

# *Research and Analysis on the Stereotyping of Chinese Fantasy Period Dramas*

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**Abstract:** As an important genre in the Chinese TV drama market, the ancient costume drama with xianxia elements has always been favored by audiences. However, in recent years, these dramas have gradually fallen into a predicament of stereotyping, exhibiting high degrees of similarity in plot, character, and styling, leading to aesthetic fatigue among viewers. Many fantasy martial arts dramas still revolve around traditional themes of good vs. evil, love and hate, lacking innovation and breakthroughs. The plot developments are often predictable, with a lack of suspense and surprises, leading to a loss of interest among viewers. Characters are often simply categorized as good or bad, lacking deep personality portrayal and psychological exploration. The relationships between characters are also often overly simplistic, lacking complexity and authenticity. Some fantasy martial arts dramas rely too heavily on visual effects, neglecting the depth of the storyline and characters. The quality of the effects varies, sometimes appearing unnatural and fake, affecting the viewing experience for the audience. In some fantasy martial arts dramas, the acting skills of the actors are not sufficient to support complex character settings, resulting in a one-dimensional character portrayal. Additionally, some actors' performing styles do not match the atmosphere of the fantasy martial arts drama, ruining the overall viewing experience. This article aims to conduct a deep analysis of the stereotyping phenomenon in xianxia ancient costume dramas, exploring its causes, impacts, and coping strategies, in order to provide a reference for the benign development of this genre.

## **1. Introduction**

Ancient costume dramas with xianxia elements, with their unique themes, rich imagination, and fascinating plots, have always been an essential part of the Chinese TV drama market. According to the author's research, the xianxia drama market showed high activity in 2022, with over 40 projects in various stages, including upcoming releases, filming completions, new productions, and preparations. Some highly anticipated xianxia dramas, such as "Chenxiang Ruxi," "Changyue Jiming," and "Yuguyao," are among the preparations or productions. These dramas cover a diverse range from large-scale productions to small- and medium-sized budgets, each with its unique characteristics. In 2023, the xianxia drama market remained active, with several dramas achieving impressive ratings. [1]

For instance, Zhao Lusi's "Shenying" and Xiao Zhan's "Yuguyao" have achieved high online viewership. From 2022 to 2023, the domestic xianxia drama market maintained high activity,

broadcasting numerous noteworthy dramas. Although the exact number cannot be provided, it can be seen that the xianxia drama market during this period showed a trend of diversification, with both large-scale productions and small- and medium-sized dramas, each with its distinctiveness. These dramas not only enriched viewers' options but also promoted the development of this genre. However, as these dramas continue to evolve, the issue of stereotyping has become increasingly apparent. The high similarity in plot progression, character settings, and styling styles makes it difficult for audiences to feel novelty, resulting in aesthetic fatigue. This article will conduct a deep analysis of the stereotyping phenomenon in xianxia ancient costume dramas, aiming to provide a reference for the benign development of this genre.

## **2. The Manifestations of Stereotypical Patterns in Xianxia Ancient Costume Dramas**

### **2.1 Plot Stereotypy**

#### **2.1.1 Confrontation and Love Entanglement**

Plots often revolve around the struggles between the righteous and evil factions. The righteous side is always brave, intelligent, and resourceful, while the evil side is treacherous, cunning, and ruthless. The love thread of the male and female protagonists runs through the entire story, often enduring obstacles and tribulations such as identity differences, opposition from friends and family, and misunderstandings before they can finally achieve their desired outcome. [2]

#### **2.1.2 Growth and Transcendence**

The protagonist typically starts out from humble or difficult origins, gradually evolving into a hero or deity through a series of events. During this growth process, the protagonist undergoes multiple transformations or awakenings, enhancing himself through battles, cultivation, and insights, ultimately reaching a new level.

#### **2.1.3 Repetitive Storylines**

The plot frequently incorporates recurring scenarios or episodes, such as the protagonist being misunderstood, framed, fleeing, or seeking revenge. The antagonistic characters often resort to similar tactics or schemes to confront the protagonist, yet the protagonist consistently overcomes difficulties and defeats enemies.

#### **2.1.4 Lack of Innovative Plot Settings**

Xianxia dramas tend to lack innovation in their plot setups, adhering to traditional tropes and patterns that fail to provide novelty for viewers. The plot development often lacks depth and complexity, being overly straightforward and difficult to evoke viewer resonance or contemplation.

#### **2.1.5 Special Effects and Battle Scenes**

To cater to viewers' visual demands, Xianxia dramas incorporate numerous special effects and combat sequences. However, these effects and scenes frequently lack creativity and imagination, merely accumulate and repeating, failing to offer viewers visually stunning experiences.

#### **2.1.6 Cultural Background and Elements**

Xianxia dramas frequently borrow from traditional Chinese culture and mythology during their creation. However, in utilizing these elements, they often lack profound exploration and innovation,

simply incorporating them into the plot without exhibiting their unique charm and value.

## **2.2 Role Stereotyping**

### **2.2.1 Stereotyped Protagonists**

In Chinese fantasy dramas, protagonists are often portrayed as heroic and courageous "hero" figures who are both brave and wise. They usually come from ordinary or troubled backgrounds but always manage to grow into extraordinary fairy characters through a series of events. The protagonists often share similar personality traits, such as perseverance, kindness, integrity, and bravery, lacking depth and complexity. [3]

### **2.2.2 Stereotyped Supporting Characters and Villains**

In Chinese fantasy dramas, supporting characters often lack independent storylines and deep characterization, merely serving the protagonist and the plot. They tend to be portrayed as accompaniments or assistants to the protagonist, lacking individuality and distinctiveness.

On the other hand, villains are often depicted as cunning and ruthless, with relatively singular behaviors and motivations, lacking complexity and credibility.

### **2.2.3 Similarities in Character Growth and Enlightenment**

The protagonists in Chinese fantasy dramas typically undergo multiple stages of enlightenment or awakening during their growth. These enlightenment processes tend to be similar, involving self-improvement through battles, cultivation, and insights, ultimately reaching a new level.

This stereotyped growth process makes the characters lack individuality and uniqueness, making it difficult to leave a lasting impression on the audience.

## **2.3 Stereotyped Styling**

The styling of Chinese fantasy period dramas also exhibits a high degree of similarity. Whether it's the male or female protagonists or supporting characters, they often wear flowing robes and adorn ornate hair accessories to showcase their otherworldly elegance. However, this simplistic and repetitive styling makes it difficult for viewers to experience anything new, potentially leading to aesthetic fatigue.

## **3. Causes of Stereotyping in Chinese Fantasy Period Dramas**

### **3.1 Market Demand Orientation**

As a commercial product, the creation and production of Chinese fantasy period dramas are inevitably influenced by market demand. Driven by market demand, producers often adopt elements and models that have been proven successful in the market to cater to viewers' tastes and aesthetics, leading to the stereotyping phenomenon in these dramas.

### **3.2 Production Cost Considerations**

The production costs of Chinese fantasy period dramas are relatively high, including scene construction, costume and prop production, and special effects production. To control costs, producers often adopt simplified approaches in certain aspects, such as using similar scenes, costumes, and props, which contributes to the stereotyping observed in these dramas.

### **3.3 Lack of Creativity**

As a genre rich in imagination, creativity and innovation are key to attracting viewers for Chinese fantasy period dramas. However, as this genre continues to evolve, the difficulty of achieving creativity and innovation increases. Some producers, to save effort, often adopt elements and models already proven successful in the market, leading to the stereotyping of Chinese fantasy period dramas.

## **4. Impacts of Stereotyping in Chinese Fantasy Period Dramas**

### **4.1 Aesthetic Fatigue among Viewers**

The stereotyping of Chinese fantasy period dramas makes it difficult for viewers to experience anything new while watching, leading to aesthetic fatigue. When viewers become familiar and tired of the plot, characters, styling, and other aspects, they lose interest in this genre, affecting viewership ratings and word-of-mouth. [4]

### **4.2 Constraints on Industry Development**

The stereotyping of Chinese fantasy period dramas also restricts the industrial development of this genre. When producers adopt similar elements and models, it limits the genre's innovativeness and diversity, affecting its market competitiveness and vitality.

## **5. Strategies to Address Stereotyping in Chinese Fantasy Period Dramas**

### **5.1 Deep Dive into Characters' Inner Worlds**

To break the stereotyping of Chinese fantasy period dramas, producers should delve deeper into each character's inner world, shaping more three-dimensional and vivid character images. By showcasing characters' emotions, beliefs, pursuits, and other aspects, producers can evoke viewers' empathy and emotional resonance, enhancing the show's watchability and appeal.

### **5.2 Innovative Plot Settings**

In terms of plotting, producers should strive for more innovation and breakthroughs. Besides the traditional themes of good versus evil and love-hate relationships, they can incorporate additional elements and plots such as exploration, puzzle-solving, political struggles, and more to diversify and enrich the storyline. [5]At the same time, they can draw inspiration from the successes of other genres like suspense and science fiction, blending different elements to create a unique world of immortality and swordsmanship.

### **5.3 Emphasizing Innovation in Scenery, Costumes, and Props**

As crucial components of Chinese fantasy period dramas, scenery, costumes, and props should also prioritize innovation and diversity. Producers can enhance the visual effects and watchability of the show by constructing more distinctive scenes and designing more creative costumes and props. Additionally, they can experiment with introducing new elements and styles, such as blending modern elements into traditional attire, to exhibit a more unique aesthetic.

## 5.4 Strengthening the Professionalism of Writers and Directors

Writers and directors are the core personnel in the creation and production of Chinese fantasy period dramas, and their professionalism and innovative capabilities are crucial for breaking the stereotype. Producers should reinforce training and guidance for writers and directors, elevating their professionalism and fostering innovation. They should encourage bold experiments with new elements and styles, thereby promoting innovation and development in the genre of Chinese fantasy period dramas.

## 6. Conclusion

As one of the significant genres in China's TV drama market, the stereotyping of Chinese fantasy period dramas has become one of the bottlenecks restricting its development. To overcome this dilemma, producers should delve deeper into characters' inner worlds, innovate plot settings, prioritize scenery, costume, and prop innovation, and strengthen the professionalism of writers and directors. These efforts can promote innovation and development in Chinese fantasy period dramas. Meanwhile, the support and attention of the broader audience are crucial to jointly pushing this genre towards a more diversified and innovative direction. Of course, in response to the current problems of Chinese fantasy dramas, here are some specific suggestions or solutions:

### 6.1 Innovation

A screenwriter can introduce more diversified themes by combining elements of modern society with fantasy stories to create novel story backgrounds. For instance, "Qing Yu Nian," starring Chen Daoming and Zhang Ruoyun, effectively blends fantasy elements with modern life, presenting a light-hearted tone and inserting modern elements that resonate with younger audiences.

### 6.2 specific methods

A director can enhance the exploration of characters' inner worlds, allowing viewers to gain a deeper understanding of their emotions and growth journeys. Experiment with nonlinear narratives or multiple narrative threads to increase plot complexity and appeal.

#### 6.2.1 Psychological Description

A director can utilize techniques such as narration, soliloquy, and flashbacks to showcase a character's mental activities. For instance, when a character faces a significant choice, their inner turmoil, struggles, and ultimate decision can be revealed through a soliloquy. Depicting a character's dreams or hallucinations can also metaphorically or symbolically reveal their deeper psychological layers.

#### 6.2.2 Emotional Expression

The screenwriter highlights the emotional entanglements between characters and showcases their personalities and inner worlds primarily through emotional conflicts. For instance, the screenwriter focuses on emphasizing the profound bond between mentors and disciples or the intricate mix of love and hatred between lovers. Furthermore, the screenwriter utilizes delicate emotional depictions to illustrate a character's growth and changes in sentiment. This is evident in the transition from initial innocence and ignorance to later maturity and firmness, or from cold-heartedness to gradually possessing a compassionate heart.

### 6.2.3 Character Conflict

First, the screenwriter sets up conflicts and contradictions between characters in order to reveal their personalities and inner worlds through these interactions. For example, the screenwriter depicts a character's choices between morality and selfish desire, as well as the struggles they face between friendship and love. Secondly, the screenwriter leverages external conflicts to trigger inner conflicts within the characters, thus exhibiting their complex inner worlds and emotional landscapes.

### 6.3 Character Enrichment

To avoid a singular character type, the screenwriter creates more characters with unique personalities and growth experiences, providing supporting characters and antagonists with more independent storylines and in-depth development, making them more three-dimensional.

To enrich emotional entanglements, the screenwriter introduces a variety of character relationships, such as mentor-student or siblings, into the narrative.

#### 6.3.1 Attention to Detail and Quality Pursuit

The producer emphasizes the quality of the script, strengthening details and foreshadowing to ensure a more coherent and exciting plot. During the casting process, the producer selects actors who closely match the characters' images to guarantee a high level of fit between the actors and their respective roles.

Producers also pursue high-quality production values, paying meticulous attention to aspects such as scenery, costumes, and props to enhance the overall visual experience for the audience.

#### 6.3.2 Improved Production Quality

Firstly, investing more resources in art design, costumes, and props is crucial to achieving exquisite and unique visual effects. The production team would prioritize strengthening technical research and development in special effects production to further enhance realism and expressiveness.

Besides this, the producer must make efforts to attract more outstanding production teams and talents to elevate the overall production level of the fantasy dramas.

In terms of actor training and casting, it is important to reinforce actor training and improve their acting skills and expressiveness. During the casting process, the producer should prioritize finding the best fit between actors and roles, avoiding an overemphasis on popularity over acting ability. Furthermore, encouraging newcomer actors to participate in fantasy dramas is a good way to inject fresh blood and new perspectives into the industry.

#### 6.3.3 Introducing New Elements and Styles

Screenwriters and producers should draw inspiration from the successes of other genres like suspense and science fiction, integrating new elements and styles into fantasy dramas. Collaborations with production teams from other countries or regions should be a key focus for producers, as it brings in diverse perspectives and ideas. On one hand, such collaborations encourage crossover cooperation between writers and directors, breaking the traditional framework limitations of fantasy dramas. On the other hand, it strengthens audience interaction and feedback, not only by enhancing interactions with viewers through social media channels but also by understanding their needs and opinions. Consequently, screen workers should create plots and character settings based on audience feedback to improve the show's reputation and ratings. Additionally, organizing online and offline events can further enhance viewers' sense of identity and belonging towards fantasy dramas.

In the future, martial arts dramas need to continue seeking innovation in content, exploring more storylines and character images with depth and substance. [6]Meanwhile, they can further explore the "martial arts +" model, integrating more elements to provide audiences with a more diverse and enriching viewing experience. In terms of production, martial arts dramas require a greater emphasis on quality and detail, enhancing the overall visual appeal. This includes elaborate design and production of scenery, costumes, props, as well as more refined special effects and action choreography. In summary, after experiencing a period of decline, domestic martial arts dramas are gradually embracing new development opportunities. Through continuous innovation and quality enhancement, martial arts dramas are expected to achieve even greater prosperity in the future.

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