

**ICEMC 2021**  
**International Conference on Emerging Media & Communication****THE FEMALE HOSTS BLOSSOM IN CHINESE TELEVISION  
TALK SHOWS**

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nabilimran@usm.my**Abstract**

Talk shows have become an instant hit in China since their introduction to the Chinese audience in the late 1990s. As Chinese TV talk shows continue to rise in numbers and types, female hosts have become popular in the China broadcasting industry, which was previously largely dominated by men. Offering their unique female perspective and strengths, like bright shining stars, the female hosts have become a new force in TV talk shows. This paper aims to analyze how female television hosts conduct popular television talk shows in China and observe audience response to the hosts' abilities to present and discuss issues in the program. Six episodes of the two popular television talk shows hosted by a female host, Yang Lan Interview and The Li Jing Show, will be analyzed to uncover the representation of themselves and the program's content. The emergence of female talk show hosts such as Yang Lan and Li Jing has enhanced the development of Chinese television talk show practice and provided a new model and object for theoretical research on Chinese television talk shows.

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## 1. Introduction

According to the Encyclopedia of Television, Television talk shows originated in the United States. Television historians generally regard NBC's *The Tonight Show*, launched in 1954, as the program pioneered television talk shows (Encyclopedia of Television, 2004). In China, the first television talk show to gain public recognition was *Oriental Live*, launched by Shanghai Oriental Television in 1993 (Zhang, 2018). The program "Tell It Like It Is" broadcast by China Central Television (CCTV) caught viewers and researchers' attention and created a wave in television production. This program has been hailed as the most contributing talk show in China.

With the advent of the mass media era and the representation of women by television, the image of women has become increasingly rich and vibrant. Since the rise of talk shows in China today, the strengths and achievements of women hosts in television programs are evident. Viewers and media practitioners alike have recognized the charisma and strengths of female hosts on TV talk shows.

The famous female hosts currently active in Chinese TV talk shows have gradually established their image positioning and broad audience groups (Liu, 2019). Such as Yang Lan, Chen Luyu and Li Jing.

## 2. Literature Review

Television talk shows originated in the United States. However, in the 1950s, American TV talk shows were mainly entertainment-oriented, with much of the content of funny vaudeville programs, not talking about the choice of topics. By the 1960s, American TV talk shows gradually found their own identity: choosing serious topics to attract the attention of a wider audience. In the noisy, confused 1980s and 1990s, a new format of television talk shows emerged: mass psychotherapy-style programs with daytime as the main airtime and women as the target audience (Wang, 2011). A typical representative of this was *Opala Talk*.

At the same time, China was facing a television reform. Television talk shows came to the attention of Chinese television workers who tried to produce and broadcast them. 1993 saw the broadcast of China's first television talk show on Chinese television screens, *Oriental Live*. Each episode revolved around a popular social topic and invited guests and audience representatives to discuss it together (Zhao, 1994).

The emergence of the program "Tell it like it is" has attracted a wider Chinese audience and theoretical researchers. It has been hailed as China's most contributed talk show. It has localized American talk shows in China, and Chinese viewers prefer to see ordinary people appearing on the television screen and talking to the hosts about many topics of interest (Liu, 2016). It was created to meet people's spiritual needs. Under the influence of "Tell it like it is," more and more talk shows emerged in China, such as Hunan TV's "Have Your Say," Shanghai TV's "Have Your Say," Chongqing TV's "Dragon Gate," Jinan TV's "Quancheng Night Talk," and Beijing TV's "International Two-Way" (Jin, 2016). During this period, male presenters gradually joined Chinese television talk shows, while female presenters were rare.

After the year 2000, talk shows in China ushered in a new trend. By September 2001, there were 179 talk shows on television in China (Shi, 2013). The content of TV talk shows has become more affluent and broader in scope, and the production level has also become higher. The choice of topics has also continued to penetrate strongly from a single economic category to other program formats such as literature

and arts, social education and sports. This has resulted in various talk shows with different and colorful styles (Hu, 2006). Because of the pressure of professionalization of Chinese TV channels and competition in the industry, talk shows have increasingly taken the path of differentiation and personalization, such as Contemporary Workers and The Road to Health, which is TV talk shows produced to meet the needs of different audiences.

Along with the heyday of Chinese TV talk shows, the female talk show hosts rose rapidly and became the leading force in TV talk shows during this period (Hu, 2006). For example, Yang Lan (Yang Lan Interview) has an appointment, Li Jing (Super Interview), Xu Gehui (Celebrity Face to Face), Zhang Dan Dan (The Story Behind). They showcase a different landscape of female talk show hosts. They maintain a high level of popularity and influence among television viewers, and they are the stars of the television media (Hu, 2006).

Western countries have mainly focused on the effects of television talk shows. Lin (2009) shows that western scholars have focused on the following areas: the effects of talk shows on viewers, the relationship between communication effects and audience attitude change, program editing, talk shows on the radio, etc. These studies mainly address the question of how the current talk show is perceived and to what extent it can have an impact on the audience. Other areas have certainly been covered, such as talk shows as public discourse spaces, the structure and content of the dialogue, etc.

Because of the differences in social and cultural environments and communication systems, Chinese scholars' focus on talk shows that may differ from those in other countries. Zhan (2005) analyzed articles on Chinese television talk show published in various journals between 1994 and 2005 in China. He found that in the micro-research area, the proportions of various studies were: conceptual analysis and essential characteristics (38%), presenters (35%), program positioning (4%), planning (7%), technical aspects of the studio (7%), audience (3%), and program operation and management (1%). In the field of mesoscopic research: a very high proportion of specific program studies (58%), descriptions of the problems of talk shows (22%), translations of Western (14%), studies on the translation of Western talk shows and the comparison of Western and Chinese talk shows (14%), a review of the ten-year development of Chinese TV talk shows, The study of the development of Chinese TV talk shows in the past ten years (5%). In the field of macro studies, studies based on cultural and social perspectives (44%), communication studies (38%), and linguistics (18%) (Zhan, 2005).

It can be seen that in the research horizon of Chinese academics, the study of TV talk show hosts is highly valued. The author searched the full-text database of Chinese journals, the full-text database of Chinese excellent master's theses and the full-text database of Chinese PhD dissertations between 1993 and 2020, using "talk show" and "talk show host" as search terms. A total of 306 records were obtained, including 28 master's theses and three doctoral theses. These articles covered many aspects, such as the status and role of TV talk show host, quality and ability, charisma, style performance, communication skills, image building and psychological regulation. However, there is no specific research on female TV talk show hosts in China among them.

There are also many monographs on the study of television talk shows in China. More than ten of them can be retrieved at present, such as The Essays on the Creation of Television Talk Programs (Wang, 2005), The Charm of Talk (Wu, 2007) and The Power of Talk (Yu & Song, 2014). For the most part, most

of these works provide a more detailed analysis of television talk show hosts. Although these monographs also do not specifically study female TV talk show hosts in China, they provide a theoretical basis for this study.

Research on Chinese female TV hosts has also produced some theoretical results in academic circles. In his book, Zhang (1999) explains the dangers and consequences of the proliferation of beautiful female presenters to develop Chinese television from two perspectives. He also suggested revising the selection criteria for presenters and establishing a training mechanism for new presenters. Jiang (2003) introduces the basic knowledge and techniques of female presenters' make-up, costumes and body language. Chen (2017) discusses the types of female presenters, the strengths and weaknesses of female presenters, and female presenters' survival strategies in the chapter "Analysis of the Current Situation of Chinese Program Presenters." Ying (2017) discusses the "space for the development of female presenters' roles." He reveals the commercial aims and utilitarianism behind the 'beauty culture' and reminds female presenters of the erosion and influence of the over-inflated 'beauty culture' on their work. These studies have addressed issues of image and charisma, and survival strategies of female presenters. Most of these studies are generalizations made about the group of female presenters, providing valuable references for the analysis and conclusion of this study.

Reviewing the overall development of Chinese TV talk shows, it has become increasingly mature, as evidenced by the quantity and quality of programs and the production philosophy of the writers and directors, which has improved significantly from its initial level. However, there are also many problems, such as similarity in topic selection and lack of depth, and there is still room for more improvement in the future (Wang, 2016).

Female TV talk show hosts appear first and foremost in their professional capacity as presenters. Like the male presenters, they are in charge of the program. As participants in the conversation, they share the pleasure of the conversation with the guests and the audience, and express their views and attitudes appropriately. As the organizers and controllers of the conversation, they dictate the course and direction of the conversation. They use various techniques to get the guests in the mood, regulate the pace of the conversation and create the atmosphere. However, in handling the program, they are inevitably influenced by their unique female physical and psychological characteristics, which to a certain extent distinguish them from male presenters and reflect their unique style.

### **3. Problem statement and Research Purpose**

Since the early 1990s, a new television program has gradually emerged on Chinese television screens - the television talk show. As an independent television program format, talk shows have won viewers' hearts with their unique charm of discourse. It has profoundly influenced the connotation and form of contemporary TV content production and dissemination and TV audiences' media literacy and behavioural concepts. It still occupies a large part of the television screen as a regular program as the "talk" craze is fading. According to CSM Media Research, "In the 100 days between January 1 and April 10, 2009, 190 talk shows were broadcast on hundreds of channels across the country during the 18:00-24:00 evening time slot, which is the most watched time on television, in 153 cities across the country.

Furthermore, variety shows and other genres competing for the market, and their competitiveness cannot be underestimated (Hou, 2018).

With the emergence and flourishing of television talk shows in China, the career of television hosts has also gained new development opportunities. Many excellent TV talk show hosts have emerged on Chinese TV screens one after another. Bernard and Robert (2010), an American television scholar who has studied talk shows, once discussed five unwritten rules of television talk shows. (1) The host is the centre; (2) It is produced and received in the present tense; (3) The host talks to millions of people; (4) Words = money; (5) Spontaneity is manufactured. All of these rules talk about the characteristics of talk shows, and at the top of the list is "host-centeredness". The interactive nature of television talk shows and the predominantly audio-linguistic programming style have given the host unprecedented prominence and role. Although talk shows result from collaboration among the show's production team and are carefully planned and prepared in advance, the unpredictable nature of improvised conversation makes it important for the host to direct and control the show.

The Most Valuable Hosts in China 2008 List released by Mondale (2008) was announced; the ten most valuable TV hosts from CCTV, namely, Hong Kong's Phoenix TV, Taiwan's CTV and Hong Kong's Sunshine TV, were named. Among the ten hosts on the list, half are male and half are female, with five among them being talk show hosts, who are Li Yong (male), Dou Wentao (male), Chen Luyu (female), Yang Lan (female) and Xu Gehui (female). Of these, two are male and three are female.

Throughout China's television screens, female talk show hosts have become an integral part of talk shows, and the development of female hosts in talk shows will be even stronger in the future. It is important to study how female hosts can better handle talk shows, such as questioning techniques and interviewing styles and provide valuable references for the cultivation of most-watched show hosts.

#### **4. Research Objectives**

This study focuses on female hosts in Chinese television talk shows. Based on the above statements, the specific research objectives of this study are as follows:

RO1: To explore the ways in which female hosts handle Chinese television talk shows.

RO2: To explore the characteristics of female hosts who handle Chinese television talk shows.

#### **5. Research Questions**

Based on these objectives, the main research questions are formulated as follows:

RQ1: How do female hosts handle Chinese television talk shows?

RQ2: What are the characteristics of female hosts handling Chinese television talk shows?

#### **6. Research Methodology**

This study focuses on two top-rated TV talk shows hosted by women in China today, Yang Lan Interviews and The Li Jing Show. By selecting two highly influential and well-known female hosts in the industry, their representative programs and hosting styles will be analyzed. The study will analyze the

content of each of the three episodes of the TV talk shows they hosted, such as the scene of the program, the host's words, the dialogue between the host and the audience, and the audience's reactions.

## **7. Research findings**

### **7.1. A uniquely feminine outward appearance**

The famous American writer Emerson once said that beautiful women are poets who can take their savage companions and sow the seeds of warmth, hope and eloquence in the hearts of those around them. This quote sums up the unique appeal of women (Zhao, 2013). The medium of television uses high technology to present a carefully retouched image of women on a straightforward and pleasing screen. With notions such as 'femininity', 'beauty as the soul', 'style' and 'culture' are the backbone. It is an elegant and atmospheric representation of women, presenting a distinctive on-screen charm. As people are keen to pursue beauty, female hosts are more popular than their male counterparts.

We can see that although they are both talk show hosts, woman's hairstyles and outfits are much more elaborate than those of men. Most male hosts dress in suits or shirts, and their hair is primarily short and stereotypical, which can bring aesthetic fatigue to the audience. On the other hand, female hosts require much tedious preparation in terms of dress and hairstyle alone. They can be packaged according to the current fashion elements to make women fashionable and beautiful. Their ever-changing looks always give people a glimpse of what is to come. This idea of fashion conveys to the female audience some trendy combinations and blends perfectly with the personal image of the hosts, which especially appeals to the younger generation of TV viewers. For example, Li Jing, the host of The Li Jing Show, changes her hairstyle and outfit for each show's episode. Her make-up also changes depending on her outfit at the time. In terms of outfits, she chooses more tailored and stylish dresses with metallic necklaces, both elegant and stylish, full of energy and vitality, always giving viewers a fresh feeling. Some even look forward to her next outfit. Combining a woman's natural good looks and how she dresses and styles herself, along with her natural femininity, attracts viewers' attention and increases ratings.

In conversations with some female guests, the discussion on woman's dressing can generate interest and resonate with the guests. For example, in this episode of The Li Jing Show on January 14, 2019, Li Jing interviews the famous Chinese actress Zhang Xingyu. Zhang Xingyu wore a light blue top with oversized puffy sleeves, making her skin look even fairer and brighter. As soon as the guest took the stage, the host chatted about her dress code in response. For Zhang Xingyu, who participated in her first TV talk show, it was inevitable that she would be nervous and unnatural. When Li Jing first came on the show and noticed the clothes Zhang Xingyu had prepared, especially for the show, she naturally talked to Zhang about woman's clothing. The appropriate compliments to the guest boosted her confidence and made her feel relaxed and better integrated into the show.

## **7.2. Distinctively feminine language**

### **7.2.1. Emotive language**

Seymour Topping, former president of the Pulitzer Prize jury and former editor-in-chief of The New York Times said that women are natural communicators of information. When women exercise their voice as radio hosts and engage in creative communication activities, they also play unique strengths to this group (Zhou, 2014). Women are more sensitive and mercurial than men. Women often use figurative words when expressing themselves verbally, preferring adjectives that express emotion without information and reflexive questioning. Furthermore, women have pleasant voices with soft tones and intonation. They would usually prefer to use rising tones to express uncertainty and lead the other person to elaborate on their reasons.

The host of The Li Jing Show often uses rising tones to express rhetorical statements during the show. For example, in the August 14, 2019 episode, it was observed that she used the words "Yes, Well?" nineteen times, "Really?" thirteen times, "OMG" two times, and "That is not what people generally think, is it?". There were even times when she used cute phrases and words that girls like, such as "Wow, that's really cute!", "That's exquisite!", "That's a beautiful photoshoot!". This inadvertently brings the host and the guests closer together, eliminating the sense of strangeness and giving the guests a sense of equality rather than aggressiveness.

### **7.2.2. Body language**

In interpersonal communication, in addition to the use of spoken language, are often used inadvertently to complement the spoken language and enhance its impact. Body language includes gestures, body movements and expressions. From a psychological perspective, many people lack a sense of attachment and security in unfamiliar surroundings. When engaging with them, the host can add some physical contact in moderation, such as patting them on the shoulder or shaking hands in a friendly manner when meeting them. This will bring some warmth to the other person and make them feel friendly and affectionate (Hong, 2018). In talk shows, female hosts usually use exaggerated body language and rich facial expressions to express empathy with their guests. Sometimes during the conversation, the host will silently gaze at the guest, with her chin slightly angled and her upper body slightly leaning forward, showing interest in the guest's conversation and respecting the other party's willingness to listen carefully, stimulating the guest's desire to confide in her.

For example, in the program Yang Lan Interview, the host usually drags his chin and encourages his guests to tell their feelings with a focused look when talking to them, nodding in response when necessary.

In The Li Jing Show on January 26, 2014, the hosts interviewed the TV series 'Love Apartment' creators. When Li Jinming recounted the problematic years she used to work in Beijing, she left tears in the scene. At the same time, the host put a tissue on the floor and patted Li Jinming on the shoulder. Although there were no words at this point, they were worth a thousand words. The humanistic care of the women was shown to the fullest, using body language to soothe the guests' emotions, warming them up and gaining their trust, making the interview go more smoothly and effectively.

### **7.3. The unique language of female questioning**

The female perspective is to analyze the issues from the female psyche. Compared to the male perspective, the female perspective is meticulous and emotional, euphemistic and refreshing, so it can more deeply reveal the guests' rich and real inner world. Female hosts in TV interview programs use a uniquely female perspective to observe and perceive their interviewees, often putting themselves in the shoes of their guests (Luo, 2013). Female hosts know how to grasp details better than male hosts, and it is easier to penetrate the guests' mind world and trigger their most authentic feelings, making them memorable to the audience.

For example, in *The Li Jing Show* on March 29, 2015, the famous Chinese singer Han Hong was interviewed. She was more interested in showing the audience the straightforward and accurate singer Han Hong. At the beginning of the show, Li Jing started talking about Han Hong's pair of glasses and dancing with them to liven up the scene. Then she brought out two posters for comparison. Li Jing has a soft feminine side, starting with detail like the tooth gap in a poster. Her language is mischievous and spontaneous. Han Hong is no longer a serious, career-driven woman but a frank, realistic "living person" who reads the real Han Hong from a woman's perspective, rather than the superstar Han Hong that everyone sees.

Women have a good language factor. In terms of vocabulary, women tend to use emotive, colourful words and euphemisms. Women have an innate advantage in oral communication, as they are more comprehensible and expressive, more responsive and able to express their thoughts in a timely manner (Ma, 2014).

The "Lan Yang Interviews" frequently interview leading figures in politics and economics. For example, Bill Gates, Warren Buffett and Wang Shi, the president of Vanke. Former US Presidents George Bush Sr. and Bill Clinton, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and former US Secretary of State Kissinger are among the leading figures in politics. These guests often have particular definitions in their areas of expertise that come up in their talks. When guests talk about their ideas and thoughts in their field of expertise, they sometimes use technical terms to express them. For some of the interviews she conducts, she understands what the guest is trying to say and then explains it to the audience in easy-to-understand language.

For example, in Yang Lan's previous 2017 show, Shirley Tillman, an expert in stem cell research, was invited. Many viewers may have only heard about stem cells but do not understand what they are. When Yang Lan, after listening to the guest, expressed her understanding of stem cells in easy-to-understand language, she strived for the audience to understand it as well. She also often used language with modal verbs and raised questions about the medical uses of stem cells its relevance. In a relaxed atmosphere, Yang Lan answered the audience's questions in clear and concise language.

## **8. Conclusion**

It has been nearly thirty years since interview programs appeared on Chinese television screens in the early 1990s. Interview programs have satisfied people's deep desire to talk and communicate and to understand the world. The key to talk shows is "talk." It is characterized by a strong sense of audience



participation and interaction. Talk shows require the host to get inside the guests' minds and show the people's personalities while reflecting the different states of society. With the increasing number of talk shows, women gradually appear on talk shows. They are delicate, quick-thinking, good listeners, thoughtful and considerate, rich body language and possess a natural affinity for others. These charms make it easier for female hosts to connect with their guests and get under their skin during talk shows. Therefore, they are loved by viewers and have a broader scope for development and gaining wider attention for their talk shows. These excellent female TV talk show hosts are good at using the art of language to create an atmosphere for conversation, move guests' emotions, guide them in the direction of the conversation, and find out what they think. Whether it is Yang Lan or Li Jing, they have different styles, but they both use their unique language to analyze their guests' stories. They use their practical actions and outstanding performance to hold up a piece of the interview program.

Excellent female TV talk show hosts can bring good professional role models and inspiring values. Their upbringing and career concepts can guide and motivate more ordinary women to set their goals and firmly believe in the courageous pursuit of their career aspirations. On the other hand, outstanding female TV talk show hosts play a role in presenting a good media image of women. Their influence, professional achievements and personality enormously enhance the image of women in the television media. They use their unique female perspective and value system to conduct interviews, fully grasp the discourse they have gained and express their thoughts and opinions. The emergence of female TV talk show hosts like Yang Lan and Li Jing has promoted the development of Chinese TV talk shows in practice and provided a new model and object for theoretical research on talk shows.

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