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The representation of women in comic sketches of the CCTV China Spring Festival Gala (2014-2024)

La representación de mujeres en sketches cómicos de las Galas del Festival de Primavera de CCTV China (2014-2024)[1]

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1 All dialogues in the sketches cited have been translated from Chinese into Spanish by the author.

Abstract
This research undertakes a feminist-informed analysis of the comedic sketches featured in the Chinese CCTV Spring Festival Gala. Its principal objectives are to elucidate the representation of women within these sketches, as well as to unpack the mechanisms through which gender-based discrimination is reproduced and/or perpetuated. To this end, the study examines a sample of 61 short comedic pieces aired between 2014 and 2024. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative and qualitative analyses. Specifically, it examines female participation in directorial and scriptwriting roles, while also investigating the construction of unequal discourses and imagery through the narratives and cinematic techniques employed. In this context, women persist as objects of ridicule and social coercion. The findings reveal that female directors and screenwriters constitute a minority, representing only 7.7 % and 5.7 % respectively during the last decade. Notwithstanding the ostensible diversity of female characterizations, the representation of women remains subordinate to an androcentric perspective. In light of these insights, the study underscores the urgent imperative for gender studies training within the film industry, with the aim of fostering a media landscape that exerts a more equitable societal influence.

Keywords
Women, media, feminist perspective, comedy sketches, CCTV Spring Festival Gala, China.

Resumen
Esta investigación se centra en el análisis de los sketches cómicos de las Galas del Festival de Primavera de la CCTV china desde una óptica feminista. Su objetivo es dilucidar la representación femenina en dichos sketches, así como desentrañar los mecanismos mediante los cuales se reproduce y/o perpetúa la discriminación de género. Para ello, se ha examinado una muestra de 61 breves comedias emitidas entre 2014 y 2024. El estudio utiliza una metodología mixta que combina el análisis cuantitativo y cualitativo. Se analiza la participación femenina en los roles de dirección y guion, se investiga la construcción de discursos e imágenes desiguales a través de la producción narrativa y cinematográfica. Los resultados evidencian que, las mujeres directoras y guionistas constituyen una minoría, representando únicamente el 7,7 % y 5,7 % respectivamente durante la última década. Pese a la aparente diversidad de roles femeninos, la construcción de la mujer sigue subordinada a una perspectiva androcéntrica, en este contexto, la mujer persiste como objeto de escarnio y coerción social. En conclusión, se subraya la necesidad imperiosa de una formación en estudios de género en la industria cinematográfica, con miras a construir una sociedad influida equitativamente por los medios de comunicación.

Palabras clave
Mujeres, medios de comunicación, perspectiva feminista, sketches cómicos, Galas del Festival de Primavera de CCTV, China.

Introduction

There has been growing academic interest in the analysis of female representations in the media. Although there is extensive literature on the presen-

ce and status of women in the media, recent research has prioritized the study of contemporary digital platforms, such as social media (Ghaffari, 2023) and emerging media such as TikTok (Scherr and Wang, 2021). The predominant themes in this research include systematic violence against women (Chirino, 2020), the invisibility of women in the media (Delgado, 2020), the reproduction of sexist sociocultural patterns (Lazo *et al.,* 2022), and the violation of fundamental rights (Tornay, 2021). Although digital platforms and journalistic and cinematographic products have provided fertile ground for analyzing female representation, it is noteworthy that the geographical scope of this research has been limited mainly to the Western and Latin American contexts, as evidenced by studies conducted on Chile (Mardones, 2020) and Ecuador (Serrano *et al.*, 2022).

Studies on the media representation of China, especially those focused on gender analysis and the temporal evolution of news coverage of Chinese women, have been notably limited, with particularly scarce research on their representation in humorous content. In this sense, it is imperative to examine the existing literature on comedy sketches in the Chinese context, the exploration of which lays the foundations for understanding the evolution of humorous creations. Likewise, the analysis of comedy productions must be complemented by exhaustive research on the presence of women in the Chinese media. This analytical framework provides the theoretical basis necessary to develop a comprehensive study of media messages from a gender equality perspective.

Objectives and hypotheses

This research examines, from a feminist perspective, the comedy sketches presented at the Spring Festival Galas of China Central Television (CCTV) during the period 2014-2024. This study employs a mixed methodology: on the one hand, it performs a quantitative analysis of female participation in directing and scriptwriting roles; on the other hand, it develops a qualitative analysis of the construction of unequal discourse and images through narrative and film production. The main objective is to examine the representation of women in these sketches, elucidating the mechanisms by which discrimination in terms of gender equality is reproduced and/or perpetuated.

In order to analyze the representation of women in the comedy sketches of CCTV's Spring Festival Galas, this research is based on a methodological framework that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis from a feminist perspective, a paradigm that provides ideal theoretical tools for examining the presence of women in the media. Cuklanz (2016) argues that the interpretation of media content must consider the interrelationship between gender and power, as well as the relevance of other textual elements, such as race, sexuality, and social class. Along the same lines of research, Cuklanz (2019) subsequently develops a preferential framework for media data collection that encompasses diverse contexts, forms, and discourses.

Considering the methodological affinity of the study with previous research, the focus is on identifying and analyzing the modalities of female representation in the conversations and activities presented, with the aim of examining the discursive and cinematographic nuances surrounding the figure of women, an aspect that has been addressed in previous research (Qiu, 2023a, 2023b). Based on these lines of research, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1) Gender differences in creative teams is very noticeable in terms of the number of participants of different genders. Compared to their male counterparts, the number of female directors and screenwriters is significantly lower. Furthermore, these women are often relegated to less important positions, without being given the same degree of voice and participation, despite being collaborators.

2) Women in their various family roles (girlfriends, wives, mothers, daughters, daughters-in-law, and mothers-in-law) are subject to systematic stigmatization. They are attributed with stereotypical and false characteristics, as well as limited economic aspirations. Male roles are characterized by an androcentric perspective or deliberate invisibility, exercising constant supervision over women to maintain a family classification based on sexism.

3) Social pressure related to marriage and motherhood falls disproportionately on the role of young women. Parents, as the main agents of this pressure, maintain the traditional belief that marriage and procreation are the only path to personal fulfillment and happiness for their daughters. andoung women, influenced by these sociocultural expectations, internalize the idea that motherhood and their role in the in-laws' family are an obligation inherent to their status as wives.

4) The role of professional women, including managers and skilled employees, faces systematic questioning of their professional abilities, despite

their academic training. Media coverage and professional discourse tend to divert attention from their work achievements, attributing them to supposed "female advantages" rather than recognizing their professional merits. While professional women face this constant delegitimization, male roles in the workplace perpetuate, often unconsciously, prejudiced narratives about women, contributing to the deterioration of women's working conditions in the professional world.

5) Social interactions between women and men in the sphere of interpersonal relationships (friendships, neighborhood ties, and camaraderie) are often permeated by underlying sexist discourse. Androcentric attitudes and veiled irony are manifested in criticism of aspects such as women's physical appearance, age, and professional skills, which are legitimized under a benevolent paternalism expressed through justifications such as "for your own good."

State-of-the-art

Study on comedy sketches in CCTV's Spring Festival Galas

Since 1983, China Central Television (CCTV) has broadcast the Spring Festival Gala annually on the eve of the Lunar New Year, a television event in which comedy sketches have become a fundamental component. The academic analysis of these sketches is particularly relevant from multiple perspectives. On the one hand, this content highlights the underlying tensions in the intellectual hierarchy that has historically marginalized the rural population, while uniquely addressing significant historical events such as the Great Leap Forward, thus articulating a narrative of apparent social empowerment (Wang, 2023). On the other hand, these audiovisual materials facilitate critical reflection on the evolution of their meanings and interpretations in different temporal contexts (Lam and Leung, 2022).

Comedy sketches, based on the interaction between linguistic and bodily expression, play an essential dual sociocultural role: "the preservation and maintenance of traditional values, as well as the consolidation and clarification of the hegemonic values that bring the community together" (Lu *et al.,* 2024, p. 370). This perspective is empirically supported by research on the psychosocial impact on audiences, which suggests that the international projection of Chinese humor acts as a catalyst for social cohesion and stabili-

ty (Zhang *et al.,* 2022). In this theoretical context, Wang's (2022) discourse analysis of the 1983 inaugural gala reveals the construction of a nationalist narrative that aspired to position China as a world power in a highly modernized global environment, with particular emphasis on the relational dynamics between citizens and the state.

Regarding the linguistic mechanisms that generate comic effect, several studies analyze the discursive strategies and narrative structures employed. Zhou (2024) posits a systematic process in the construction of humor that culminates in audience hilarity: initially, discursive presuppositions are established through the interventions of the actresses and actors, to later subvert them, thus generating a rupture in the psychological expectations of viewers that results in the humorous effect. On the other hand, Huang (2024), through the analysis of dialogic interactions between the protagonists, provides a deeper understanding of humorous production in the Chinese television industry within the framework of entertainment. The research identifies three categories of simulated discourtesy in discourse: self-directed, directed toward the direct interlocutor, and directed toward third parties. These patterns of simulated discourtesy function as particularly effective humorous devices in the representation of interpersonal relationships characterized by intimacy and cordiality.

However, the reception and interpretation of the Gala Show as a media tradition in the Chinese family context has undergone a significant evolution, a phenomenon that Xie (2022) attributes to the sociocultural transformations that have emerged since the advent of the television era. This metamorphosis in social perception has manifested itself in a particularly problematic way in the treatment of gender, where insufficient training in gender perspective has led to a progressive normalization of derogatory expressions toward women, even when these present under the pretext of simulated discourtesy for humorous purposes.

The relationship between stereotypes and media information

The study of female representation in the media has already been addressed by Arfuch (1996), who raises two fundamental questions: "What is meant by the word 'woman'?" and "How are the media defined today in a 'satellite civilization'?" (p. 112). The author argues that media production and reproduction not only reflect social discourse and consumption, but also have the capacity to transform the stereotypes, norms, and models that predominate in society. In this line of research, Ward and Grower (2020) delve deeper

into the analysis of media stereotypes, demonstrating that the consumption of media content significantly influences the perpetuation of prejudices and discrimination related to gender roles. This phenomenon manifests itself in multiple dimensions: physical appearance, sexualization, playful behaviors, courtship behaviors, professional aspirations, and academic performance.

In the context of contemporary digital media studies, various research studies highlight the significant influence of visual platforms on the perception of the female body. Recent studies by Huang *et al.* (2021), Vandenbosch *et al.* (2022), and Engeln *et al*. (2020) examine body representation in the digital environment, highlighting that predominantly visual platforms such as *Instagram* have a more detrimental impact on body self-perception compared to text-based platforms. Their findings reveal a correlation between the use of these platforms and a decline in three fundamental aspects: body satisfaction, positive affect, and constructive social comparison. Overall, they identify that exposure to body positivity-focused content has beneficial effects on self-image. In response to the negative consequences of sexist media bias, Tiggemann *et al.* (2020) propose that representing female body diversity on social media is an effective strategy for promoting body satisfaction and appreciation.

Given China's growing presence in the international community, the situation of Chinese women has reemerged as a topic of significant academic interest. Nie (2020) points out that although Chinese women have achieved unprecedented levels of social and educational participation since the founding of the People's Republic of China, they continue to face manifestations of sexism in both the domestic and public spheres. Cao *et al.* (2023) identify Chinese women as a vulnerable group that is often neglected in the context of intimate partner violence. From a historical-cultural perspective, Tarasco and Gómez (2020) analyze the conceptualization and treatment of women in Confucianism, arguing that kinship relationships are decisive in the construction of the female gender.

In the field of media, Zhang and Zhou (2023) and Chen and Gao (2023) examine the representation of Chinese women in the genre of live comedy. Their research reveals that the female themes presented constitute a negotiated form of feminist expression. Female comedians employ various discursive strategies such as humor, satire, absurd fantasy, subversive affirmation, self-deprecation, and ambiguity to coexist within hegemonic rhetoric. However, these humorous expressions remain conditioned by gender stereotypes and patriarchal perspectives.

Methodology

This research proposes to analyze, from a feminist perspective, the representation of women in comedy sketches broadcast during CCTV's Spring Festival Galas between 2014 and 2024. The methodology is based on the systematic collection and analysis of dialogues and visual elements from 61 short programs available on YouTube, with data collection carried out during 2024. The study adopts a mixed approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods from a gender perspective, to examine the reproduction of stereotypes and their influence on the construction of the female imaginary. Following the theoretical framework proposed by Osorio and Castro (2021), this dual methodology allows identifying population behavior patterns and a deeper understanding of specific social phenomena.

The quantitative analysis focuses on examining gender distribution in management positions during the artistic creation process, meticulously documenting the proportions to highlight the existing disparities in responsibility roles. The investigation of gender roles in the main creative team seeks to establish a solid empirical basis that allows formulating more precise and well-founded research questions. On the other hand, qualitative analysis is based on the reconstruction of social reality (Balcázar *et al.,* 2013) regarding female representation. The study examines the cinematographic level based on "intertextuality and narrativity as useful strategies for producing reflexivity in research processes" (Martínez *et al.,* 2014, p. 11). The research delves into narrative structures, discursive modalities, and compositional elements to elucidate the construction of the female image in the sketches, considering aspects such as sexist language in discourse and the discriminatory representation of female experiences and voices (Erol and Cuklanz, 2020), including their emotional states and traditional behavioral patterns (Delgado, 2020).

Power relations are equally relevant in the analysis of the representation of women in news reports, in addition to investigating oppression based on gender relations (Franco and Tajahuerce, 2022). Power imbalances exist within the family and society, and "the consequences of this assignment of roles throughout the life cycle greatly hinder any proposal for equality" (Lamas, 1996, p. 1). Within this framework, the aim is to study how comedies construct the discourse of women and men based on the family, professional, and interpersonal environment, considering their diverse identities as mothers, daughters, wives, lovers, daughters-in-law, mothers-in-law, bosses,

clients, employees, colleagues, neighbors, friends, etc., in order to enable the detection of unequal power relations.

In the analysis of the generic framework, which covers both executive distribution and narrative production, it is essential to establish specific research parameters. Regarding the directing distribution, the following questions are raised: What is the quantitative and qualitative representation of women in directing and screenwriting roles? What significant disparities exist in the frequency of appearance between male and female directors, as well as between screenwriters of both genders? How has gender distribution in positions of responsibility evolved over time? Regarding narrative production, the following aspects are analyzed: How is the stigmatization of female roles in the domestic sphere manifested? How are female family identities instrumentalized within the patriarchal structural hierarchy? What mechanisms are used to impose traditional conceptions of marriage and motherhood as opposed to female autonomy? Who are the main agents in perpetuating marital pressure? What representations of professional women predominate in media discourse? How are the job skills of female workers valued and recognized? To what extent does the androcentric narrative persist in the representation of female interpersonal relationships?

Results and discussion

Creative teams without women

Table 1
Frequency of appearance of female and male directors (2014-2024)

	Number of appearances	Percentage
Female directors	7 (one repeated)	7.7%
Male directors	84	92.3%
Total	91	

According to Table 1, over a period of ten years, female directors appear seven times, representing 7.7% of the total. In contrast, male directors main-

tain absolute control of the comedy market in CCTV's Spring Festival Gala. Of the 61 sketches studied, men appear 84 times, equivalent to 92.3%. This large disparity in the frequency of appearance between female and male directors lays the foundation for a less feminist approach in the works created. The marginalization and invisibility of female directors results in a scarce presence of female voices in national programs, preventing their artistic innovations, which differ from those of men, from being known. When women are forced to remain silent in the production process, it is inevitable that men in power will begin to portray the world according to their own experience, imbuing the works with their own pride and prejudices.

Table 2
Frequency of appearance of female and male directors each year (2014-2024)

Year	Female directors (times)	Male directors (times)	Percentage of female directors
2014	0	6	0
2015	1	10	9%
2016	0	8	0
2017	0	8	0
2018	2	8	20%
2019	0	10	0
2020	1	8	11%
2021	0	9	0
2022	1	8	11%
2023	0	6	0
2024	2	3	40%
Total	7	84	

According to Table 2, female directors appeared in 2015, 2018, 2020, 2022, and 2024. The years 2024 and 2018 saw the highest female presence, with 40% and 20% respectively. In 2020 and 2022, the participation of female directors was low, not exceeding 11%. In 2015, the female presence fell to

9%, and in the remaining years, it was zero. Analyzing the figures for the ten years, it is clear that female directors have less than half the opportunities to appear before the public compared to their male counterparts. The female directors who appeared seven times deserve to be mentioned by name, as they are the only female representatives on the management team. In total, there are six women: Xv Yi (2015), Fang Fang (2018), Lou Naiming (2018, 2020), Liu Qingling (2022), Jiang Shimeng (2024), and Liu Tianchi (2024). Among them, director Lou is the only one who directed comedy programs twice.

The year 2024 marked a milestone in reducing the gender gap, as two of the four sketches aired were directed by women. Jiang took first place, followed by a male director, while Liu was the only female director on her program. In 2018, for the first time, a woman directed the comedy sketch in the lead position, a role shared by Lou and Fang. In addition, Lou is the only woman to have directed comedies as the lead director on two occasions.

The achievements of women in the management team are insufficient. The five female directors have witnessed repeated discrimination in the history of the Spring Festival Galas. They have fought against sexist prejudices to be recognized in the performing arts. Meanwhile, men are the beneficiaries of existing gender privileges. Two directors, Fang Xiang and Shang Daqing stand out, having directed five times; four other directors have participated four times; six men have directed three times and seven have done so twice.

About the sketches from the period with the highest proportion of female directors, the thematic analysis of 2018 is unique in that it perpetuates the traditional family narrative. This perspective is embodied through two significant ways of thinking: on the one hand, maternal concern about the marital status of the daughter in *Sharing Joy and Pleasure/Tong Xi Tong Le* (Lou and Liu); on the other, feelings of longing, jealousy, and marital submission in *Returning Home/Hui Jia* (Zhao and Fang). Female emotional fragility presents in a paradoxically "privileged" way, as it is the female creators who capture their everyday experiences without giving a voice to the defenders of gender equality. The comedy *Kai Bu Liao Kou/I Can't Say It (*2024), directed by Liu, is another paradigmatic example of the reproduction of androcentric ideas from a female management and administration perspective. The narrative focuses exclusively on the dynamic father-child, completely disregarding the mother figure. It is contradictory that a film directed by a woman preserves and continues the imperceptibility of the female subject.

Table 3
Frequency of appearance of female screenwriters and male screenwriters (2014-2024)

	Number of appearances	Percentage
Female screenwriters	9 (1 repeated)	5.7%
Male screenwriters	148	94.3%
Total	157	

According to Table 3, there is a marked gender disparity among screenwriters: women appear only nine times during the decade analyzed, accounting for 5.7% of the total, while men appear 148 times, equivalent to 94.3%. This pronounced asymmetry in representation substantially determines the narrative orientation of the humorous content, which is predominantly constructed from a male perspective. The employment situation of female screenwriters (5.7%) is even more precarious than that of female directors (7.7%) previously analyzed in terms of professional recognition.

Table 4
Frequency of appearance of female and male screenwriters in each year (2014-2024)

Year	Female screenwriters (times)	Male screenwriters (times)	Percentage of female screenwriters
2014	1	8	11%
2015	2	11	15
2016	1	18	5
2017	0	14	0
2018	1	18	5%
2019	1	15	6.7%
2020	1	15	6.7%
2021	2	14	12.5%
2022	0	14	0
2023	0	14	0
2024	1	7	12.5%

As seen in Table 4, there was a total absence of female screenwriters in comedy productions in 2017, 2022, and 2023. In contrast, 2015 saw the highest percentage of female participation, reaching 15%, although this represented only two women. The years 2021 and 2024 ranked second with 12.5% female participation in script design and writing, significantly surpassing previous years such as 2019 and 2020, when only one female screenwriter was counted in a total team of 16 professionals. The years 2016 and 2018 showed identical rates of female participation, standing at 5%, lower than the figures recorded in 2019 and 2020.

Among the few professionals who have managed to break through in this restrictive environment are Li Yi (2014), Ye Dan and Meng Huan (2015), Liu Lan (2018), Zou Jingjing (2020), Li Yuyue (2021), Liu Jing (2021), and Zhang Nana (2024). It is worth mentioning that Li Yi participated in two productions, occupying a leading position in the 2014 work, as did Zhang Nana in 2024. The other professionals, however, were relegated to secondary positions, generally ranking at the bottom of the creative team. As for the distribution of male directors, there is a significant concentration in the frequency of appearance of certain names. The analysis reveals that two directors individually registered six appearances, six names appeared five times each, three directors appeared four times, another four were mentioned three times, and nine men were registered twice.

In the field of male screenwriters, Wang Hongkun and Wang Zhenhua stand out, having served as directors on six occasions, while their participation as lead screenwriters exceeded four appearances. A similar pattern can be seen in the cases of Su Huan and Su Biao, who contributed five times as members of the screenwriting team and four times in directing roles. The notable density of male decision-makers, characterized by a lack of gender perspective, increases disparities in the comic creation process, perpetuating misperceptions about women's professional abilities. As a direct consequence of this phenomenon, female screenwriters experience systematic marginalization in the field of writing.

Although the representation of female screenwriters exceeded 10% in 2015, 2021, and 2024, this figure remains significantly lower than that of their male counterparts. The limited decision-making power of female screenwriters reinforces the subordinate position of female characters in comedies. In *Yu Sankuai, Community Police Officer/She Qu Min Jing Yu San Kuai (*Shang and Xiao, 2015), the low female participation in the writing team—barely

15%—fails to overcome the stereotypical characterization of the female customers' physical appearance. This situation increases in the 2021-2024 period, in works entitled *The Terrace/Yang Tai (*Peng and Shang, 2021), *Pressured to Marry at Every Holiday/Mei Feng Jia Jie Bei Cui Hun (*Zhang and Zhao, 2021), and *How Can It Be the Same?/Na Neng Yi Yang Ma?* (Jiang and He, 2024), where, despite maintaining 12.51% female representation, the narratives continue to revolve around the fulfillment of domestic roles.

Both the management and screenwriting teams are dominated by men. From 2014 to 2024, women are highly marginalized and invisible in making their artistic innovations known. The absolute control of men in film direction and script production reproduces a system of exclusion that limits narrative diversity and reproduces gender stereotypes in the audiovisual industry. This male hegemony not only restricts women's creative opportunities but also conditions the construction of the social imaginary through cinematic language.

The distortion and stigmatization of women in family structures

The theme of family relationships appears repeatedly in the sketches analyzed. As girlfriends, wives, and mothers, women are presented in a very traditional way: as the main caregivers as those concerned with the poor maintenance of the home. They devote themselves to domestic affairs, while their distortions and objectification continue. The 2019 sketch entitled *Occupy the seat / Zhan Wei Zi* (Shen and Ma, 1m05s) highlights, first, the lack of education of a mother at her daughter's school. For her daughter to have a more appropriate place in the classroom, the mother begins to physically fight with others who also want it, as if she were crazy (Figure 1).

This sketch gives the mother a barbaric image to satisfy the male scriptwriters' and directors' illusion about women in the family, in whose sexist minds wives, mothers, and daughters must do anything for the good of the family. Women's total contribution to the home is what macho men want. If less polite behaviors help solve problems in the private sphere, submissive women are taught to exercise them, to be the bad guys, because their behaviors are judged in the name of "the good of the family." Born and raised under self-sacrificing education, women become puppets in the home. However, total sacrifice reduces them to the role of domestic "housekeepers," deprived of a voice in decisions.

Figure 1
Occupy the Seat

Source: Shen and Ma (2019, 1m05s).

Besides suffering unjustified defamation and harmful images, these women are characterized by stereotypes such as hysteria, jealousy, prodigality, and greed. However, many of the unrealistic female characters are embellished when their domestic roles are highlighted. Under the "protection" of "for the good" of the family, the hatred of macho men towards femininity is hidden. Instead, the level of sacrifice of women to the family becomes the evaluation standard to decide who is good or bad.

The sketch also considers ideas in favor of equality to be "interesting" elements capable of provoking laughter from the audience. It is unfortunate that egalitarian facts are manifested through ironic laughter, which is actually mockery directed at the subordinate status of women in the tradition of Eastern culture. When the audience learns that it is the husband who is in charge of household chores, in addition to the introduction of sarcastic laughter, the camera focuses on the men sitting in the front row, who cannot contain their laughter at the "comic effect" of the situation. Activities such as washing clothes, cooking at home, or helping children with their homework should not be viewed as exotic or unusual tasks for men. These are everyday responsibilities that should not be associated exclusively with a particular gender. In no case are women the only ones who do domestic work. Mocking men who help out in the home reflects a dual contempt, undermining both a more

equitable masculinity and women's intelligence. Rejecting male participation in the family sphere in advance contributes to the deprivation of women.

Regarding masculinity and femininity, a different dialogue can be found in the 2021 sketch entitled *The Train of Happiness Towards Spring/Kai Wang Chun Tian De Xing Fu*. The reversal of traditional roles between wife and husband brings an egalitarian audiovisual fragment, in which the husband is not ashamed to explain why he works as a nanny:

> Jia Bing: Your wife works as a security guard.
> Yang Xiaodi: We went together to an interview to be security guards, but they thought my personality was more suited to being a nanny. I am a very meticulous person in my work. (Lou, 2021)

Comedies broadcast on New Year's Eve in China do not usually include gender-related content. Regarding female roles in the family environment, they impose false identities on women, such as treacherous, unfaithful, and harsh. In the 2019 play directed by Director Shang, when the protagonist explains why she is single, he stigmatizes the girl by accusing her of betrayal. However, she is nothing more than an employee of his company, with whom he has had no private relationship. In this man's imagination, the girl is the villain for not marrying him in the end because "she ran off with someone else."

> Shao Feng: That's enough, let it go. Call your pretty Star to come pick you up.
> Guo Donglin: Star has run off with someone else.
> Shao Feng: Wow! The CFO has run off with someone else. (Shang, 2019)

The 2019 case is not the only one that tarnishes women's honor through dialogue. In his two works, released in 2021 and 2022 respectively, the young director Lou repeatedly imposed on the audience the idea that women were the ones who abandoned marriage or romantic relationships, that they were the irresponsible ones. Phrases such as "Don't forget that it was you who asked me to separate back then (2021)" and "Wasn't it that girl who left you back then (2022)?" specifically blame women for the breakdown of relationships, leaving men as the supposed victims. In this context, men shirk their responsibilities for problems between two people, turning women into the real victims. Discourses laden with gender segregation are conveyed to the public, leaving misleading images of women. When the idea of women as perpetrators is falsely repeated, gynophobia is encouraged.

Among the relationships investigated, contempt for female talent is evident. The lack of a voice for people educated with gender ideas worsens the images of women in the sketches broadcast. Stereotypical concepts are applied to women's ways of being. In the comedies titled *Going Home/Hui Jia* (Zhao and Fang, 2018) and *Are You Going to Return It or Not?/Hai Bu Huan (*Yan and Peng, 2022), wives are portrayed as submissive and hardworking in accordance with the desires of a sexist world. Meanwhile, to highlight how "outstanding" they are, in comedy scripts, wives become the ones who are not interested in money. The male-dominated family vision imposes multiple restrictions on women: they must excel at housework and family care while remaining excluded from economic control, as any female aspiration to wealth is interpreted as "greed" within the androcentric family system.

In the 2014 comedy directed by Chen and Mu, both men, men's hatred of "greedy women" is easily detected. Although the girlfriend is a virtual character who does not appear on screen, through the conversation between the two brothers, it is understood that she was unhappy because she asked for money, wanted to leave the younger brother, lacked traditional femininity, and was not particularly attractive. The misogynistic sentiment reflected in the dialogue is evident, preventing women from being appreciated impartially and establishing unequal romantic relationships. It is necessary to reflect on the exploitation of women by a sexist society, especially at home. Women's economic vulnerability is their confinement, in which they suffer both contempt and surveillance from men.

> First: Don't worry, we'll find someone else for you.
> Second: Yes, let's find someone who doesn't ask you for money.
> First: She should like doing housework.
> Second: With a good body.
> First: And with lots of hair. (Chen and Mu, 2014)

Although preference is given to women who do not want to earn money, it is noteworthy that they are looking for women who can manage it. The essence of women as "butlers" is what sexist works desire and expect. On the one hand, wives are given a "high" position in the home, where they are allowed to "rule," while on the other hand, husbands continue to be the ones in charge of financial resources. They believe that spending money on their partner and supporting the family is something prestigious and privileged. Conversely, it is an insult to their masculinity because they lose their family

role as protector, which is one of power. To please the expectations of a sexist society, the expression of love between the couple is evidenced by the husband giving money to his wife so that she can thank him, instead of supporting each other in their work outside the home. It is important to remember at this point that women are treated like machines without personal qualities. They are seen as objects with which it is permissible to have sexual relations. Their intelligence, emotions, and values as human beings are ignored.

Women's economic independence is a threat to men because they will lose their power of control when women achieve financial autonomy. The sketches studied never ask wives what they really want, to be "housekeepers" or to be the source of family finances. They give women the emotions about money that men imagine, without forgetting to ask for their gratitude. When women are educated in this way and become accustomed to the "protection" of men, even in the economy, money becomes a measure of love for both people. In the 2023 sketch, we see a husband's explanation of the intimacy of his marital relationship, in which he highlights the power of money and denies the woman's efforts to preserve the family union:

> Why do you think she is so committed to me? Because I have given myself completely, right? I have given myself completely. I tell you, I not only provide her with material things, but I also give her emotional value, brother. (Fang, 2023)

Living under the "happiness" constructed by men, women are entering into a vulnerable life. What husbands offer are temporary benefits that confine wives to the home. Every time the media mentions the importance of men in maintaining the family, female talent is dismissed. The worst thing is that public women are unaware of their submissiveness thanks to the transmission of content that defends the sexist social structure and segregated gender ideas.

In the sketches entitled *It became a trend on social media! / Shang Re Sou Le* (Fang, 2023) and *How can it be the same? / Na Neng Yi Yang Ma?* (Jiang and He, 2024), there are mothers and wives who have a strong need for control, while retaining the "right" to "manage" the family. Women may be "placed" in "decisive positions" in the to manage the daily tasks, but in reality they are economically dependent. According to the studies, they are aggressive because they easily get angry with others who oppose them. In addition, they argue with others at any moment. The suffocating images of women created by those responsible for the works are filled with stereotypes

and distortions. Because directors and screenwriters do not wear purple glasses during the work process, women in real life have to endure once again the infamies invented by the audiovisual industry.

The conflictual relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law also reveal the limited and discriminatory vision of the sketches when they address issues of women in the family. The 2020 comedy titled *Guisquillosas /Po Po Ma Ma* establishes the starting point of the narrative from the outset: the little things in everyday life. Directed by two men, Sun and Liu, the plot focuses on the imaginary conflicts that unfold between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law of the household, for example: the silent competition for more attention from the young husband, or their long disputes to gain control of the situation. The invisible father-in-law and the hidden husband make up the classic figures of men in the home.

The design of the incessant conflicts between the women at home reflects the macho ambition for the female sex: that she be self-sacrificing and submissive. The male directors, without a gender perspective, even place the young husband in an unattainable position within the family, where the others are required to compete if they want to get his attention. This discriminatory idea highlights the supposed importance of male biological inheritance, which is in fact a complete lie. The struggle between the two women is futile, as it is nothing more than a tool to reinforce paternalism in the family. If women focus on who wins the man's favor, they give up opportunities to regain their autonomy. Similarly, the entire sketch conveys a negative image of the mother-in-law. The mother-in-law's complaints and criticisms of her daughter-in-law's lack of care for the family expose men's views on a "perfect" family, which encompasses a vertical hierarchy among women, but one that is subservient to the male sex. It is noteworthy that the dissatisfaction shown by the mother-in-law is complicit in the paternalistic hierarchy, because she is angry about the absence of women in the tasks, completely excluding men from domestic chores.

Mockery of female appearance constitutes another "funny scene" that perpetuates sexist ideas in the comedy sketches studied. In the 2021 sketch, the husband compares the face of his wife, a flight attendant by profession, to that of *Voldemort*, the character in the *Harry Potter* films. In addition to the verbal insults uttered behind her back, under Lou's direction, the husband uses body language to show his disgust at the girl's appearance. The director tries to generate comic moments by contrasting the man's descrip-

tion with the woman's actual appearance. The audience's mood was heated by this unfunny "humor," as evidenced by the canned applause and laughter heard in the background. This is a vulgar audiovisual fragment that bases its "funny situations" on the offense of women. It is possible that the controversial points help to attract the audience's attention, but it is sexist attitudes that allow the female sex to be dishonored based on their physical appearance.

The interest in the comedies analyzed from a female perspective is no less significant. In terms of dialogue between couples, men are more sensitive when talking about the beauty or ugliness of their wives. These male characters live in a psychological contradiction: on the one hand, they seek beautiful women who belong exclusively to them; on the other, they believe that "an ugly wife is the treasure of the home" (Zhang, 2017), arguing that less attractive women offer greater security in marriage. The male roles portrayed in these comedies are selfish, wanting to enjoy all the benefits that traditional femininity offers, while at the same time appreciating the beautiful appearance of women.

The ideas conveyed in Li's sketch (2015) are absurd in their treatment of the dangers the couple faces. When the husband offers to protect his wife, his excuse is that he is concerned about the beauty of his wife being seen by the thief. It is absurd to hear the man's explanations when he says, "Precisely because you are a woman, and such a beautiful one at that, if he comes in, the consequences could be unimaginable." In this case, pretty faces under stereotypical contemplation are reduced especially to the parameter that decides who he saves and who he does not.

The objectification of women permeates doubly: it emerges in the male characters and is replicated in the women. Among the comedies analyzed, there are women who feel useless when they learn that they cannot give birth. They blame themselves for not being able to "make contributions" to the family, unaware of their work capacity both inside and outside the home. This feeling that they should not have come from their obedient life and work environment. An education full of discrimination shapes women and men with inequality. Thanks to the conservative mindsets portrayed in television shows, women in real life cannot escape the disdain of people with segregated attitudes, who view female self-sacrifice as something natural and logical. Thus, in the 2017 comedy, there are the submissive ideas expressed by the female role:

> You told me that the doctor said I may never be able to have children in my life. In your family, the male line has been one son per generation. If you lose your offspring here, how will you explain that to your parents when you go home? Instead of telling you this and then you would leave me, it's better for me to take the initiative and leave you first. (Li and Zhao, 2017)

Coercion in marriage and motherhood

The assimilation of women in the weaker sex is a weapon of control over women in a male-dominated society. The infantilization of adult women in the family environment continues to satisfy men's imagination of power and privilege. Taking advantage of the benefits of being male, the father's over-protectiveness leads him to complain about his daughter's "young age" for dating when she is 25 years old. The stifling dialogue between father and daughter was accompanied by applause and smiles from the audience, which reinforces the childish image of mature women inside and outside the home, since restricting the freedom of a 25-year-old woman is not funny at all, but rather the beginning of a horror movie:

> Father: What? Do you have a boyfriend?
> Daughter: What's wrong?
> Father: I don't agree.
> Daughter: Why?
> Dad: How old are you? You're only twenty-five and you're already dating someone (Hou, 2015)!

The same sketch uses the title *The Little Padded Jacket /Xiao Mian Ao* to ration patriarchal supervision over women. Applying terms such as "little jacket" to adult daughters in public increases the false impression of women's dependent status in the family, even though the "little jacket" has been considered in that headline as a metaphor to describe the close relationship between daughter and father. Tajahuerce (2021, p. 22) further adds that words written under male authority cause "feelings of guilt and perpetual unease" when decisions are made against the father's ideas.

Being single, postponing marriage, or not wanting to marry is the original sin of women according to the videos investigated. Rage, anxiety, and mistrust are the emotions that follow and lead to them, which come not only from male family members such as fathers, grandfathers, and husbands, but

also from mothers, wives, etc. In this case, women become the protectors of the macho hierarchy because they have been raised in a sexist environment.

In the 2021 sketch entitled *Being pressured to marry at every holiday/ Mei Feng Jia Jie Bei Cui Hun*, the mother blames her daughter for not having a "normal" life like other people, saying that "being single is like being a dog." Furthermore, the dialogues between the mother and daughter/father and 28-year-old daughter highlight the concerns and anxieties of older people, accompanied by ironic metaphors.

> Xixi's mother: What are you laughing at? Look at yourself, so carefree. How can you be happy at your age without being married?
> Xixi: Does getting married make you happy? What's so good about marriage? A classmate of mine is already at her third marriage.
> Xixi's mother: If marriage wasn't good, people wouldn't get married three times.
> (…)
> Xixi's father: Do you know why oranges are so sweet?
> Xixi: Hmm.
> Xixi's father: Because when you cut them open, they're full of segments. If oranges have segments, when will our Xixi find a partner?
> Xixi: Dad, if you keep this up, I'm not going to eat anymore.
> Xixi's mother: You don't want an orange? Here, peel this garlic.
> Xixi's father: Look, daughter, even garlic has teeth. Look at your mother, my partner. And your partner? (Zhang *et al*., 2021)

Although the parents' interpretation is intended to be a comedic punchline, the essence of their words is not funny at all. On the contrary, they show great disrespect for women who are truly single, who live happily and independently from the protection of the men in their family. However, the suffocating conversations between family members, together with the reactions in favor of the audience, build a culture of comedy that delivers the *coup de grâce* by being against gender equality. In this culture, it seems that the value and happiness of female roles are evaluated by whether they are married or have children, but this is not the case. Women today are strong enough to choose the life they want, regardless of whether they have men by their side or not.

The mothers who appear in the sketches studied tend to be given roles of low self-awareness, as they very often place their daughters' happiness in a marriage to a well-educated man with a good job. Meanwhile, they ignore and do not accept their daughters' excellent professional development skills. The submissive desire of mothers is born and grows within a more subordi-

nate educational, work, and family environment, where they spend their lives listening to the illusions invented by men, without having the opportunity to review their value as human beings.

When the story moves to Africa, the African mothers who appear on the Chinese stage have no other ideas than to marry their daughters to "a rich and handsome man" because "now that she is a flight attendant on the Mombasa-Nairobi railway, her status has changed" and she is "more beautiful than ever." According to the mother, marrying such a man is a symbol of "success in life" (Lou and Liu, 2018, 3m16s). The most ironic thing is that the humble mother is played by the director of the comedy herself, who dresses up as a Kenyan woman, representing a stereotype of African women (Figure 2).

Figure 2
The Kenyan mother

Source: Lou and Liu (2018, 3m16s).

Although at the end of the story, the mother supports her daughter's work plan and future studies, sexist ideas about marriage hinder the young woman's personal development. In the traditional mindset of female obedience, a good education and a good job are a young woman's capital when entering the marriage. In this regard, female intelligence and talent are valued in the private sphere rather than the public sphere, which again rejects the professional value of women. As a result, the lack of recognition of women's work capacity and their scarce presence in positions requiring high training lead to greater female economic dependence in everyday life. With the desire for their daughters to maintain a certain standard of living, mothers send them back to school, but with the aim of finding a good match for marriage, thus perpetuating the vicious circle that imprisons young women. Therefore, training mothers in gender-focused education is a viable mechanism for women to escape this harsh, intergenerational cage of oppression. Once mothers have internalized principles of equality, both daughters and sons will be better equipped to break the cycle of female subordination.

Under no circumstances should women be considered mere tools for the perpetuation of the family or blame themselves for not being able to have children. Motherhood is not mandatory for all women because each woman has the capacity to make her own decisions. In the 2017 sketch entitled *True Love Endures/Zhen Qing Yong Zhu,* the wife shows feelings of guilt after suffering a miscarriage, and the solution she comes up with is to ask for a divorce, as she imagines that she is responsible for not being able to bring the family's "successor," obviously "the male successor." Therefore, in her traditional mindset, the separation of the two people is a "reward" for her to recover the loss of her husband's family, especially his parents. The wife's low self-esteem pushes her to be the protector of the male-dominated hierarchy, where men are seen as the rulers of the world. When she loses her ability to be a mother, she believes she is worthless in her marriage, but this should not be the case.

The wife's absurd ideas about motherhood are described in the same sketch as a "commendable sacrifice" and "true love." In reality, they are nothing more than "reproductive exploitation of women" (Nuño, 2020, p. 182). The two male directors, who lack gender education, exercise male power in their work, conveying unequal relationships between couples and family members through the discriminatory script.

Men's expectations of motherhood are not insignificant, especially among older men. The 2022 sketch entitled *The father and son/Fu Yu Zi* discusses the issue between father and son, as the title itself suggests. The entire comedy highlights the older father's stress about not having grandchildren. Although women have the absolute right to decide whether or not to have children, they are excluded from conversations about their bodies. The elderly father of the family gets angry in front of his only son, saying that having a baby is "so simple." The male neighbors, for their part, pass on the reproductive pressure to young people by linking a good quality of life in retirement with caring for grandchildren. Although it is the older men who want to be grandparents, the caregiving tasks always fall to women. When it comes to raising children, the will of older men is assumed to be a reconstruction of family privilege, as they seek once again the obedience of the vulnerable group.

> Neighbor: Hurry them up so they have a baby soon. As soon as you become a grandfather, your emotions will instantly transfer. Let the parents take care of their stuff, we'll focus on raising this little one. I'll show you how: "Granddaughter, who is better, daddy, mommy, or grandpa?"
> Granddaughter: Grandpa is the best.
> Neighbor: Look, when she grows up, who is she going to listen to? Grandpa, of course. andou'll see. (Fang, 2022)

The invisibility and lack of presence of women in motherhood is a clear reflection of discrimination against women. The sketch uncritically reproduces stereotypes "regarding the gender of bodies," as confirmed by Franco and Tajahuerce (2022, p. 85). Due to their lack of a voice and marginalized roles in the domestic sphere, women are forced to live under sexist domination until they lose control of their uterus under family pressure, social persuasion, and guilt-inducing education.

Social imaginaries about personal characteristics and professional skills

The female roles presented at work are diverse, although most carry negative images, especially in the case of women in management positions. The misogyny transferred from television to the public manifests men's antipathy towards female management. Under the discriminatory description of male

screenwriters and directors, the roles of female executives are used to provoke laughter in comedies, through virtues and extravagant activities that do not correspond to their job positions. For example, in the 2015 comedy (Peng and Yan), the head of the logistics department gets her job by flattering her superiors. The title of the play Flattering Someone's Tastes clearly reflects this dynamic. In 2020, the comedy titled *Doing Something by Pure Formula/Zou Guo Chang (*Shen) is another example that seeks to expose the supposed "incompetence" of female directors. The bureaucratic and formalistic attitude portrayed by the actress reinforces the incompetent image of women in management positions. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the actress who appeared in the 2015 and 2020 versions is the same. The almost identical figures and gestures reinforce the "harmful" impression of women in leadership roles, contributing to the strengthening of the glass ceiling in the real professional sphere.

The "weakness" of women in management positions in the company is constant. The contemptuous looks directed at them were born out of the egalitarian social system, where men are the controlling sex both inside and outside home. In the 2020 sketch entitled *Love for Dumplings in the Snow and Wind/Feng Xue Jiao Zi Qing (*Lou), the character of the captain of the rescue and emergency construction team does not appear on stage, but is only revealed through the words of others. During the 14-and-a-half-minute performance, the fact that the team was led by a woman is revealed in the last four minutes. It is unfortunate that in the first 10 minutes, no viewer would have imagined that the central theme revolved around a woman. The surprise of one of the customers tarnishes the captain's reputation, insinuating that she must be a "close friend" of the male directors. This assumption reflects a sexist mentality, assuming that men are incapable of managing difficult tasks in the middle of a snowstorm, let alone a pregnant woman. The clear portrayal of the supposed supremacy and preeminence of the male sex in positions of power is manifested through the doubts expressed. Fortunately, the captain's husband demonstrates a more egalitarian attitude than the customer, strongly rebuking this unfounded suspicion:

> Sha Yi: Do you understand now? If I'm not mistaken, your wife and the captain are best friends, right?
> Jia Bing: Come on, what are you talking about? I suggest you take out that brain of yours and spray it with some vinegar to disinfect it. I thought you

> were complimenting me, don't you get it yet? My wife and the captain are the same person. (Lou, 2020)

In another sketch from the same year entitled *Happiness is Very Simple/ Kuai Le Qi Shi Hen Jian Dan* (Fang), there is a similar situation. The conversations are structured in such a way that the woman's managerial identity is relegated to the background, to the point of confusing her with the male assistant's wife. Even more worrying is that the dialogues between the male employee and the female manager are full of paternalistic advice. It is suggested that having a partner is a form of rest, and that staying single without children means living without worries. The man's recommendations to professional women are ridiculous, as they are based exclusively on a male perspective. If men perceive life in this way, as a form of relaxation, it is because it is women who bear the pressure and fatigue of both work and home life. It is women who take care of seemingly insignificant but complicated situations, freeing men from these responsibilities. This representation reinforces gender stereotypes, while minimizing the achievements and difficulties women face in their leadership roles and personal lives.

In the 2023 sketch titled *The Hole/Keng* (Yan and Peng), and the 2021 sketch *The general cleaning/Da Sao Chu* (Fang), there are two other female directors who are initially not recognized by the male workers. In addition to being belittled, they suffer indignity because of their personal characteristics and physical appearance, from being labeled "rude" to being criticized for not having a perfect body shape. The contempt and hostility of the male employees towards women is conveyed directly from the scene to the audience. The irony is the change in attitude of the detractors when they discover the true identity of the women. The humble reverence they show them is respect for power, not for the female gender. The 2018 film entitled *Making Comments/Ti Yi Jian* differs from the ones mentioned above, as the director's identity is revealed from the outset. The employee's reaction is therefore different. He compliments the director's makeup to make a good impression on her, even though she is not wearing any. He also compares the director to the other employees, emphasizing her beauty.

The working conditions for women are not easy. Based on what the men say and do in the comedies studied, it is clear that men are selfish when it comes to their interests. In no case are they willing to give up their benefits and rights. They become flatterers and less aggressive towards female directors

due to their fear of the administrative authority they possess, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. Without managerial identity, professional women are seen as the most subordinate in the workplace. Inequality in television programs that is neglected and omitted diminishes opportunities to achieve gender equality in real life, as the population without a gender perspective occasionally imitates the stereotypical words and expressions presented as models. The lack of anti-macho debates in comedy sketches further deteriorates the gender order, which already lacks balance.

The construction of disdain among professional women is another phenomenon in the sketches analyzed. *The stories in* Director Zhang's *Ban Gong Shi De Gu Shi* (2015) show the insults of a young employee towards the manager: "Why are you so aggressive? At your age, you could already be president, but you are only a director." The young woman's audacity does not imply that she is competent in her job; on the contrary, she is the daughter of the company's president and is also the only woman employed in an office of five people. She is not afraid of disrespect because she knows that no one will fire her for speaking like that. The role of the proud "connected" girl reflects a social fantasy laden with prejudices towards women, where those from wealthy families are always portrayed as stupid. One wonders: why is there not a single man playing these capricious roles in comedies of the last 20 years?

The role of the manager in the same sketch presents without privileges. The jokes about her single status are the supposed "comic effect" that the play aims to achieve. The laughter spread across the screen is, in reality, an outrage to brave professional women who choose to live independently. Likewise, there are misleading concepts about women's happiness, reducing them to giving birth and caring for the family without their own economic aspirations. At the manager's birthday party, due to a misunderstanding, she happily accepts the message on the cake prepared by her subordinates: "may you soon have a son." Surprisingly, she endorses this retrograde idea, stating that "it is my mother's greatest wish for me." It is regrettable that notions that "belittle women and exalt men" reappear in national television productions, which undoubtedly encourages self-contempt among women in the real professional sphere.

Verbal abuse against the female director also appeared in 2017. In the comedy titled *El tal A Feng/A Feng Qi Ren* (Zhao), the company's driver A Feng denigrates his boss, considering that her "train has passed" because

she is 38 years old and single. Instead of appreciating his boss's excellence at work, he constantly gossips with his neighbors, belittling her: "She's been on eighty-one blind dates, all of which have failed, which is why we call her the 'golden single,' the 'big leftover.'" In this case, men's aversion to women is evident, especially towards those who are outstanding and single. It seems that they are the ones most to blame for everything. In reality, it is professionally successful women who do not follow the path laid out for them by paternalism. Stereotypical comments that invade the privacy of professionally successful women are a clear example of workplace harassment, as they denigrate them and prevent them from being socially accepted.

As lower-level employees, they are the most discriminated against compared to their superiors. They are marginalized and described as "mentally weak" at work, with the purpose of provoking laughter from the audience. The 2020 sketch titled *The Airport Sisters/Ji Chang Jie Mei Hua (*Lou) is about two young women who work as ground staff at an airport. They are serious workers who prefer to be alone and devote themselves fully to their work rather than give themselves over to family life. However, the conversations that take place between them and their supervisor are extravagant and irrational. Taking advantage of the innocent image of young women, the "funny" dialogues based on the confusion of customers' first and last names once again degrade women's abilities in the workplace. The worst part of the comedy is the insults that the young women tell at each other regarding their intelligence, reinforcing the stereotype ingrained in the educated population without a gender perspective:

> Song Zuer: But sister, what if I'm not very smart?
> Jin Jing: What are you talking about? To not be smart, you'd have to have a brain in the first place. (Lou, 2020)

Director Zhao's comedy, released that same year, presents similar ideas that underestimate the female image through two female characters. To escape a blind date, the young woman who works in the tea shop asks her colleague for help, inventing flaws that her colleague does not have, in order to get rid of her admirers. Although the terms used to humiliate her are presented with a supposed humorous intent, it is very likely that the audience will perceive the falseness of these expressions about women, since one learns from what one hears:

> Xie Na: Why should I go on your blind date?
> Ju Jingyi: But you're different!
> Xie Na: How am I different?
> Ju Jingyi: You have an intimidating appearance, a direct personality, an explosive character, and you're also quick-witted. I'm sure you can do it. (Zhao, 2020)

The marked "difference" in the above conversation presents as the comic point of the sketch, although it fails to convey a true sense of humor to the audience. A woman's shortcomings are constructed under male gaze, but are expressed by another woman. This reveals the intrigue of the sexist world: envy struggles between women favor the strengthening of the male hierarchy, since the enemies are female, not male. When women become obsessed with doing what men say, without having the strength to question the hidden meaning behind their words, they lose their right to express themselves. In the macho conception, a less traditional physical appearance and personality are excuses to drive men away. In this context, it is not difficult to imagine what the male world really wants from women: beauty and an obedient idiosyncrasy.

"Protecting the beauty" of women from challenging and dangerous jobs is another phallocentric excuse, as this conservative thinking prevents well-educated women from achieving new professional advances, under the pretext of "for your safety." The 2022 sketch titled *Rest Area Stories/Xiu Xi Qu De Gu Shi (*Li *et al.),* directed by two male directors and one female director, once again it reaffirms male prejudice against women. Although Guo's husband tries to create a humorous atmosphere by praising his partner's beauty, linking a woman's physical appearance to her ability to work is totally unfair, as it reinforces the public perception that female success is linked to beauty. The directing team's lack of egalitarian awareness exacerbates the discriminatory tone of the comedy through the conversations between the couple of doctors, when they both have to decide who will go to the first aid area at the border.

> Guo Zi: Why do you think you should go?
> Yun Yun: I'm a woman, I'm more sensitive than you. When I get there, I'll be able to do the job better.
> Guo Zi: Precisely because you are a woman, you will not be able to do the job when you get there.
> Yun Yun: Why?
> Guo Zi: Because you're pretty. Everyone will be looking at you, who's going to pay attention to the sick person (Li *et al*., 2022)?

The doctor tries to persuade her husband, believing that sensitivity is an inherent characteristic of the female sex that favors rescue tasks. However, she underestimates herself by not basing her arguments on her outstanding professional achievements, which should be the main reasons for convincing her partner. Considering sensitivity as a natural female attribute is a male construct to maintain their authority. The term "sensitive" has been engraved in the minds of subjugated women like Dr. andun Yun, undermining women's pride and confidence in the workplace.

The representation of people engaged in cleaning is evident. In the 2018 (Sun) and 2019 (Sun and Liu) sketches, the same actress plays the role of a cleaner. She is a young, short, and sturdy woman who is portrayed as honest and loyal. The character appears to have little education and is shown to be clumsy when offering home services. The knowledge of the main television creators about cleaning work is limited. The stereotype of female cleaners excludes educated, tall, and thin women who cannot find work commensurate with their education due to social preference for men. Poor, quiet, older, or weak-willed women are also not represented. The sad reality of cleaners is hidden in these comedies, ignoring the low wages that barely cover food and housing. The issue of basic tasks in society is embellished. Comic sketches that induce the audience to admire the cleaner's optimism overlook the difficulties faced by working women from the lowest social strata.

The stereotypical construction of interpersonal relationships

The relationships of friendship, neighborliness, between the delivery man and the customer, and between former schoolmates shown in the sketches represent the many sexist facets of this Eastern society. The persistent inequality between men and women remains linked to gender distinctions, perpetuating established social roles. The delivery man's rejection of the customer's single life (Zhou, 2016) exerts sexist pressure on female public figures, as do the porters' sexual fantasies about the nanny in the neighboring building (Feng, 2014) and a man's sarcastic and mocking comments to his neighbor during a discussion about the loss of a dog (You and Hou, 2016). Elderly female artists who fake accidents (Yan and Peng, 2014) contribute to a less trustworthy image of women outside home. The oppressive atmosphere conveyed by these "comic segments," in describing the socio-ecological environment, once again reaffirms male authority over women.

The 2015 sketch (Pan *et al.,* 5m29s) is a typical example that highlights the "unfriendly" friendship between young people. Although the protagonist is a cheerful and self-confident girl, her supposed friends humiliate her in various ways. The criticism ranges from her imperfect body shape, her inability to sing or dance, her bad personality traits, to her unemployment and single status, covering almost all the prejudices that can be directed at a woman. The misogyny that creeps into the conversations is evident. In order to increase the body anxiety of the girl, named Jia, a comparison is made between her and a fashion model (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Comparison of body shape between the model and Jia

Source: Pan *et al*. (2015, 5m29s)

The dialogue accompanying the comparison image is even more offensive. Jia is described as a "car airbag" because her body type is not as slim or tall as the model's. She is also given a nickname: tomboy (Nv Han Zi), while the model is called "Goddess." The insulting terms and offensive attitudes went unnoticed by both the performance's management team and the actors and actresses. These "comical" representations hurt the feelings of ordinary girls, once again trampling on respect for women who do not fit traditional standards of beauty. Like the unequal terms and attitudes, the applause and laughter that accompany the show, both on stage and among the audience, cause further harm to people who have a body similar to Jia's, as these reactions reflect public attitudes that favor discriminatory ideas.

Due to the indignity of her friends, Jia sometimes doubts herself, thinking: "I'm turning thirty this year, I don't have a job or a partner, and just thinking about it makes me feel very discouraged." Jia's insecurity stems entirely from the inculcation of a hierarchical and paternalistic society, in which women who live according to the male paradigm are valued positively. The friendship surrounding Jia, which constantly reminds her of her imperfection, is a toxic relationship. The time limit of the sketch and the script with fixed concepts hide the true nature of such a company, which is to protect male dominance.

In order to fulfill the male directors' fantasy about women's physical appearance, female roles are created that mock their own bodies in social activities. In the 2015 sketch (Shang and Xiao) titled *Yu Sankuai, Community Police Officer/ She Qv Min Jing Yu San Kuai,* a female figure appears who laughs at her body weight to accentuate the comical atmosphere, visiting her police chief husband who is still working on New Year's Eve.

> Officer Shao: Sister-in-law, how come you came?
> Yu Sankuai's wife: Can't I come? I knew that even on New Year's Eve, our old Yu couldn't stop worrying about the community and his work. If he's not going home, what can I do? So I brought my 200+ jin (100 kg) here. (Shang and Xiao, 2015)

Judging a weight of over 100 kilograms in front of everyone at the police station is a forced "laugh" in the dialogue that does not contribute any real humor. The camera crew also collaborated with the directors by moving the shot towards the audience after the woman tried to entertain the show by revealing her weight. Images of men who cannot contain their laughter fill the screen again. Degrading women to introduce supposedly funny fragments into this sketch represents a type of low-quality entertainment, which is based on disrespect for the female sex, pushing the population without education in equality to repeat and accept the dominance of men over women.

In the sketch entitled *Joy upon Joy! /Xi Shang Jia Xi* from 2022 (Sun and Guo), there are other dialogues that represent the "horror" women feel towards their bodies. In fact, it is an imaginary fear imposed by men on women, where a "pumpkin" silhouette is supposedly what can attract the attention of the male. However, the docile opinions that have been internalized by women are, in essence, exhortations from a patriarchal society. When they engage in activities outside home, they act according to the rules established by sexist education, forgetting what they really want. Therefore, the protago-

nist appears submissive when she wants to start a romantic relationship with her dance partner. She presumes the importance of a "perfect" body shape to achieve love, complaining that eating little to maintain her figure is difficult, without taking health into account:

> I'm flirting with your Uncle Zhang, you know? Do you have any idea how I eat when I'm with your Uncle Zhang? I eat rice grain by grain, eh! Your Uncle Zhang compliments me by saying I look like a little bird. (Sun and Guo, 2022)

Conclusion

Following previous research on the representation of women in the media, this study analyzes the media representation of Chinese women in comedy sketches broadcast during CCTV's Spring Festival Galas between 2014 and 2024. The research aims to provide an analysis of female participation, both in creative roles (directors and screenwriters) and in acting roles, with the aim of examining the mechanisms that perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination in these short comedy pieces. Through discourse analysis and cinematic representations, a significant marginalization of women in the creative process is evident. Although there is an apparent diversity of female roles in both the domestic and public spheres, the construction of these characters continues to be subordinate to an androcentric perspective.

Regarding the participation of female directors and screenwriters, the results of the research show their marginalization and virtual invisibility in the creative process. Under male dominance in artistic direction, the contribution of most female collaborators is in the traditional domestic sphere, which, far from promoting gender equality, hinders it. The hierarchical structure of the educational and creative environment limits the access of the few participants with their own voice to egalitarian content, inadvertently transforming them into perpetrators of androcentrism. This dynamic positions them as unwitting agents of a structural hierarchy that reinforces sexist patterns based on gender segregation.

Regarding the representation of women in the family, there has been a systematic distortion and stigmatization of their personal qualities. The discursive framework is constructed on androcentric bases that not only ignore but deliberately render invisible the outstanding capacities of women, promoting an image of self-sacrifice that reinforces the order established by

the system of gender segregation. The construction of female archetypes is developed in accordance with the interests of the patriarchal system, which seeks to maximize the exploitation of women. On the one hand, their unpaid domestic work is exploited while they are paradoxically accused of coveting male wealth; on the other hand, their entry into the labor market is promoted under the pretext of family welfare, masking this demand with a discourse of apparent material detachment. These contradictory ideological conceptions of women are persistently evident throughout the period analyzed.

As for marital and reproductive pressure, the persistence of these issues has been evident over the last decade, a phenomenon that coincides with the steady decline in China's fertility rate (Yang *et al.,* 2022), considering the role of CCTV's Festival Galas as a vehicle for transmitting national policies. Social anxiety about this issue is mainly channeled through older characters, particularly maternal figures. The marriage-motherhood equation is presented as a *sine qua* non condition for female personal fulfillment, thus perpetuating the imperatives of an androcentric society and reinforcing discriminatory stereotypes towards women. Social scrutiny of the private lives of professional women who aspire to personal autonomy is configured as a control mechanism that intensifies female anxiety in relation to their independent life decisions, resulting in a systematic devaluation of their professional aspirations.

About female professional identity, mistrust of women's abilities persists until 2024, as evidenced by the fact that female screenwriters represent only 12.5% and have not achieved a predominant position during the ten-year study period. Professional women and female executives are characterized by stereotypical attributes such as naivety, servility, aggressiveness, or supposedly exceptional interpersonal skills, thus underestimating their objective competencies and intelligence. This representation derives from male hegemony in creative processes, which simultaneously constructs conventional professional representations for male characters. In terms of the female relational dimension, media narratives and constructions perpetuate harmful stereotypes and prejudices, reinforcing patriarchal social structures. Humor is instrumentalized as a mechanism for normalizing discrimination, where interpersonal relationships and social bonds operate as devices of control and oppression that reproduce androcentric values.

The research highlights that female media representations, transcending their apparent playful function, operate as active instruments in the perpetuation of social hierarchies where women persist as objects of ridicule and

social coercion, particularly when they transgress traditional aesthetic canons and gender roles prescribed by the prevailing androcentric system. From an analytical perspective, it is imperative to restructure the film industry based on gender equality. The strategic integration of professionals trained under non-androcentric paradigms is the fundamental pillar for achieving a truly egalitarian media ecosystem. Similarly, the systematic incorporation of equitable principles in higher education in communication sciences emerges as a cardinal element in this structural transformation.

It should be noted that this research has certain methodological limitations that suggest new lines of investigation. First, the analysis has focused exclusively on comedy sketches broadcast by CCTV, without establishing a comparative study with similar productions from other television networks or countries that also address the representation of Chinese women, which could provide significant findings on the media construction of female identity. Second, this work has not considered the educational and professional background of the creative and artistic teams, including both the management team and the cast of performers. The inclusion of these elements would allow expanding the corpus of analysis in future research. Third, a comprehensive analysis of the narrative structures and cinematic composition of these comedy sketches would contribute substantially to the field of feminist studies in the Chinese context.

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Declaration of Use of Artificial Intelligence
The author DECLARES that the preparation of the article ***The Representation of Women in Comedy Sketches on CCTV China's Spring Festival Gala (2014-2024)*** did not involve the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).