations. Platforms prioritize traffic maximization, assessing the value of content based on engagement metrics such as dwell time, likes, shares, and comments [4]. Content labeled with terms like "Asian soft beauty" or "dominant older sister" gets more engagement, leading algorithms to promote similar posts and creating a cycle of creation, recommendation, and consumption [5]. The "short, flat, and fast" nature of short videos compels creators to rely on vivid visual symbols and label-driven narratives to quickly capture attention. This not only reinforces character typification but also amplifies the recognizability and transmission intensity of stereotypes. The cross-regional dissemination capabilities of digital platforms further spread these typified images globally. Traditional cinematic tropes, accelerated by algorithms, are reproduced with greater speed, forming a unified gender perception landscape across media and cultures [1]. The continuity

between cinematic symbols and short-video visual expressions, combined with creator-audience interactions and platform algorithms' traffic logic, collectively reinforce stereotypes within the digital environment. Thus, the portrayal of Asian women in digital media not only perpetuates historical cinematic stereotypes but also reflects the complex interplay of commercial, technological, and cultural logics.

3.2 Negative Effects and Impacts

The symbolic representation of Asian women in digital media exerts significant impacts on individual women, gender equality, and cultural diversity [9]. Stereotypes fix them into delicate or dangerous archetypes, potentially leading to objectification, limiting behavioral imagination, and reinforcing monocultural perceptions. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in short-form video creation. Surveys indicate that 62% of Asian female creators on Douyin conceal their assertive traits due to concerns about traffic performance, while 38% refrain from posting career-related content for fear of being perceived as "unlike typical Asian women" [10]. This self-censorship not only impacts creators' professional choices and expression but also solidifies gender and cultural perceptions. The detrimental effects of stereotypes extend beyond individual levels to permeate sociocultural structures. Film, television, and digital media continuously reinforce established perceptions through standardized visual symbols, narrative patterns, and platform mechanisms, limiting the complexity and diversity of Asian female characters. Creators, pressured by traffic metrics and algorithms, repeat stereotypical expressions, while audiences, through prolonged exposure, form fixed perceptions, thereby perpetuating existing power structures and cultural orders [2,3]. Prolonged symbolic representations may also distort public discourse and social participation, causing the diverse experiences and authentic voices of Asian women to be overlooked or marginalized. Society's understanding of them becomes narrowly defined. This demonstrates that symbolic expressions in media are not merely issues of cultural representation but also concern the realization of gender equality and cultural diversity in real-world society.

3.3 Positive Efficacy and Value

Despite their negative effects, stereotypes serve certain functions in specific contexts. Archetypal characters provide easily recognizable visual cues, enabling audiences to quickly grasp narrative structures and character motivations [11]. During periods of low cultural visibility, such representations can arouse audience interest in Asian women and their cultures, thereby prompting further exploration of these subjects. Particularly in digital media environments, stereotypical content often serves as an entry point for audiences to engage with specific cultures or group identities, forming an initial feedback loop from cognition to action. The impact of stereotypes depends on how creators shape them and how audiences interpret them. Through critical viewing and analysis, audiences, researchers, and content creators can identify and transcend rigid patterns, driving the construction of more diverse characters. For instance, analyses of Lotus Girl and Dragon Girl demonstrate that reinterpreting and expanding character dimensions can reveal richer cultural and gender experiences [2,6]. This suggests that typified symbols can serve as starting points for diverse narratives rather than mere constraints. Digital platforms further amplify this potential. As counter-stereotypical labels and diverse content emerge, public demand for varied characters grows, forming a cycle of critique-innovation-dissemination. Audience feedback encourages creators to experiment with new narrative approaches, while platform mechanisms amplify popular diverse content, gradually shaping a more diverse media landscape. This cycle not only mitigates the negative effects of stereotypes but also promotes diversity in gender and cultural perceptions, positioning digital media as a vital arena for fostering cultural understanding and social cognitive pluralism.

4. Trends in Women's Roles and Practical Pathways in the Digital Age

In the digital age, breaking down stereotypical portrayals of Asian women requires multidimensional strategies, including empowering creators, optimizing platform algorithms, and fostering cross-media collaboration. These interrelated measures help drive symbolic characters toward greater diversity, exposing audiences to more richly

layered and nuanced cultural and gendered expressions. Creators' character development skills are pivotal. The core criterion for determining whether a character transcends stereotypes lies in its complexity and multidimensionality [2]. For instance, Evelyn in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* embodies both "housewife" and "cosmic hero" traits, revealing vulnerability while demonstrating courage and independence. Such complex characters not only achieve commercial success but also enhance the visibility of Asian women's multifaceted identities. This prompts creators to focus on characters' layered and contradictory aspects rather than singular symbolic features. Additionally, digital platforms play a vital role in disseminating diverse characters. Platforms can curb stereotypes by optimizing algorithms to give more visibility to diverse characters. For instance, adjusting recommendation weights, adding diverse trait tags, or establishing user feedback channels can prioritize complex content, thereby enhancing the visibility of diverse characters within the "creation-recommendation-consumption" cycle. This enhances the platform's content ecosystem and promotes healthier sociocultural perceptions, gradually increasing audience acceptance of diverse characters. At the same time, cross-media collaboration is seen as the best way to challenge stereotypes. Traditional film and television works enhance character credibility and cultural depth through "deep narrative," while digital platforms rapidly infiltrate popular consciousness with "broad dissemination." Combining these approaches enables top-down and bottom-up collaborative dissemination [12]. In this model, Hollywood supplies high-quality character templates, while short-video platforms like Douyin quickly bring diverse characters into viewers' daily lives. Cross-media collaboration helps replace stereotypes with diverse characters and provides a practical model for future digital cultural dissemination.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that representations of Asian women in digital media environments remain notably stereotyped. Hollywood films typically cast them as Lotus Blossom or Dragon Lady archetypes, while digital platforms like TikTok reduce them to symbolic variations of

either delicate femininity or assertive strength. These two modes of presentation, driven by commercial logic and algorithmic recommendations, form a closed loop that collectively reinforces typified perceptions. Stereotypes carry both negative consequences and certain positive effects. Negative impacts include restricting female identity expression, reinforcing gender inequality, and limiting cultural diversity. Positive effects include attracting audience attention to Asian women and their cultures, offering reference points for diverse roles, and enabling attempts to move beyond stereotypes on digital platforms. The study has limitations: case analyses are primarily focused on Hollywood films and TikTok, and algorithmic analysis remains at a macro level, with insufficient in-depth exploration of specific operational mechanisms. Future research could cover more regions and media types, combining data observation with an analysis of how technology affects the spread of different roles, and ultimately help show a fuller picture of Asian women.

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