

Hearing ‘Her’ Voice - A Study of Female Music Narrative in the Film *Her Story*

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Abstract

In recent years, many excellent feminist films have emerged in China. This study takes the film *Her Story* directed by Shao Yihui as the object to analyze how it integrates musical narrative and feminism to build a unique female music narrative system. The film uses sound montage and distinctive music inserts. Music and other means present the life difficulties and emotional exploration processes faced by three women of different ages. Music has become a key medium for them to self-examine, realize emotional catharsis, establish connections with each other and even achieve empowerment. The study analyzes the dual metaphorical function of music in the film and how to help female characters achieve self-expression and growth. It also explores the setting of male characters as “voiceless people” in the film. The study believes that the musical narrative in *Her Story* expands the dimension of feminist films in Chinese films and provides a new model for the interpretation of contemporary women’s films.

Keywords

Her Story, musical narrative, feminism

1. Introduction

In the current film environment, the trend of feminism and the booming of individual narratives have become a cultural phenomenon that cannot be ignored, so many feminist films were born this spring, and all the narrative of music is a key factor used to promote the progress of the plot most of the time. In addition to the lines, the diverse expression has played a key role in all kinds of excellent films. These two have achieved innovative presentation and integration in the feminist film *Her Story* directed by Shao Yihui: innovatively taking music as a core narrative element and emotional carrier, building a complete female music narrative system.

In this film, it tells in detail the life difficulties faced by three urban women at different ages and different life situations and their emotional exploration process, including married women seeking a balance between the workplace and family - the protagonist Wang Tiemei is a single mother and a former investigator. The narrative examines the relationship between hidden noise and truth in the construction of identity. It also addresses the emotional confusion experienced by young women. This confusion is embodied by Xiao Ye, who voices and negotiates her inner struggles through her performance as the lead singer of a band. In addition, the narrative depicts young women’s exploration of self-knowledge. Under the influence of music, Tiemei’s

daughter, Wang Moli, undergoes an awakening, with the pursuit of self-identification forming the principal thematic motif of her coming-of-age. At the same time, male characters play a supporting role in films, often appearing in a state of “loss of voice”, which gives up power to female-based narratives. Such a combination can reveal how contemporary urban women use music and other art forms to achieve emotional healing and self-empowerment, and explore the positive role of music in women’s growth. Music is no longer just a simple background decoration in the film, but has become a key medium for female characters to self-examine, express emotions, establish connections and even achieve empowerment. By closely aligning women’s interiority with musical form, this narrative strategy provides a new framework for understanding contemporary women’s cinema.

This study aims to combine music narrative and feminist film criticism, and explore how music becomes gender discourse through non-verbal artistic application, participates in the shaping of women’s subjectivity, and provide references for women’s film narrative. Susanne Langer once said that the essence of music is a form of movement that can be heard but not seen [1]. This study tries to explore the higher value of the functionality of music narrative in the film. It not only plays the artistic role of atmosphere rendering, emotional expression, drama criticism, etc., but also has the characteristic power of “female gaze”. It analyzes how music characterizes women’s desires, difficulties, awakenings, growth and resistance in *Her Story*. So as to deepen the dimension of feminist films in Chinese films.

2. Literature Review

The current research is mainly carried out from the perspective of multiple disciplines such as feminism, musicology, filmography and narrative, focusing on how film music participates in the narrative process, shapes the image of women and expresses the subjectivity of women under the perspective of female roles and female directors. However, the academic research on the film *Her Story* is still in its infancy. Most of the existing achievements focus on three aspects: feminist perspective, narrative and style research, and social and cultural criticism. Only a small number of studies involve film music, such as the sound montage used in the film.

For movies, music not only plays the role of emotional enhancement, but also participates in the inner world of the characters and the presentation of female subjectivity with the help of theme melody, sound effect design, etc., taking the soundtrack in the film, three female characters and their respective character music as research samples. Female directors are often more inclined to use music to present the subtleties of women’s emotions, social situations and psychological changes. They will organically integrate music and pictures to present a unique female audio-visual language, just like the Shao language presented by director Shao Yihui in *Her Story*, using sound montage. The technique has created a warm film scene. In addition, many new generation of female directors have made bold innovations in music narratives, using soft and tough audio-visual strategies to express women’s self-discovery and mutual assistance, and shaping new narrative themes such as women’s friendship and women’s growth.

Scholars in Europe and the United States introduced feminist theory in the field of film music research relatively early. They focus on the role of music in the process of gender narrative to promote the expression of female subjectivity. Representative cases include films such as *Little Women* and *Barbie*, which present the close combination of music and female narrative. In South Korea and other Asian regions, there has also been a situation of the rise of female directors. These female directors use music to strengthen female roles in their works and explore marginal issues, forming a new narrative style. The domestic research on this area started relatively late, but in recent years, the development rate has been relatively quickly, pay special attention to the music and narrative innovation in the works of Chinese female directors. Films such as *The Determination to Leave*, *Send Me to the Qingyun* and *The Myth of Love* present the conflict between women’s emotional world, family and self, which has attracted people’s attention. Some scholars have begun to systematically sort out the narrative characteristics of women’s music culture and female directors, focusing on music in women’s-themed films. Narrative function and social significance.

The research field of music and female subjectivity focuses on how music can help female characters break through the traditional gender shackles, achieve self-expression and achieve growth, which has become a research hotspot that has attracted much attention. Just like in *Her Story*, music and women’s friendship and life difficulties are intertwined and integrated. Most of the time, female directors regard music as an emotional

bond or a symbol of struggle to build resonance and support among female groups. They pay more attention to presenting a soft, delicate and inclusive narrative style in terms of music style, arrangement and sound effect design. The research is constantly expanding in the direction of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary, combining psychology, sociology and other perspectives to explore how music narratives present women's issues in different cultural contexts.

In film research, understanding how music acts as an implicit narrative force has become a key research field. It not only affects the audience's emotional response, but also affects their cognitive interpretation of visual narratives. The current research on female film music narratives focuses on text analysis. There is a lack of empirical research on the relationship between musical narration and audience reception and emotional response [2]. For works by Chinese female directors such as *Her Story*, in terms of musical narrative, more musical texts, director interviews and audience research are needed to combine with each other for a more in-depth analysis. In the future, it is worth paying attention to the impact of digital music, AI soundtrack, and other new technologies on female music narratives, as well as the construction of female voices in cross-media narratives such as film and television, games, and short videos.

3. Analysis

3.1 Double Metaphor of Sound Montage

The theme dynamic mechanism forms a unique auditory code through pitch outline, harmonic process and tone identification, and its repetition and variations create a "musical montage" [3]. Montage is not only a film expression technique, but more importantly, a way of expression of film thinking [4]. The semantic pun of a sound montage in the plot combines the combination of character dialogue and the mixing of multiple audio, and uses the similarity of montage to edit. As a band singer, Xiaoye uses various sounds in life to mimic the sound, so that the child Wang Moli can guess the source and composition of the sound: The sound of Wang Tiemei cracking eggs during breakfast preparation is reconfigured as a heavy rainstorm, activating the audience's gustatory imagination of frying and culinary activity within the kitchen space; the sound of cutting vegetables and throwing them into the pool while cooking was imagined as dolphins jumping into the sea, and the sound of splashing water showed visual aesthetics; the sound of painting brushes in boxes and boxes when tidying up the table was associated with excavators, full The granular collision sound triggered tactile imagination [5]... The film relies on the sound montage to integrate the voices of women who are ignored most of the time when working at home with the innocent interpretation of Wang Moli's child's perspective, so that the audience can pay attention to the contribution and value of women in the family from a new perspective, and praise Xu, agree with these pleasant female voices in life. Wang Moli's interpretation of sound in the film reflects Hall's decoding and coding theory, that is, there are different decoding methods for the information received from the outside world by audiences with different life concepts, social backgrounds and education levels, and there are differences in the interpretation of its content. Decoding is divided into four modes, namely dominant, consultative, Resistance and creation, Wang Moli's interpretation of onomatopoeia fragments belongs to creative decoding [5]. In the world of Wang Moli, the mother Wang Tiemei's daily family work is the sound of nature in Wang Moli's ears. The subjects of two different worlds create different self-interpretation spaces with their own understanding. These sound elements are also symbols of women's exploration and pursuit in different fields, reflecting the awakening of their self-awareness, presenting women's breakthrough in traditional gender roles, and re-recognition and affirmation of self-worth.

When the child Wang Moli speculated about the onomatopoeia, French singer Berry's *les Mouchoirs Blancs* slowly intervened. At first, it became gentle and then became clear and gradually integrated into the picture. At this time, the dialogue, environmental sound and music were presented juxta to each other, creating a plural sound. The state of harmonious coexistence of sound elements [6]. The "white handkerchief" in the lyrics can be applied to various scenes, echoing the previous sound montage. The white handkerchief is a warm comfort, and it is also the purest and beautiful dream in everyone's heart, corresponding to Tiemei's toughness as a woman in the workplace and the ease of coping with daily life. With the wanton imagination of children and the daily work of adult women, music builds the dual metaphorical function of narrative.

3.2 Self-Realization in Music

“Sound has always been an influential film technique”, the overall music style of director Shao Yihui’s works mostly adopts jazz and post-pop style [7]. It is not common in the soundtrack style of the current film. There are more than 10 songs in the whole film as film interludes, including electronic folk songs, independent folk songs and nostalgic pop music, etc., and most of the creators are women. The film interludes include Chinese, English, French and other different languages, and the seemingly complicated music composition. When it fits the narrative of the film, it also adds a diverse and inclusive color to the film itself, implicitly matching the inclusiveness of the film in terms of content appeals, and the characteristics of female creators who do not define everything at will [6].

The child Wang Moli made up her mind to overcome her timidity in the music performance space, and then went on stage to perform. She started from the long corridor and walked towards the stage step by step. When the drum beat sounded, the background music of “*Children*” also sounded. The little girl took the mallet handed over by the male drummer Xiao Ma and began to perform drums. At this time, the lyrics of “*Children*” by THE BOOT LEGS “I still choose to be a child” also sounded. “Rough and original” is the characteristic of this song. The original musical language presents a pure instinct of children. On the one hand, it reflects that drummer Wang Moli, as a child, breaks through the inner fear and dares to try the unknown. On the other hand, it also implies that the director hopes to use the song to the audience under the stage and off the screen. People convey their inner thoughts, so that everyone can let go of worldly prejudices and give up weighing the pros and cons, so that the whole world can be as innocent and kind as children. The sound of drums also broke the child’s question of “how should a girl play the drum”, and reached what Wang Tiemei said to her, “You can beat the girl as you want”.

As a singer, Xiao Ye sang two songs, one of which is *Honey Lake* from the Simple Lover Band. This song has an electronic folk style. Its soundtrack uses simple and nostalgic band instruments to match with lazy songs, creating a confused and soft atmosphere. The lyrics will fall in love. Compared to jumping into a honey lake, I am willing to die happy in this sweetness, showing the tension of sweetness and destruction in love. Just as the creator of the Simple Lover Band explained the creative idea of this song, they believe that love is thick and weighty, and it is a unique beautiful feeling and experience of human beings. The more charming it is, the more dangerous it is, so it will attract some moths to the fire. Those who linger in love are like honey, like the positive and negative poles of magnets uncontrollably attract each other. Introduction, but this is also the power of its fatal beauty, which just corresponds to Xiao Ye’s initial fall in love, lose himself, put men above himself, until he was broken by Dr. Hu’s view of love. Another song is from the “*Vulgar Song*” by the female musician Hamburger Huang. The scene of the interlude is that Xiao Ye pretends to be Wang Moli’s single mother to deal with Dr. Hu’s promiscuity and irresponsibility. The lyrics express a love that is difficult to give up. As long as she can wake up in the arms of her lover in the morning, she is willing to be a lover. Even if they know the truth of the matter, they will choose to be silent because of deep love. It is precisely because of this mentality that they pretend to be homosexuals who have children, maintain a deformed relationship with Dr. Hu, satisfy the other party’s fetish of pursuing excitement, pretend that he regards feelings as a tool like the other party, and does not touch the true feelings. The persistence for love, blind enthusiasm and gentleness of the melody expressed in the lyrics are in line with Xiao Ye’s own personality characteristics, making the film full of strong feminine color, with exquisite narrative and swaying posture.

3.3 The “Loss of Voice” of Male Characters

Traditional films generally focus on male characters who have the right to speak, while the shaping of female characters mostly revolves around the protagonist, making the main character more single. Dai Jinhua once pointed out that “women originally did not have their own language and have been struggling toss and turn under the yoke of patriarchal culture and language; and contemporary Chinese women have even gradually lost their words about women” [8]. In order to avoid adopting a traditional male-centric perspective, *Her Story* deliberately marginalizes its male characters, placing them in a state of narrative “voicelessness.” Even large speeches revolve around discussing feminism. Although the female character has a similar performance in traditional male-dominated films: Wang Tiemei is a single mother who was abandoned and divorced by her husband, Xiao Ye is a young girl who was hurt by a scumbag and experienced her father’s domestic violence in her childhood, and Wang Moli is a child who lacks love who grows up without her father. From the perspective of male power, they can’t Have a happy and complete life. However, the film does not continue

such a tragic narrative, but makes a voice for women, showing that women can still achieve happiness, maintain tenacity and have the ability to be independent after leaving men. The setting of these female characters gets rid of the niche of repeating “miserable narratives” in traditional women’s films, making women’s voices more powerful and more heard [9]. The film creates a new type of women’s alliance, conveys a positive female power, and provides the audience with a beautiful imagination of women’s life [10].

The film ironizes the male discourse system in a relatively gentle way. It does not set up a plot that is tense and clearly emphasizes gender opposition. Instead, it slowly tells the hidden female appeals in a humorous and silent manner. When the male characters in the film appear, most of them are in a state of “loss of voice”. Tiemei’s ex-husband is full of words about “Ueno Chizuruko”, “structural problems” and “gender dividends”, but he still feels that he is better than most fathers to pick up children from school. He is a “formal feminist”, and Xiao Ma, who can only be Tiemei’s “ten-minute between classes” drummer, and Xiao Hu, Xiao Ye’s boyfriend, an ophthalmologist, When they appeared, they didn’t have that very prominent reference with relevant musical elements. In the table conversation, in the clip where Xiao Ma and her ex-husband competed with feminist theory, their dialogue space became a large-scale feminist “performance art scene”. At the same time, the ex-husband also made a central statement such as “under structural oppression, everyone is a victim”. With the verbal conflict between the two male characters, those Women who were originally invisible gradually became the main center, and the sensitive issue of social structure became a common problem inside and outside the screen. The introduction and discussion of these values have become the most powerful part of Shao Yihui’s film. With this conscious distribution and setting of the sound and picture relationship, director Shao Yihui realized the female narrative appeal she wanted to express, put men in a state of loss of voice, and established the film’s perspective of focusing on women and paying attention to women’s own growth. The implementation of this strategy makes the overall atmosphere of the film light and flexible, implicitly and clearly expressed. The narrative plot and the picture do not directly tell the connotation, which presents a kind of extraverbal meaning and a kind of euphemistic aesthetic interest, which can make the female audience resonate with the understanding and realize the euphemistic metaphor of the world of male discourse.

4. Conclusion

With the innovative application of music narrative in *Her Story*, director Shao Yihui built a set of female music narrative system, which gave a new narrative paradigm for feminist films. The music in the film not only plays the single effect of emotional enhancement and atmosphere rendering, but also becomes a female character for self-expression and emotional catharsis. The key media for establishing connections and realizing empowerment, such as sound montage, music interludes and other techniques, coupled with the setting of male characters’ “loss of voice” to give power, cleverly avoids falling into the perspective of traditional male power, and jointly shaping the fresh and humorous audio-visual language of “Shao-style” films, and no longer continue to deliberately carry out female tragedy. The narrative expands the dimension of feminist films in Chinese films. Future research can analyze the relationship between musical narrative and audience acceptance and emotional response, while paying attention to the impact of cross-media and new technologies on women’s music narrative.

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