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Mirror, Discipline, and Negotiation: A Qualitative Exploration of the Impact of "Viva La Romance" on the Gender Perception of Young Chinese Women in Contemporary China

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	General debates about media, gender, and intimacy in contemporary China highlight how romantic reality television can both reinforce and challenge traditional norms of wifehood and marriage. This paper will explore the effects of the reality show in influencing the gender perception of young Chinese ladies between the ages of 25 and 35. It tackles the wider issue of how most aestheticized images of couples in terms of their travel and emotional communication affect expectations of femininity, emotional labour and marital roles. The study aims at the four objectives of analysing gender roles encoding in the show; studying the ways viewers perceive these representations; studies perceived effects on gender identity and relationship expectation; and patterns of acceptance, negotiation, and resistance, guided by the Gender Theory and Acceptance Theory. The qualitative design in the study involved semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and purposely chosen participants were used. According to the thematic analysis, there was heightened awareness of women's emotional labour, reinforcement of traditional roles in part, encouragement of relationship self-reflection and reinforcement of egalitarian beliefs among a critical minority. The majority of the participants were involved in negotiated readings where they admired intimacy at the expense of unequal burdens imposed on wives. The paper comes up with the conclusion that Viva La Romance is an object of reflection, of discipline and of negotiation, of stabilisation and destabilisation of gender norms in modern China that is both relatively stable and more or less unsettled.

Keywords: Gender perception, emotional labour, reality television, Chinese women, media reception, marita roles. |

1.INTRODUCTION

Media culture in China serves as a key source that defines the ways in which gender is perceived, acted and bargained among young women in contemporary China. Reality TV, specifically, has taken over as a strong domain where the standards of femininity, romance, marital relationships, and domestic life are created and propagated (Peng, 2022). Programs like Viva La Romance are highly mediated manifestations of marital love, emotional work, travel and gendered expectations serving as cultural texts in which women are reflected and disciplined in their identities in intimate relationships. According to recent scholarship, the current contradictions of Chinese gender norms are marked by the coexistence of the traditional expectations and the new feminist consciousness (Koo et al., 2020; Yang, 2021; Gu, 2021). This strain of (pressure) of not changing versus the very possibility of changing is particularly acute to young women aged between 25-35, who are striving to cope with the demands concerning marriage, career, self-growth, and social identity.

The representations in the media have also been revealed to act as reflections that reflect the dominant cultural ideologies (Cai, 2022; Lutz, 2023), disciplinary practices that uphold normative gender behaviours (Peng, 2022; Liu

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et al., 2020), and even as arenas of negotiation where viewers, refusing, reinterpret, or selectively accept the meaning of mediated messages (Fan et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Reality shows about romantic affairs shape the perceptions of viewers of intimacy and gendering, form expectations of emotional labour, marital harmonies and caretaking (Zhang and Liu, 2022; Zhang, 2021). To the young Chinese women, such representations are included in their overall identity work in an environment that is quickly transforming, but remains patriarchal (Shu and Meagher, 2023; Huang and Guo, 2023).

Most of the studies have investigated the role of media in shaping the understanding of gender in China but most of them have examined dating shows, cosmetic makeover shows, or social-media platforms (Peng, 2022; Knight et al., 2021; Wantono and McKercher, 2021). Inadequate focus has been put on reality TV programs that focus on the traveling experiences of married couples, although it is increasingly popular and more applicable to support the discourse of Chinese femininity today, romance and familial expectations. The limited literature on the topic of travel media also implies that the portrayal of the mobility of women and romantic travel is associated with patriarchal limits and empowerment possibilities (Seow, 2020; Pung et al., 2023; Keshavarzian and Wu, 2022). This knowledge speaks of the necessity to research the effects that the Viva La Romance program that combines traveling, marriage, emotion, and femininity has on the gender perceptions of its audience.

Moreover, the studies show that young Chinese females are active media-readers depending on the socioeconomic situation, cultural education, and personal ambitions (Hori and Kamo, 2021; Jiang et al., 2023; Xu and Liu, 2021). Media never just imposes norms, meaning that the process of meaning production is an active process of interaction whereby the encoded messages and lived realities of viewers are both involved (Miles and Huberman, 2021; Gabriel et al., 2023). This corresponds to decoding, negotiation, and identity formation models, which are highly focused in modern gender and media research (Asadullah et al., 2023; Abeya, 2023). Since there is a growing debate around the level of gender equality, romantic freedom, and emotional wellbeing among Chinese women (Brockmann et al., 2022; Wang and VanderWeele, 2022), it is important and timely to study how Chinese women reacted to gender representations in Viva La Romance.

However, even though the literature on gender and media in China is quite extensive, there is a significant gap: no published qualitative research investigated how the process of mirroring, discipline and negotiation of gender perceptions is applied to young Chinese women as the result of watching Romantic Travel of Wife. This gap is significant on filling in the information on how modern media is constructing and promoting femininity, wifehood, and marital behaviour ideals in a rapidly evolving cultural dimension.

Research Objectives

In order to fill this gap, the following objectives are used in the present study:

1. In order to examine the construction and representation of gender roles, femininity and expectations on marriage by Viva La Romance.
2. To understand how young Chinese women (25-35) perceive, embrace, oppose or negotiate such mediated gender representations.
3. To test the impacts of the program on their perceptions of gender identity, romantic relationships, emotional labour, women's rights, and the equality of genders in modern China.
4. To examine the role of media as a mirror, a disciplinary device and a platform of negotiation in creating gender images amongst young Chinese women.

2. GENDER THEORY AND ACCEPTANCE THEORY.

The study is based on the Gender Theory and Reception Theory, which will be used to address the role of a reality program Viva La Romance in shaping the gender attitudes of young Chinese women aged 25-35. These theories describe the way gender representations are created in media texts and how audiences take meaning, accept, negotiate or resist such messages depending on their own, cultural and social conditions. Collectively, they offer a solid base of knowledge concerning the way the program can be viewed as a place of gender refraction, discipline and negotiation of identity in modern China.

2.1. Gender Theory

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Gender Theory is a critical theory that explains gender as a socially constructed and reproduced notion that is not a predetermined biological element. It emphasizes the fact that media texts have a potent influence in creating the social norms of femininity and masculinity by showing emotional behaviour, relational expectations and role in marriage in recurrent situations. To the young Chinese women who are in the transitional stage of lives in early adulthood, such roles can play a significant role in shaping the way that they view themselves, their relationship expectations and their gender identity. This multi-layered communication and internalization of gender via media is taken up by the framework components in your diagram, which include gender expression, gender stereotypes, gender identity, and gender ordination. All these aspects get combined to enable the study to examine not only the portrayals of women as depicted in the book Viva La Romance, but also the ways the portrayal is used as a symbolic guide by viewers to develop their own interpretation of women hood, romantic roles, and marital behaviour.

2.1.1. Gender Expression

Gender expression is the external enactment of gender in terms of visible behaviours, communication style, emotional reactions, body language as well as self-presentation. The expression of gender in Viva La Romance is seen in the way wives interact with their husbands, show love or anger, in decision making in travelling process, and addressing emotional issues. These representations help to create an ideal femininity model, which most frequently focuses on a warm attitude, sensitivity, and emotional intelligence. To the audiences, such performances act as reflections of cultures. The young Chinese women can contrast their behaviour with that which they observe onscreen and evaluate themselves with reference to the mediated display of femininity. Therefore, gender expression offers an insight into exploring how the show mainstreams some relational behaviours and emotional acts as ideal qualities to women.

2.1.2. Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes refer to the cultural ideas and beliefs attributed to men and women, and are usually upholding the traditional values of women being nurturing, emotional, and relationship-oriented. Viva La Romance often depicts wives as the main emotional caregivers, conflict mediators and relationship harmony sources and husbands as less emotionally demonstrative and passive in relationship maintenance. These images support conventional gender scripts which can be absorbed by young female viewers on a conscious or unconscious level. Gender Theory assists in revealing how these stereotypes train women to follow certain emotional and behavioural norms, which they have in the way they expect relationships in romance. Through the study of gender stereotypes in the show, the study will examine how some of the portrayals can be used to insidiously enforce a patriarchal view of the roles that women play in keeping marital happiness.

2.1.3. Gender Identity

Gender identity can be defined as the inner self of a person in which they feel that they are a gendered individual. In the case of women aged 25-35, who in many instances are under social pressure to enter into marriages and live up to the expectation of their families, media images can have a profound impact in defining the way women treat themselves in romantic relationships. The image of wives that are patient, emotionally mature, and supportive might also motivate the audience to internalize these attributes as the key elements of ideal womanhood. On the other hand, other viewers might not accept these images, particularly those whose preferences are more progressive or egalitarian on gender roles. Gender identity hence is a fluidity of space in which women are able to bargain between personal ambitions and socially constructed demands. This paper applies the concept of gender identity as one of the main dimensions of analysis in order to comprehend how consumers seek out media discourses to validate, challenge, and/or redefine their perceptions of themselves and places of belonging.

2.1.4. Gender Ordination

Gender ordination can be defined as the ordered nature of gender roles in the society where the masculine dominance and feminine emotional labour has a different value. Even though the discourses of gender equality in China are on the rise, the traditional gender order has found its roots in culture. Viva La Romance can support this hierarchy by portraying women as the ones who keep married life on track with the help of emotional labour, adapting, and empathy. Traditional gender arrangements are rather subtly supported through the characterization of wives as caretakers and men as decision-makers. With the inclusion of gender ordination in the framework, the paper will explore the impact of the show in perpetuating or defying these hierarchical standards.

2.2. Reception Theory

Reception Theory is a supplementary of Gender Theory, where audiences work out the interpretation and responsiveness to media messages. It also claims that the viewers are not mere receivers and actively decode the message depending on their cultural heritage, life experience, level of education, and personal values. The elements of the theory that your diagram includes are encoding/decoding, and the cultural cycle that depicts how media messages interact with the understanding of the audience. The theoretical method is vital to help learn about the ways in which the young Chinese women can accept, negotiate or protest against the gender representations in Viva La Romance. Reception Theory facilitates understanding of the fact that the meaning is not predetermined to the text but it is a product of the viewing process that is conditioned by both media intentions and the social reality of the viewers.

2.2.1 Encoding and Decoding

Encoding is defined as the deliberate or inadvertent production of gender meanings by producers of the programs in terms of images, symbols, dialogues, editing, and narrative structures. The producers of Viva La Romance code certain images of marital intimacy, forms of communication, emotional labour, and romantic rituals. The interpretation of these coded messages by viewers is referred to as decoding, on the other hand. Depending on the way they have been reared, their past relationships or their perceptions about gender equality, young Chinese women might decipher the same scene in different ways.

2.2.2 Cultural Cycle

The cultural cycle is used to describe how the overall cultural situation shapes the interpretations which viewers make and how their reactions, in turn, stabilize or oppose cultural norms. In China, feminine and masculine expectations are influenced by Confucianism values, family pressure to marry, and on the rise of feminist discourses. When young women view the Viva La Romance, they interpret the gender message of the film through these cultural prisms to shape their attitude regarding the rights of women, the emotional roles they need to full fill, and the duties that they should perform as wives.

3.METHODOLOGY

The chapter presents a methodology which will be used in the research to examine the way in which Viva La Romance influences the way young Chinese females aged 25-35 understand gender. The paper is based on the Gender Theory that elaborates on how gender is expressed, stereotyped, identified and ordained in social constructs and Reception/ Acceptance Theory that focuses on how audiences perceive media messages based on encoding, decoding and cultural meaning-making. These theoretical ideas have a direct impact on research design, sampling plan, data gathering and data analysis. Since the study aims to know more in-depth personal meanings of gender representations, a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews and focus groups would be best suited to reveal the lived life experiences, gender meaning negotiations, and reaction of the media representations among the participants.

3.1. Research Design

The present research has a qualitative and interpretivist research design that is appropriate to research complex and subjective phenomena of gender perception, identity formation, and negotiating media messages. Qualitative research enables one to explore how people derive meaning to the behaviours, interactions and symbolisms depicted in Viva La Romance. The show on its own is very full of emotional dialogue, narrative presentation and cultural indicators hence a good location to study gender expression and stereotypes. The design will enable the participants to express their perceptions of the behaviours of the wives, the ways in which they can contrast themselves with the roles, and the ways in which they are influenced by the cultural values to accept or reject the representations of the wives.

3.2. Sampling Strategy

This study will focus on young Chinese women in the age group of between 25 and 35. This age is selected due to the fact that this is a crucial period of gender identity development in the Chinese sociocultural background. Gestational women at this age are known to be going through some major changes in life like; romantic relationships, union, early marriage life and the juggling of career and family demands. Consequently, media images of womanhood,

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romantic speaking and marital roles are especially sensitive to them. They are heavily influenced by the traditional Confucian gender norms as well as the new feminist discourses in urban China and they are therefore the best candidates to study how reality TV shapes gender attitudes.

3.3. Sampling Method

In the study, purposive sampling will be employed to guarantee that all the respondents fit the requirements of age, gender, nationality and awareness of the program. Moreover, the maximum variation sampling in this group makes the group more diverse in marital status, level of education, and professional background so that a rich comparative analysis can be made of how various women perceive the same media representation. The recruiting process is done in social media groupings, women forums, and university alumni networks. The sample size will consist of 20 interview participants and 3-4 focus groups of 5-6 people each, which will be both deep and broad qualitative knowledge.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The most crucial technique to be used in the exploration of the individual interpretations of the gender descriptions in Viva La Romance can be the semi-structured interviews. The approach is flexible, yet it covers the major theoretical concepts. The questions will be aimed at exploring how participants conceptualize gender expression, stereotypes and identity as constructed in the show and how participants bargain in accepting or rejecting these images. The interviews are 45-60 minutes long and conducted either in the face-to-face mode or in the secure online mode.

Examples of interview questions are:

Q1: How do you feel about the expression of emotions and roles of wives in the show? How do these phrases shape your perception of what ideal womanhood is?

Q2: Does the program present any gender roles that you either agree with or disagree with? Why do you either accept or not accept these portrayals?

These are questions which are directly related to gender expression, stereotypes, and the process of acceptance/negotiation which is a major focus in the Reception Theory. Interviews are recorded on tape, and transcribed in order to analyse.

3.4.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups supplement individual interviews by the way they identify how gender interpretations are produced socially. Whereas the interviews lay emphasis on personal reflection, focus groups demonstrate the impact of the collective identity and sharing of cultural values in decoding other gender meanings. Combining groups of women aged 25-35, the talks reveal the tendencies of assent, dissent, bargaining and opposition of the show on the issues of representation of the wives, emotional labour and marriage relations.

The duration of every focus group is between 60-90 years with prompts based on theoretical concepts. There is a discussion of issues like:

whether the behaviours by the wives are realistic to the gender expectations.

whether emotional labour is being represented as the responsibility of a woman.

how actors can make compromises between old fashioned standards and new ones.

Focus groups put personal interpretations in context of the larger cultural cycle, demonstrating the processes of the distribution and reinforcement of the gender norms among the peers.

3.5. Data Analysis

The thematic analysis of the data is conducted according to the six-step methodology of Braun and Clarke, which can be appropriately applied in interpreting the data based on the theory. It is both inductive and deductive, where the

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Gender Theory and Reception/Acceptance Theory are the guiding forces, and the new themes can be revealed in the narratives of participants.

During the initial phase, the transcripts will be repeated to familiarize oneself and extract initial observations concerning gender expression, stereotypes, identity, and cultural sense-making. A hybrid approach is then used in coding. These deductive codes are divided into such categories as emotional labour, ideal femininity, relationship maintenance, gender hierarchy, full acceptance, negotiation acceptance, and resistance. Inductive codes are based on the personal experience of participants, including the pressure of in-laws or digital feminism impacts or individual marital backgrounds.

Themes are then created through clustering of codes which express the perceptions that the women have of the gender messages of the program. Themes such as idealized wifehood, emotional discipline, negotiating identity through comparison, and cultural tension between traditional and modernity are potential ones. These themes bring the interactive dynamics between gender representation (encoding) and gender interpretation (decoding) and thus achieve the goals of the study.

4.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Thematic Categories Mapped to Gender Theory Components

Theme (Derived from Data)	Gender Theory Component	Description
Emotional Labour Burden	Gender Expression	Women described wives as expressing patience, empathy, and emotional regulation.
Idealized Wifehood Standards	Gender Stereotypes	Participants noted unrealistic expectations of perfection placed on wives.
Self–Relationship Comparison	Gender Identity	Women compared their own roles to portrayals in the show.
Traditional Marital Hierarchy	Gender Ordination	The show reinforced husband-led decision-making and wife-led emotional labour.

Table 1 illustrates the close correspondence between the stories of the participants and the four major elements of Gender Theory namely, gender expression, gender stereotypes, gender identity, and gender ordination. The Emotional Labour Burden theme as charted against Gender Expression demonstrates that women were aware of how wives in the programme are always patient, empathic and even control their emotions. These statements are effective models of emotional behaviors that the ideal wives are supposed to display. Idealized Wifehood Standards, linked with Gender stereotypes, implies that participants are painfully conscious of unrealistic expectations of perfection, beauty, emotional strength, and understanding of wives at all times. This implies that the show supports the conservative feminine ideals all under the slick, romantic veneer. Self-Relationship Comparison which is associated with Gender Identity emphasizes the fact that the viewer is not a passive observer but measures his/her own role in romantics and marriage against the one depicted on the screen. This may result in aspiration and pressure based on the closeness they perceive themselves to be to the media ideal. Lastly, Traditional Marital Hierarchy under Gender Ordination demonstrates the fact that the decision-making of husbands and emotional labour of wives remains to be normalized. All in all, Table 1 reveals that gendered meanings are encoded in the programme and have a direct influence on the way women perceive themselves and their place in the relationships.

Table 2. Viewer Interpretation Mapped to Reception/Acceptance Theory

Interpretation Pattern	Encoding/Decoding Process	Evidence from Participants
Literal Acceptance	Dominant/Preferred Decoding	Viewers accepted the wives' behaviour as natural or ideal.

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Selective Negotiation	Negotiated Decoding	Women admired intimacy but questioned gendered labour.
Critical Resistance	Oppositional Decoding	Some rejected portrayals as patriarchal or unrealistic.
Cultural Reinterpretation	Cultural Cycle	Women reinterpreted the show through modern values and lived experiences.

The way in which the interpretive patterns of the participants outline the prominent concepts of Reception/ Acceptance Theory: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional decoding and the overarching cultural cycle are explained in **Table 2**. Literal Acceptance is the dominant / preferred decoding, with the behaviour of the wives being accepted as natural or ideal by the viewers, commonly in terms of female sacrifice and responsive relation to other cultural values. This trend indicates that to certain women, the show is not challenging the status quo. In particular, Selective Negotiation that is mapped onto negotiated decoding is notable. In this case, the participants marvelled at the emotional closeness and supportive relationships as they are depicted but also challenged the uneven emotional labour that wives were subjected to. This implies that most of these young Chinese women are in an ambivalent position: they want proximity and romance and are becoming very critical of the gender imbalances in the traditional. Critical Resistance which is linked with oppositional decoding means that a small number of viewers strongly oppose the representations because they are patriarchal or unrealistic, which is frequently linked to feminist concepts or individual discontent with gender disparities. Cultural Reinterpretation in the cultural cycle indicates that no one receives the messages but reinterprets them in terms of modern values, education and urban living. Collectively, these trends prove that viewers are negotiating actors who negotiate meaning directly to your purpose of acceptance, resistance, and negotiation of gender representations.

Table 3. Influence of Program Viewing on Gender Perception

Influence Category	Participant Frequency	Interpretation
Increased Awareness of Emotional Labour	41	The show highlighted unseen gendered labour.
Reinforcement of Traditional Roles	26	Some felt pressured by patriarchal romantic norms.
Encouragement of Relationship Reflection	35	Viewers reported comparing their relationships.
Stronger Egalitarian Beliefs	21	Participants resisted stereotypes and valued equality.

Table 3 summarizes the effects of watching Viva La Romance on the perceptions of participants in four aspects, which involve gender. The high frequency of Increased Awareness of Emotional Labour (41) indicates that the programme influenced a significant number of women to be more aware of the amount of invisible emotional labour wives do. Rather than merely normalising this labour, various members had referred to perceiving or becoming aware of the extent of responsibility that women carry to keep the harmony. This helps you achieve your goal of analysing the influence of the show in forming the perception of the issues of emotional labour and gender roles. Promotion of Relationship Reflection (35) shows that the viewers often compared their relationships with the one they saw on the screen and this is connected to gender identification and self-relationship comparison. This aspect of reflection may result in the acceptance of the traditional norms or questioning it. Reinforcement of Traditional Roles (26) indicates that to some women, the show reinforced the patriarchal norm and they had to feel pressured to perform the idealised role of a wife. Nevertheless, the existence of Stronger Egalitarian Beliefs (21) proves that a significant segment of respondents acted in the reverse way, opposing the stereotypes and becoming stronger believers in equality.

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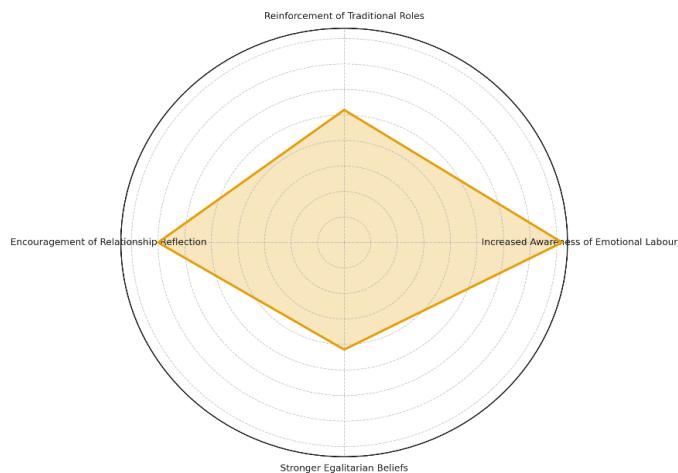
Figure 1. Relative intensity of four influence categories derived from young Chinese women's responses to Viva La Romance.

Fig.1, presents the visual impact of the perception of various aspects of gender with the watching of Viva La Romance. The dimension that is most powerful is "Increased Awareness of Emotional Labour" revealing that a great number of participants have become more aware of the extent of invisible emotional labour that wives are supposed to do in relationships. This follows the Gender Theory emphasis of gender expression and emotional labour as major feminine performances. It also features prominently "Encouragement of Relationship Reflection" implying that the programme is slightly a mirror: the viewers compare their own relationship with those broadcasted, and are at times either inspired by it or compelled by it. Reinforcement of Traditional Roles and Stronger Egalitarian Beliefs seems to be in conflict with one another. To certain women, the show helps to reinforce patriarchal ideals by promoting the self-sacrificing, eternally tolerant wife, for others it leads to a catharsis and backlash, leading to more egalitarian principles. The circular nature of the radar chart properly illustrates how these influences do not exist in place of each other but co-exist. In general, this character demonstrates that the programme is disciplining and disrupting gender conventions at the same time and that it fits perfectly well into your tropes of mirror, discipline and negotiation in modern Chinese gender perception.
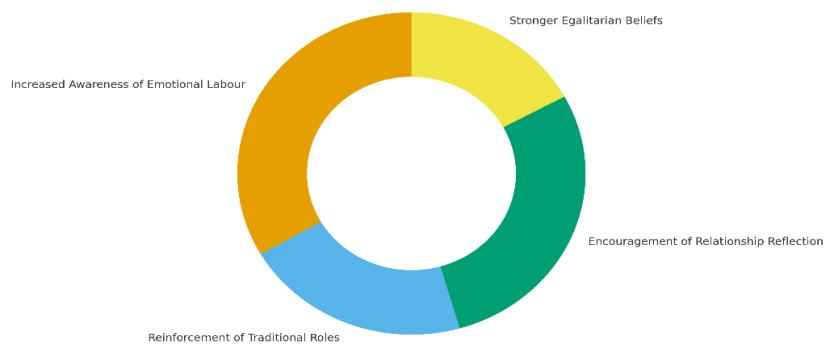

Figure 2. Proportional contribution of each influence category to overall changes in gender perception among young Chinese women viewers.

Fig.2, gives a proportional picture of the number of times each category of influence was reported by the participants, and it provides a complimentary view to the radar chart. The biggest percentage is associated with the Informed in Emotional Labour, which graphically supports the idea that emotional work is the most memorable among a number of spectators. This implies that although the programme might naturalise the emotional labour of women, it also unintentionally reveals its extent, making viewers label it and identify it. Encouragement of Relationship Reflection has a significant proportion, which implies the fact that the show is one of the most significant reflective devices: women contrast the communication patterns, conflict-management, and emotional demands with their own relationships. In the article, Reinforcement of Traditional Roles, it is demonstrated that even a considerable number

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of subjects internalised or were under pressure because of the conservative norms of wifehood being projected as romantic and ideal. But the fact that Stronger Egalitarian Beliefs can be cut up as a meaningful slice means that exposure to these images does not equally bring about patriarchal support, in some cases it intensifies criticism and increases favor in favor of equality. The segments taken together are a practical demonstration of the Acceptance Theory: viewers do not react all the same way but they are distributed across acceptance, negotiation, and resistance but based on their experiences, values, and social backgrounds.

In a nutshell, the findings prove that Viva La Romance is both a potent reflector and a subtle disciplinary agent in the development of gender perceptions in young Chinese women. As revealed by thematic analysis, representations of emotional labour, idealised wifehood, and traditional marital hierarchy were the most sensitive issues among the participants who often used them to compare themselves and their relationships with those on the screen. Meanwhile, reception patterns recorded in the tables and figures demonstrate that viewing is not a passive process: most viewers are negotiated or critical in their treatment of the programme, and selectively accept intimacy and love and challenge unequal emotional responsibility on wives. The influence data also reveal that the show simultaneously raises awareness of emotional labour, upholds certain traditional roles, elicits reflection on the relationships and, to a certain substantial minority, reinforces egalitarian beliefs. These findings combined with each other confirm the theoretical framing of the study of Gender Theory and Acceptance/Reception Theory indicating how gender performances with a particular mediation are decoded in different ways. They also respond directly to the objectives of the research, elucidating what gender messages are coded, the way they are interpreted, and the way they have an influence on the viewers self-awareness and their attitudes to gender equality.

5. CONCLUSION.

This study can conclude that Viva La Romance has a multifaceted and contradictory role in the modern Chinese gender culture. Using Gender Theory, it is revealed that the programme in question ciphers a model of womanhood that is based on emotional labour, patience, and relational responsibility and that solidifies old-fashioned gender stereotypes and marital hierarchies despite its wrapping them in the contemporary, travel-based romance. However, through the Acceptance/ Reception Theory, the results showed that young Chinese women between 25 and 35 are not mere consumers of these messages, but they make a form of interpretation based on their own experiences, education and cultural positioning. There are numerous in-betweeners of admiration and critique who use the show as the point of reference to reflect on their own relationships, and a visible minority who mobilise it to make claims against more egalitarian demands. The show thus forms itself as a place of reflexing, control and bargaining of gender conventions. The research can add to the existing body of knowledge about the role of media in reproducing and destabilising patriarchal gender orders in a shifting Chinese society with a high rate of change, as well as the need to focus on the voice of women when interpreting the influence of media.

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