

Algorithmic Recommendation and Female Representation in Overseas Chinese Short Dramas

Zijuan Shi¹, Gaofeng Luo^{2,*}

¹*School of Literature and Communication, Hunan Women's University, Changsha, China*

²*School of Information Science and Engineering, Hunan Women's University, Changsha, China*

**Corresponding Author*

Abstract: The global expansion of Chinese short dramas has been facilitated by algorithmic recommendation and platform-based content distribution, reshaping both media circulation and female representation. Focusing on female representation in overseas Chinese short dramas, this study examines how algorithmic recommendation influences its construction and cross-cultural narrative strategies. Drawing on the framework of algorithmic recommendation, it analyzes the interaction among platform algorithms, content production, and audience engagement. The findings identify four dominant female character archetypes and demonstrate how algorithmic recommendation shapes their dissemination and audience exposure through content classification, traffic allocation, and iterative user feedback. However, platform-driven optimization also reinforces gender stereotypes, reduces narrative diversity, and intensifies cultural discount. The study argues that algorithmic recommendation actively shapes female representation rather than merely distributing content, contributing to a better understanding of the relationship between platform algorithms, gender representation, and cross-cultural digital communication.

Keywords: Chinese Short Dramas; Female Representation; Algorithmic Recommendation; Cross-Cultural Communication; Narrative Strategies

1. Introduction

The rapid transformation of the global digital communication environment has fundamentally reshaped the production, distribution, and consumption of audiovisual content. Within this evolving media ecology, Chinese short dramas have emerged as one of the fastest-growing

forms of digital entertainment, attracting substantial international audiences through social media platforms and dedicated short-drama applications. Characterized by concise storytelling, accelerated narrative rhythms, and emotionally charged plot structures, these productions have become an increasingly influential vehicle for the global dissemination of Chinese digital culture. Their remarkable overseas success reflects not only innovations in content production but also the transformative role of algorithmic recommendation systems in facilitating cross-cultural communication.

Among the various narrative elements that contribute to the popularity of overseas short dramas, the representation of women occupies a particularly significant position. Female protagonists dominate many of the most successful productions, and narratives centred on women's professional development, emotional relationships, family responsibilities, and personal empowerment constitute a substantial proportion of internationally distributed short dramas. These female characters function not merely as narrative protagonists but also as emotional mediators who facilitate audience identification across different cultural contexts. Through their experiences of struggle, resilience, romance, and self-discovery, female characters provide accessible points of emotional engagement for increasingly diverse global audiences.

The international circulation of Chinese short dramas, however, cannot be explained solely by their narrative appeal. Their visibility is fundamentally mediated by algorithmic recommendation systems, which have become the primary infrastructure governing digital content distribution. By integrating user profiling, behavioral prediction, content classification, and real-time interaction data, recommendation algorithms determine not only which content reaches specific audiences but

also which narrative forms receive sustained exposure and commercial success[1]. Consequently, algorithms increasingly influence creative decision-making during content production, encouraging creators to develop stories and characters that align with platform preferences and maximize user engagement. As Gillespie argues, algorithms function not simply as technical instruments but as cultural intermediaries that actively participate in organizing visibility and shaping public discourse[2]. Within the ecosystem of overseas short dramas, algorithmic recommendation therefore constitutes an essential force in the construction of female representation.

The growing prominence of female-oriented short dramas reflects both changing market demands and broader transformations in global gender discourse. The increasing purchasing power and cultural influence of female audiences have encouraged production companies to develop narratives emphasizing women's agency, emotional growth, and social mobility. At the same time, digital platforms have identified female-centred stories as commercially valuable genres capable of generating sustained audience engagement and high conversion rates. This convergence of market incentives and algorithmic optimization has accelerated the expansion of female-themed short dramas across international markets. Nevertheless, the integration of algorithmic logic into content production has generated a series of critical concerns. While recommendation systems enhance communication efficiency by accurately matching content with audience preferences, they may simultaneously reinforce stereotypical gender representations, prioritize emotionally sensational narratives over nuanced storytelling, and reduce the diversity of female identities presented on screen.

Importantly, recommendation algorithms should not be regarded as neutral or objective technologies. Their operational logic is embedded within commercial imperatives that prioritize user retention, platform profitability, and continuous engagement. Recommendation models optimize measurable behavioral indicators-including click-through rates, completion rates, viewing duration, and sharing frequency-which inevitably privilege narrative structures capable of producing immediate emotional responses. Under these conditions,

female characters are increasingly transformed into standardized narrative categories whose primary function is to maximize algorithmic performance rather than reflect the complexity of women's lived experiences. Consequently, algorithmic recommendation not only determines the visibility of existing content but also gradually reshapes creative practices by encouraging the repeated production of highly recognizable character archetypes and emotionally intensive plot patterns.

Existing scholarship has examined the overseas dissemination of Chinese short dramas from multiple perspectives, including cross-cultural communication strategies, industrial development, platform expansion, and international market adaptation[3-6]. Studies on algorithmic recommendation have likewise investigated recommendation mechanisms, algorithmic bias, and gender discrimination in digital media environments[7-9]. Meanwhile, research in gender and communication has explored female representation, narrative strategies, audience identification, and affective communication across diverse media forms[10-12]. Despite these valuable contributions, these three strands of scholarship have largely developed independently. Relatively little research has integrated algorithmic recommendation, female representation, and cross-cultural communication within a unified analytical framework capable of explaining how technological infrastructures reshape gender narratives during the globalization of Chinese digital media.

To address this gap, the present study examines female image construction and narrative strategies in overseas Chinese short dramas from the perspective of algorithmic recommendation. Specifically, it addresses three interrelated research questions. First, how do recommendation algorithms shape dominant female character archetypes through mechanisms of content classification, traffic allocation, and behavioral feedback? Second, how does algorithmic logic influence the selection, circulation, and effectiveness of cross-cultural narrative strategies? Third, what challenges does algorithm-driven content distribution pose for the diversity, complexity, and cultural adaptability of female representation? By answering these questions, this study seeks to illuminate the dynamic

interaction between algorithmic governance and gendered storytelling within contemporary global digital media. Through an integrated analysis of female character typologies, narrative strategies, and cross-cultural communication dilemmas, the article contributes to ongoing debates concerning algorithmic power, digital platform governance, and the international dissemination of Chinese cultural products.

2. Algorithmic Recommendation and the Construction of Female Images in Overseas Short Dramas

Having established the theoretical significance of algorithmic recommendation in the globalization of Chinese short dramas, this section turns to the construction of female representation within this platform-based communication ecology. It argues that recommendation algorithms influence not only the distribution of audiovisual content but also the production and visibility of gendered narratives. To demonstrate this process, the discussion proceeds in three stages. It first examines the communication ecology and operational logic of algorithmic recommendation, then identifies the dominant archetypes of female representation that emerge within overseas Chinese short dramas, and finally analyses the algorithmic mechanisms through which these representations are continuously reinforced and reproduced.

2.1 The Communication Ecology of Overseas Short Dramas and the Logic of Algorithmic Distribution

The globalization of Chinese short dramas has been facilitated by an increasingly sophisticated digital communication ecology in which algorithmic recommendation systems serve as the principal mechanism connecting content producers with global audiences. Unlike the international distribution of traditional television dramas, which primarily relied on broadcasting agreements and copyright transactions, overseas short dramas operate within a platform-based ecosystem characterized by personalized recommendation, continuous data collection, and real-time optimization. Consequently, the international dissemination of short dramas is shaped not only by the quality of the content itself but also by the computational logic governing platform visibility.

At present, Chinese short dramas primarily reach overseas audiences through two complementary distribution channels. The first consists of global social media and video-sharing platforms-including TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook-which rely on algorithmically curated recommendation feeds to maximize audience engagement. These platforms exploit extensive user networks and social sharing mechanisms to accelerate the diffusion of short-form video content across national boundaries. The second channel comprises dedicated short-drama applications such as ReelShort, DramaBox, and FlexTV, which have established vertically integrated content ecosystems tailored specifically to serialized short-form storytelling. Unlike social media platforms, these applications integrate content production, recommendation, subscription services, and monetization within a unified commercial framework, enabling more precise user segmentation and personalized content delivery.

The evolution of overseas short-drama distribution reflects a broader transition in China's digital cultural export strategy. Early international expansion largely depended on copyright licensing and straightforward subtitle translation, approaches that often produced limited market penetration due to insufficient localization and inefficient distribution. As recommendation technologies have matured, however, algorithm-driven distribution has gradually replaced traditional broadcasting models. Contemporary platforms continuously analyze users' viewing behaviors-including watch time, completion rate, interaction frequency, payment history, and browsing patterns-to construct dynamic user profiles that enable highly personalized content recommendations. This data-driven matching process substantially enhances content discoverability, improves user retention, and increases the commercial efficiency of cross-cultural communication.

From a technical perspective, recommendation systems generally operate through three interconnected components: content understanding, user modeling, and intelligent matching. Content understanding employs multimodal artificial intelligence technologies-including computer vision, speech recognition, natural language processing, and semantic analysis-to identify narrative themes,

character types, emotional intensity, visual style, and other content features. These characteristics are subsequently transformed into structured metadata that serve as the foundation for recommendation decisions. User modeling integrates historical viewing records, interaction behaviors, demographic information, device characteristics, and temporal viewing habits to construct continuously updated preference profiles. Finally, intelligent matching algorithms-including collaborative filtering, deep learning, reinforcement learning, and hybrid recommendation models-estimate the probability of user engagement and determine which content should be delivered to specific audiences under multiple optimization objectives.

This technological architecture fundamentally transforms the traditional communication paradigm. Rather than requiring audiences to actively search for content, algorithmic recommendation enables content to proactively locate potential viewers. Such a shift significantly lowers the barriers to cross-cultural dissemination by exposing audiences to content they might never have discovered through conventional search mechanisms. For Chinese short dramas seeking international audiences, algorithmic recommendation therefore functions not merely as a distribution tool but as the essential infrastructure enabling global cultural circulation.

Nevertheless, recommendation algorithms should not be understood as neutral technological systems. Their design reflects the commercial priorities of platform economies, where user attention constitutes the primary resource. Recommendation models are optimized to maximize measurable indicators such as click-through rates, viewing duration, completion rates, interaction frequency, subscription conversion, and advertising revenue. Consequently, algorithms systematically privilege content capable of generating immediate emotional responses and sustained audience engagement. This optimization process exerts significant influence on creative production by encouraging producers to adopt narrative structures and character configurations that have previously demonstrated strong algorithmic performance.

Within this technological-commercial ecology, female representation becomes deeply embedded in platform optimization strategies.

Character archetypes, emotional conflicts, and narrative formulas increasingly function as algorithmically recognizable content features rather than solely artistic or cultural expressions. The construction of female images is therefore shaped simultaneously by creative intentions, audience preferences, and the computational logic of recommendation systems. Understanding this interaction provides the necessary theoretical foundation for examining how algorithmic recommendation participates in the production of gender representation in overseas short dramas.

2.2 Dominant Female Archetypes in Overseas Short Dramas

To investigate the construction of female representation in overseas short dramas, this study combines textual analysis with an examination of the operational logic of algorithmic recommendation. Sample selection followed a purposive sampling strategy designed to capture the most influential productions within the current overseas market. Based on comprehensive indicators of viewership, user interaction, and platform popularity, the twenty most popular short dramas released between January 2024 and December 2025 on ReelShort, DramaBox, and TikTok were initially identified, producing a preliminary sample of sixty works. From these, thirty representative productions featuring female protagonists or female-centered narratives were selected for detailed analysis. The sample includes narratives emphasizing female independence, romantic dependence, revenge, personal transformation, and diversified identity construction.

Female characters were analyzed according to three principal dimensions: narrative agency, pathways to self-realization, and positioning within interpersonal relationships. Coding was conducted independently by two researchers, producing satisfactory intercoder reliability. Four dominant categories of female representation emerged from the analysis.

The first category is the independent achiever, characterized by professional competence, emotional autonomy, and strong personal agency. These protagonists typically occupy managerial or entrepreneurial positions, demonstrate resilience when confronting adversity, and pursue individual success independently of male assistance. Rather than defining themselves primarily through romantic

relationships, they prioritize career development, self-actualization, and personal dignity. This character type resonates strongly with contemporary female audiences because it reflects broader social aspirations toward gender equality and women's empowerment. Within cross-cultural communication, the independent achiever functions as a globally recognizable representation of female agency.

The second category is the emotionally dependent heroine, whose narrative trajectory remains closely connected to male protagonists. Although these characters often display kindness, perseverance, and emotional sensitivity, their personal development is frequently conditioned by romantic relationships or male protection. Their narrative value derives less from autonomous decision-making than from their contribution to emotional storylines. This representation reproduces elements of traditional gender ideology, positioning women primarily within domestic or relational frameworks despite superficial appearances of independence.

A third category is the revenge-oriented protagonist, arguably the most commercially successful female archetype within overseas short dramas. These narratives typically follow a highly standardized progression in which the heroine experiences humiliation or betrayal, undergoes personal transformation, and ultimately achieves dramatic revenge or social elevation. The emotional structure-moving rapidly from oppression to empowerment-creates intense audience gratification while requiring relatively limited cultural background knowledge. Consequently, revenge narratives have become particularly compatible with algorithmic recommendation systems that prioritize emotionally stimulating content capable of sustaining viewer engagement.

The final category is the *diversified female subject*, representing attempts to move beyond conventional narrative formulas. Characters within this category exhibit greater psychological complexity, contradictory motivations, and multifaceted social identities. Rather than functioning exclusively as symbols of romance or empowerment, they negotiate multiple roles simultaneously as professionals, mothers, partners, daughters, and independent individuals. Although such representations remain relatively uncommon within current platform ecosystems, they indicate an emerging

trend toward more nuanced portrayals of female experience.

These four archetypes should not be understood as rigid classifications but as dominant patterns generated through the interaction of creative practice and algorithmic recommendation. Their relative visibility varies considerably across platforms. Dedicated short-drama applications such as ReelShort and DramaBox overwhelmingly prioritize revenge-oriented and emotionally dependent narratives because these genres consistently generate high completion rates and strong subscription conversion. By contrast, social media platforms such as TikTok display somewhat greater diversity in female representation owing to broader content ecosystems and more heterogeneous user communities. Nevertheless, even within these platforms, recommendation algorithms continue to privilege emotionally intensive narratives that maximize audience engagement.

This distribution pattern demonstrates that female representation is shaped not solely by artistic preference or cultural ideology but also by platform-specific optimization strategies. Recommendation algorithms effectively determine which female identities become highly visible and which remain marginalized, thereby influencing the evolution of narrative conventions across the global short-drama industry.

2.3 Algorithmic Preferences and the Construction of Female Representation

Algorithmic recommendation systems do not simply distribute pre-existing content. Rather, they actively participate in shaping content production through a recursive process linking data analysis, recommendation, user behavior, and subsequent creative decisions. The construction of female representation within overseas short dramas is therefore increasingly influenced by three interrelated mechanisms: automated content classification, algorithmic traffic allocation, and iterative user feedback.

The first mechanism involves algorithmic content classification. Before content enters recommendation pipelines, algorithms employ multimodal machine learning techniques to identify narrative themes, emotional trajectories, visual aesthetics, character relationships, and dialogue patterns. Female protagonists are categorized through combinations of semantic tags such as career woman, romantic heroine,

revenge queen, single mother, or female CEO. These labels facilitate efficient recommendation by reducing complex narratives into standardized computational categories.

However, algorithmic classification is not a purely objective process. Machine-learning models are trained using historical media content and accumulated user behavior, both of which already reflect longstanding cultural assumptions regarding gender. Previous research has demonstrated that recommendation systems frequently reproduce existing gender stereotypes because biased training data become embedded within algorithmic decision-making. When female characters are repeatedly associated with attributes such as romance, appearance, motherhood, or emotional vulnerability, recommendation algorithms gradually strengthen these associations, reducing the visibility of alternative representations that emphasize intellectual achievement, political participation, or social leadership. Consequently, algorithmic classification contributes to the symbolic simplification of female identity.

The second mechanism concerns algorithmic traffic allocation. Following content classification, recommendation systems estimate the likelihood that individual works will maximize user engagement. Predictions are generated using historical performance indicators including click-through rates, viewing duration, completion rates, sharing behavior, subscription conversion, and payment records. Content demonstrating characteristics similar to previously successful productions is assigned greater initial exposure, while less familiar narrative structures receive comparatively limited recommendation opportunities.

This mechanism closely resembles the cumulative advantage described by the Matthew Effect. Once a particular narrative pattern has demonstrated commercial success, recommendation systems increasingly favor similar content, enabling successful genres to accumulate ever greater visibility. Within overseas short dramas, revenge narratives and emotionally intensive romantic stories consistently outperform more experimental forms of storytelling because they generate reliable engagement metrics. As a result, recommendation algorithms repeatedly amplify these genres, encouraging producers to reproduce similar narrative structures. By contrast, productions featuring psychologically

complex female protagonists or slower-paced character development frequently struggle to obtain sufficient exposure, not because of inferior quality but because algorithms lack historical evidence demonstrating their commercial potential.

The third mechanism involves iterative user feedback, through which audience behavior continuously reshapes recommendation models. Every click, pause, comment, like, subscription, and payment generates new behavioral data that are incorporated into algorithmic optimization. Recommendation systems interpret these signals as indicators of audience preference and subsequently adjust content rankings accordingly. The result is a self-reinforcing feedback loop in which recommendation influences user behavior while user behavior simultaneously validates recommendation.

This recursive process has profound implications for female representation. Once recommendation systems identify revenge-oriented female protagonists or emotionally dependent heroines as commercially successful, they increase the visibility of similar content. Increased exposure generates higher interaction rates, which are then interpreted as confirmation of audience preference. The algorithm subsequently allocates even more traffic to comparable productions, gradually narrowing the diversity of female narratives available within platform ecosystems. Over time, users encounter increasingly homogeneous representations not necessarily because these narratives reflect genuine audience demand, but because algorithmic recommendation has systematically constrained the range of available alternatives.

Accordingly, the construction of female images within overseas short dramas should be understood as the product of continuous interaction among platform algorithms, commercial incentives, creative practices, and audience participation. Recommendation algorithms do not merely influence which narratives become visible; they actively shape the cultural production of gender itself by establishing the conditions under which certain forms of female representation become economically viable and culturally dominant.

3. Cross-Cultural Narrative Strategies and Identification Mechanisms of Female Representation

Having examined how algorithmic

recommendation shapes the construction of female representation in overseas Chinese short dramas, the analysis now turns to the mechanisms through which these representations achieve cross-cultural communication. The international success of female-centered short dramas depends not only on algorithmic distribution but also on narrative strategies capable of fostering audience engagement across diverse cultural contexts. Through carefully designed visual symbols, emotionally intensive storytelling, and continuous algorithmic optimization, female representation becomes increasingly accessible to global audiences and facilitates processes of cross-cultural identification. Accordingly, this section examines the narrative strategies that underpin the international dissemination of female-centered short dramas, focusing on visual representation, emotion-driven storytelling, and the dynamic interaction between audience feedback and algorithmic recommendation.

3.1 Visual Representation and the Construction of Cross-Cultural Identification

Within the transnational circulation of Chinese short dramas, visual representation serves as the primary medium through which female characters are introduced to global audiences. Because short dramas rely on compressed storytelling and fragmented viewing practices, visual information must rapidly establish character identity, narrative context, and emotional orientation. Consequently, costume, mise-en-scène, colour design, camera language, and performance style function as highly condensed semiotic resources that enable audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds to recognize character roles almost instantaneously. The visual construction of female protagonists in overseas short dramas follows a relatively stable coding system. Rather than emphasizing cultural specificity, visual design frequently adopts internationally recognizable aesthetic conventions capable of transcending linguistic and cultural barriers. Such strategies reduce audiences' cognitive burden while facilitating rapid emotional engagement, thereby increasing the likelihood that viewers will continue watching during the crucial opening moments evaluated by recommendation algorithms. Costume design constitutes one of the most important visual markers of female identity.

Professional women are typically portrayed wearing tailored business suits, minimalist accessories, and neutral colour palettes that communicate competence, independence, and authority. These visual characteristics immediately signal occupational status and personal autonomy without requiring extensive narrative explanation. By contrast, emotionally dependent heroines frequently appear in softer colours, flowing fabrics, and more traditionally feminine styling, visually reinforcing characteristics such as tenderness, vulnerability, and emotional sensitivity. In revenge narratives, dramatic transformations in clothing and appearance often symbolize the protagonist's changing social status and psychological growth, allowing audiences to perceive narrative progression through visual contrast alone. Diversified female protagonists, meanwhile, are increasingly represented through less standardized styling strategies that resist immediate categorization and instead emphasize individuality and everyday realism.

Spatial design further contributes to the construction of female identity. Urban office buildings, luxury apartments, conference rooms, and entrepreneurial workplaces commonly accompany representations of independent women, reinforcing themes of professional achievement and economic autonomy. Domestic interiors, family dining rooms, and intimate private spaces frequently frame emotionally dependent narratives, emphasizing interpersonal relationships and family responsibilities. Revenge-oriented narratives often juxtapose contrasting spaces-moving from modest living environments to luxurious settings-to visualize dramatic shifts in power, wealth, and social recognition. Through these carefully constructed spatial environments, viewers quickly infer the social position and life trajectory of female protagonists without the need for lengthy exposition.

Colour also performs significant narrative functions within overseas short dramas. Cool tones, monochromatic palettes, and controlled lighting are frequently associated with workplace narratives, conveying rationality, discipline, and emotional restraint. Warm colours and soft illumination dominate romantic storylines, creating an atmosphere of intimacy and emotional comfort. Revenge narratives often employ striking visual contrasts between dark and bright colour schemes to emphasize

emotional conflict and dramatic reversal. These recurring aesthetic patterns establish visual expectations that facilitate rapid audience comprehension across different cultural contexts.

The relationship between visual representation and character archetype demonstrates a high degree of consistency. Independent achievers are commonly identified through professional attire and modern urban settings; emotionally dependent heroines through domestic spaces and gentle visual aesthetics; revenge protagonists through dramatic visual transformation; and diversified female subjects through more individualized and realistic visual identities. Such visual conventions enable audiences from different cultural backgrounds to construct immediate interpretive frameworks, thereby supporting efficient cross-cultural communication.

Beyond facilitating recognition, visual symbols also play an important role in generating audience identification. Identification theory suggests that audiences establish emotional connections with fictional characters by projecting aspects of their own experiences, aspirations, and identities onto media representations. In overseas short dramas, visual coding initiates this process by providing instantly recognizable representations of success, vulnerability, resilience, or transformation. These symbolic cues invite audiences to experience the emotional journey of female protagonists as if it were their own, thereby strengthening emotional engagement and encouraging continued viewing.

Importantly, algorithmic recommendation further amplifies the significance of visual representation. Since recommendation systems increasingly analyze video thumbnails, opening frames, facial expressions, and visual composition when estimating audience engagement, visual design becomes simultaneously a narrative device and an algorithmically optimized feature. Consequently, the visual construction of female characters is shaped not only by artistic considerations but also by computational strategies intended to maximize visibility within platform recommendation systems.

3.2 Emotion-Driven Storytelling and the Logic of Instant Emotional Gratification

While visual representation provides the initial

foundation for audience engagement, emotional storytelling constitutes the central mechanism through which overseas short dramas sustain viewer attention and facilitate cross-cultural communication. Compared with conventional television dramas, short dramas operate within an extremely compressed narrative structure, requiring emotional conflicts to emerge rapidly and intensify continuously. As a result, emotionally driven storytelling has become the defining characteristic of internationally distributed Chinese short dramas.

Female-centered narratives are particularly well suited to this storytelling model because they provide emotionally accessible experiences that resonate across cultural boundaries. Themes such as workplace discrimination, romantic betrayal, family conflict, social prejudice, and personal self-realization involve emotions that audiences from diverse societies can readily understand, even when cultural values differ. Consequently, emotional universality functions as an effective strategy for reducing cultural barriers and expanding international audience appeal.

A dominant narrative pattern emerging from this context is what Chinese scholarship commonly describes as *shuanggan*—a mode of storytelling that produces immediate emotional satisfaction through rapid cycles of suppression, reversal, and triumph. Rather than translating this concept literally, it may be more appropriately understood as instant emotional gratification, emphasizing the intense psychological pleasure generated by dramatic reversals and accelerated narrative pacing.

Among the various female archetypes identified earlier, revenge-oriented protagonists exhibit the greatest compatibility with this narrative logic. Their stories typically follow a standardized trajectory: the heroine initially suffers injustice, humiliation, or betrayal; subsequently acquires new resources or capabilities; and ultimately overturns existing power relations through decisive retaliation. This progression creates repeated emotional peaks that maintain audience attention throughout the series while requiring minimal cognitive investment. Because viewers rapidly experience anger, sympathy, anticipation, and satisfaction within a short viewing period, such narratives consistently achieve high completion rates and strong audience engagement.

Independent achievers follow a somewhat

different emotional trajectory. Rather than emphasizing revenge, these narratives focus on perseverance, self-improvement, and professional accomplishment. Emotional satisfaction derives from witnessing gradual personal growth and the realization of long-term aspirations. Although this structure unfolds more slowly than revenge narratives, it nevertheless appeals strongly to audiences seeking representations of female empowerment grounded in individual competence rather than romantic fulfillment.

Emotionally dependent heroines frequently occupy the initial stage of emotional transformation. Their narratives often begin with vulnerability, dependence, or victimization before progressing toward greater self-awareness or liberation. However, despite superficial character development, many of these stories continue to define female identity primarily through romantic relationships, thereby reproducing conventional gender norms even while appearing to advocate women's empowerment.

Diversified female protagonists challenge the dominant logic of instant emotional gratification by emphasizing psychological complexity and realistic character development. Rather than relying exclusively on dramatic reversals, these narratives explore internal conflicts, moral ambiguity, and multifaceted social relationships. Although such storytelling possesses greater artistic depth, it often performs less successfully within algorithmic recommendation systems because emotional intensity develops more gradually and may generate lower short-term engagement metrics.

Emotionally driven storytelling in overseas short dramas operates through several recurring narrative mechanisms. The first is dramatic reversal, whereby protagonists rapidly transition from positions of weakness to positions of power, generating strong emotional contrast and audience satisfaction. The second is retributive justice, in which previous antagonists receive punishment proportionate to their wrongdoing, fulfilling audiences' moral expectations and desire for emotional closure. The third is personal growth, highlighting the protagonist's acquisition of confidence, competence, and independence through persistent struggle. These narrative mechanisms frequently overlap, collectively producing emotionally rewarding viewing experiences that encourage continuous

consumption.

From the perspective of cross-cultural communication, emotional storytelling functions because it mobilizes forms of empathy that transcend linguistic and cultural differences. Viewers experience anger toward injustice, admiration for perseverance, sympathy for suffering, and satisfaction at eventual success regardless of their national background. Such emotional universality partially compensates for cultural differences that might otherwise hinder international reception.

Nevertheless, excessive dependence on instant emotional gratification also presents important limitations. When narrative success becomes measured primarily through emotional intensity and audience retention, stories risk sacrificing psychological realism, social complexity, and cultural specificity. Female characters may gradually become vehicles for emotional stimulation rather than multidimensional representations of women's lived experiences. This tension between emotional efficiency and narrative depth constitutes one of the central challenges confronting overseas short-drama production.

3.3 Algorithmic Feedback and the Dynamic Optimization of Narrative Strategies

Algorithmic recommendation systems continuously transform audience behavior into data that guide subsequent content production. Through this recursive process, recommendation algorithms no longer merely distribute existing narratives but actively participate in shaping future storytelling practices. Female representation within overseas short dramas is therefore increasingly influenced by the dynamic interaction between audience behavior, platform optimization, and creative decision-making.

Recommendation systems monitor numerous indicators of audience engagement, including viewing duration, completion rate, replay frequency, comment sentiment, sharing behavior, subscription conversion, and payment activity. These behavioral metrics provide platforms with continuous feedback regarding the effectiveness of particular narrative strategies. Among these indicators, completion rate occupies a particularly significant position because it reflects audiences' willingness to remain engaged throughout an episode. Stories capable of sustaining attention from beginning to end receive higher recommendation priority, thereby

increasing their visibility among broader user populations.

This evaluation mechanism directly influences creative production. Producers increasingly analyze platform analytics to identify narrative structures associated with strong algorithmic performance. Dramatic openings, rapidly escalating conflicts, frequent cliffhangers, and emotionally charged plot twists are therefore systematically incorporated into new productions because previous data indicate their effectiveness in maintaining viewer engagement. Recommendation algorithms thus establish an indirect but powerful mechanism of editorial influence, shaping narrative design through economic incentives rather than explicit content regulation.

The interaction between algorithmic feedback and content creation forms a continuous cycle of optimization. Successful narrative formulas receive greater recommendation exposure, attracting larger audiences and generating additional behavioral data that further validate existing recommendation models. Producers subsequently imitate these successful structures in future productions, reinforcing dominant storytelling conventions across the industry. In this sense, algorithmic recommendation functions not only as a distribution technology but also as a mechanism of industrial standardization.

For female-centered narratives, this process produces contradictory outcomes. On the one hand, recommendation algorithms enable producers to identify themes that resonate strongly with global audiences, thereby increasing the international visibility of women's stories. On the other hand, continuous optimization around measurable engagement metrics encourages the repeated reproduction of commercially successful character archetypes and emotional formulas. Innovation becomes increasingly risky because unfamiliar narrative structures often lack the historical data required to receive substantial algorithmic support.

As a consequence, narrative diversity may gradually decline despite the apparent abundance of available content. Producers seeking commercial success become increasingly reluctant to experiment with unconventional female protagonists or culturally specific storytelling approaches, preferring instead to replicate formulas that recommendation systems have already validated.

Although such strategies improve short-term dissemination efficiency, they also contribute to the homogenization of female representation across global digital platforms.

Ultimately, algorithmic feedback transforms narrative creation into an iterative process governed simultaneously by audience preferences and computational optimization. Recommendation systems do not determine creative outcomes directly; rather, they establish an economic and technological environment within which certain forms of storytelling become systematically more advantageous than others. Understanding this dynamic interaction is therefore essential for evaluating both the opportunities and the limitations of female representation in the era of algorithmically mediated global communication.

4. Cross-Cultural Challenges and Optimization Pathways for Female Narratives in Overseas Short Dramas

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that algorithmically mediated narrative strategies have significantly enhanced the international dissemination of female-centered Chinese short dramas by facilitating audience identification across diverse cultural contexts. However, communication efficiency does not necessarily translate into representational quality or long-term cultural influence. The increasing reliance on algorithmic optimization and platform-driven distribution has also exposed a range of cross-cultural challenges, including the simplification of female representation, the reinforcement of gender stereotypes, and the weakening of culturally specific narratives. These issues highlight the tension between commercial visibility and meaningful cultural communication. Against this backdrop, this section examines the principal challenges confronting female representation in overseas Chinese short dramas and proposes potential pathways for promoting more diverse, culturally responsive, and sustainable forms of algorithmically mediated communication.

4.1 Cross-Cultural Challenges in the Representation of Women

The globalization of Chinese short dramas has significantly expanded the international visibility of Chinese digital cultural products. Nevertheless, the cross-cultural circulation of female-centered narratives also exposes a series

of structural challenges arising from the interaction between cultural differences, platform economies, and algorithmic recommendation systems. Although algorithmically optimized storytelling has enhanced dissemination efficiency, it has simultaneously intensified tensions between commercial visibility and meaningful cultural representation. Consequently, female images in overseas short dramas are increasingly situated at the intersection of technological governance, market logic, and cross-cultural interpretation.

These challenges do not stem solely from differences between Chinese and international audiences. Rather, they emerge through the complex interaction between localized cultural meanings and globally standardized recommendation mechanisms. Narrative formulas that achieve remarkable success within one cultural context may lose persuasive power when transferred to another, while algorithmic optimization frequently privileges emotional universality over cultural specificity. As a result, female representation often becomes increasingly standardized during transnational circulation, gradually sacrificing narrative diversity and cultural depth in pursuit of broader market appeal.

4.1.1 Cultural Discount in the Cross-Cultural Dissemination of Female Narratives

The concept of cultural discount, originally proposed in international media studies, refers to the reduction in the perceived value of cultural products when they circulate beyond the social and cultural environments in which they were produced. Because media texts inevitably embody specific historical experiences, social norms, and cultural values, audiences from different cultural backgrounds may interpret identical narratives in fundamentally different ways. Female representation is particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon because ideas concerning gender roles, family structures, romantic relationships, and women's social status differ substantially across societies.

In the case of overseas short dramas, cultural discount manifests at multiple levels. At the level of values, understandings of female independence vary considerably across cultural contexts. Narratives portraying women as balancing professional ambition with family responsibility may resonate strongly within East Asian societies, where collective obligations remain culturally significant, yet they may

appear insufficiently emancipatory to audiences accustomed to liberal feminist discourses. Conversely, highly individualistic portrayals of female empowerment may fail to generate equivalent emotional resonance among audiences whose social values emphasize family solidarity or community responsibility.

Different cultural understandings of romantic relationships likewise influence audience reception. Storylines emphasizing sacrifice, endurance, or reconciliation within intimate relationships may be interpreted as admirable expressions of commitment in some societies but criticized as reinforcing patriarchal norms in others. Similarly, revenge narratives that rely heavily on social status, family honor, or inherited wealth may carry different symbolic meanings depending on local cultural traditions and legal systems.

Cultural discount also emerges through processes of linguistic and symbolic translation. Although subtitle localization effectively addresses basic semantic communication, many culturally embedded meanings remain difficult to translate. Idiomatic expressions, interpersonal etiquette, family hierarchies, and implicit social expectations often lose nuance when transferred across languages. Consequently, audiences may understand the literal content of a narrative while overlooking its deeper cultural significance. Female characters whose motivations appear coherent within one cultural framework may therefore seem inconsistent or implausible when interpreted through another.

Moreover, emotional expression itself is culturally mediated. While emotions such as love, grief, anger, or hope possess universal dimensions, societies differ considerably in the ways these emotions are publicly expressed and socially evaluated. Narrative strategies relying on intense emotional confrontation may therefore generate divergent audience responses despite their apparent universality. These differences illustrate that successful cross-cultural communication requires more than emotional accessibility; it also demands sensitivity to culturally specific patterns of interpretation.

Importantly, recommendation algorithms may unintentionally intensify cultural discount. Recommendation systems prioritize measurable engagement rather than cultural understanding, encouraging the widespread circulation of emotionally accessible narratives while reducing

opportunities for culturally complex storytelling. As a consequence, female representation may become progressively detached from the social realities that originally gave these narratives their cultural significance.

4.1.2 The Erosion of Narrative Complexity Under Platform Traffic Logic

Beyond cultural discount, overseas short dramas face another significant challenge arising from the commercialization of algorithmic recommendation. Contemporary digital platforms operate within an attention economy in which user engagement functions as the principal indicator of content value. Recommendation algorithms therefore reward narratives capable of generating immediate emotional responses, sustained viewing behavior, and repeated interaction. While this optimization strategy increases dissemination efficiency, it simultaneously exerts considerable pressure on narrative diversity and artistic complexity.

From the perspective of content production, platform algorithms encourage creators to prioritize standardized narrative formulas over experimental storytelling. Since recommendation systems continuously reward successful content patterns, producers face strong economic incentives to replicate proven narrative structures rather than explore unfamiliar forms of female representation. Stories emphasizing rapid emotional escalation, dramatic reversals, romantic conflict, and clear moral polarization consequently become dominant across platform ecosystems. Female protagonists increasingly conform to commercially successful archetypes because deviation from these conventions introduces uncertainty into algorithmic evaluation.

This process contributes to the gradual simplification of female identity. Although contemporary short dramas appear to feature diverse female protagonists—including entrepreneurs, lawyers, physicians, celebrities, and business executives—their underlying narrative trajectories frequently remain remarkably similar. Professional achievement often serves merely as a backdrop for romantic conflict, while personal growth is regularly reduced to dramatic revenge or emotional reconciliation. Complex questions concerning gender inequality, structural discrimination, social class, or work-life balance receive comparatively limited attention because such issues require sustained narrative development

that may not align with platform optimization metrics.

Audience reception further reinforces this tendency. Personalized recommendation systems repeatedly expose users to content resembling their previous viewing preferences, creating increasingly homogeneous media environments. Although audiences retain the ability to choose among recommended works, the range of available alternatives has already been substantially narrowed by algorithmic filtering. Over time, repeated exposure to similar female narratives normalizes particular representations while marginalizing more diverse perspectives. This phenomenon resembles the "filter bubble" or "echo chamber" effect identified in studies of digital media, whereby algorithmic personalization reduces opportunities for encountering alternative viewpoints.

At the level of platform governance, commercial incentives may conflict directly with broader cultural objectives. Recommendation systems are designed primarily to maximize measurable engagement rather than promote artistic innovation or social diversity. Consequently, productions that challenge dominant gender stereotypes or explore complex social issues frequently struggle to receive sufficient algorithmic visibility despite their cultural significance. Recommendation algorithms do not explicitly suppress innovative narratives; instead, they systematically disadvantage them through unequal exposure opportunities and the absence of historical performance data. Over time, this cumulative process generates a structural imbalance in which commercially successful narrative formulas become increasingly dominant while experimental storytelling gradually disappears from mainstream visibility.

The erosion of narrative complexity should therefore be understood not as the consequence of individual creative decisions but as the product of broader interactions between technological infrastructure, commercial competition, and platform governance. Recommendation algorithms shape the conditions under which cultural production occurs, thereby influencing not only which stories become successful but also which forms of female representation remain imaginable within contemporary digital media.

4.2 Promoting Diverse Female Representation

Through Responsible Algorithmic Recommendation

Addressing these challenges requires moving beyond isolated adjustments in narrative content toward a more comprehensive reconsideration of the relationship between technological design, creative production, and platform governance. Rather than viewing algorithms solely as instruments of commercial optimization, they should also be understood as infrastructures carrying important social and cultural responsibilities. Within this context, the concept of responsible algorithmic recommendation offers a valuable normative framework for balancing technological efficiency with public values.

Responsible algorithmic recommendation does not imply abandoning commercial objectives or limiting technological innovation. Instead, it advocates designing recommendation systems that simultaneously pursue economic performance, cultural diversity, and social responsibility. Recommendation algorithms should therefore be evaluated not only according to their ability to maximize user engagement but also according to their contribution to inclusive cultural communication and equitable media representation.

At the level of algorithm design, platforms should incorporate ethical considerations directly into recommendation objectives. Gender diversity, representational fairness, and cultural inclusiveness can be integrated into optimization models alongside conventional performance indicators such as viewing duration and completion rate. Rather than concentrating recommendation resources exclusively on highly repetitive narrative formulas, algorithms could intentionally increase the visibility of productions presenting multidimensional female identities and culturally diverse storytelling approaches. Advances in explainable artificial intelligence and fairness-aware machine learning further provide technical possibilities for identifying and mitigating gender bias within recommendation systems, thereby reducing the amplification of existing stereotypes.

At the level of content production, creators should actively resist the excessive standardization encouraged by platform economies. Female protagonists should be represented as socially situated individuals whose identities extend beyond romance or personal success. Greater attention should be

devoted to women's experiences across different professions, generations, ethnic communities, family structures, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Instead of relying exclusively on binary oppositions between victimization and empowerment, future productions should explore the ambiguities, contradictions, and everyday realities that characterize women's lives in contemporary societies. Such narratives possess greater potential to establish meaningful emotional resonance while also enhancing the cultural credibility of Chinese digital storytelling.

Cross-cultural collaboration offers another important avenue for improving narrative quality. The participation of international screenwriters, translators, cultural consultants, and regional production teams can facilitate more nuanced representations of local cultures and reduce misunderstandings arising from cultural discount. Rather than simply translating existing narratives, overseas productions should increasingly adopt localized adaptation strategies that preserve core thematic concerns while responding to the cultural expectations of specific target audiences.

Finally, at the level of platform governance, stronger institutional mechanisms are required to support sustainable cultural development. Industry associations, regulatory agencies, and digital platforms should jointly establish ethical guidelines concerning gender representation, algorithmic transparency, and recommendation fairness. Platforms may also introduce funding schemes or promotional initiatives specifically supporting innovative female-centered productions that contribute to greater representational diversity despite uncertain commercial returns. Cooperation between technology companies, academic researchers, cultural institutions, and women's organizations could further facilitate evidence-based governance capable of balancing commercial innovation with broader social responsibilities.

Ultimately, responsible algorithmic recommendation represents more than a technical adjustment to recommendation systems. It embodies a broader transformation in the governance philosophy of digital media platforms, emphasizing that technological innovation should enhance rather than constrain cultural diversity. Only when recommendation algorithms become capable of supporting both economic sustainability and meaningful

representation can overseas Chinese short dramas achieve lasting international influence while contributing positively to global discussions of gender and culture.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the construction of female representation and the evolution of narrative strategies in overseas Chinese short dramas through the analytical lens of algorithmic recommendation. By integrating perspectives from platform studies, gender communication, and cross-cultural media research, it has demonstrated that recommendation algorithms have become a decisive force shaping not only the international circulation of short dramas but also the production and reception of female narratives within the contemporary digital media environment.

The analysis reveals that algorithmic recommendation systems influence female representation through three interconnected mechanisms: automated content classification, differential traffic allocation, and iterative user feedback. Together, these mechanisms contribute to the emergence of several dominant female archetypes, including the independent achiever, the emotionally dependent heroine, the revenge-oriented protagonist, and the diversified female subject. While these representations have facilitated the rapid international expansion of Chinese short dramas, they have also encouraged increasing standardization of female identity as commercially successful narrative formulas become repeatedly reproduced within algorithmically governed platform ecosystems.

The study further demonstrates that cross-cultural communication depends heavily upon emotionally driven storytelling and visually recognizable character construction. Narrative strategies emphasizing instant emotional gratification, dramatic reversal, and universal emotional experience effectively reduce cultural barriers and enhance audience engagement across diverse markets. However, the same mechanisms that improve communication efficiency may simultaneously weaken narrative complexity, reinforce gender stereotypes, and intensify the phenomenon of cultural discount. Recommendation algorithms, therefore, function not merely as neutral technological intermediaries but as active participants in the cultural production of gender

representation.

These findings highlight the necessity of reconsidering the relationship between technological innovation and cultural responsibility. Future development of overseas short dramas should move beyond an exclusive reliance on engagement-driven optimization toward a more balanced model that values representational diversity, narrative quality, and cross-cultural inclusiveness alongside commercial performance. The framework of responsible algorithmic recommendation proposed in this study offers one possible pathway for achieving this objective by integrating ethical algorithm design, diversified creative practices, and collaborative platform governance.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. First, the present analysis is primarily based on textual interpretation and publicly observable platform practices; the internal operational mechanisms of commercial recommendation algorithms remain inaccessible. Second, the study focuses on a specific period in the rapidly evolving short-drama industry, and future technological developments may reshape both recommendation systems and audience behavior. Third, although this article discusses cross-cultural communication broadly, further comparative research examining audience reception across different national and regional markets would provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural variation in the interpretation of female representation.

Future research may therefore combine computational communication methods with qualitative cultural analysis to investigate the dynamic interaction among algorithms, content production, and audience behavior on a larger scale. The integration of machine learning, network analysis, and audience ethnography could generate more comprehensive evidence concerning the evolving relationship between algorithmic governance and gender representation. As artificial intelligence continues to transform global media industries, understanding how digital platforms shape cultural narratives will become increasingly important for promoting both technological innovation and cultural diversity in transnational communication.

References

- [1] KUANG Wen-bo. Logic, Ethics and

- Regulation of Intelligent Recommendation Algorithm Technology[J]. Journal of Shenzhen University (Humanities & Social Sciences Edition), 2021, 38(1): 144-151
- [2] Gillespie T. The relevance of algorithms[M]. Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014: 167-194.
- [3] Peng Huiyuan. An Analysis of Optimization Strategies for the Overseas Expansion of Online Micro-Dramas from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication[J]. Media, 2024(6): 52-55.
- [4] MENG T. Study on the Dissemination Logic and Cross-Cultural Strategies of Micro-Dramas[J]. Interdisciplinary Humanities and Communication Studies, 2026, 3: 1-6.
- [5] Yang Li, Peipei Kang. Chinese Micro Short Dramas 'Going global' in the Perspective of Intercultural Communication: Opportunities, Challenges and Breakthroughs[J]. China Digital Publishing, 2026(2): 150-158
- [6] Tu Yan, Chen Yuanchun. Creative Problems and Improvement Strategies of Overseas Micro-Dramas from the Perspective of Trans-cultural Communication" [J]. Contemporary TV, 2025(11): 85-93.
- [7] Wen Fengming, Xie Xuefang. The Operational Logic and Ethical Concerns of Short Video Recommendation Algorithms-From the Perspective of Actor-Network Theory[J]. Journal of Southwest Minzu University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition), 2022, 43(2): 160-169.
- [8] Kheya T A, Bouadjene M R, Aryal S. Unmasking Gender Bias in Recommendation Systems and Enhancing Category-Aware Fairness[J]. 2025. DOI:10.1145/3696410.3714528.
- [9] Guo Xiaoping, Qin Yixuan. Deconstructing the Data Myth of Intelligent Communication: Causes of Algorithmic Bias and Pathways to Risk Governance[J]. Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China), 2019, 41(9): 19-24.
- [10] Long Nan. Narrative Strategies of 'Her-Themed' Micro-Dramas[J]. News Outpost, 2025(14): 79-80.
- [11] Qin Shanshan, Wang Xinhui. Narrative Characteristics, Value Orientations, and Realistic Dilemmas of 'Her-Themed' Micro-Dramas[J]. Vision & Hearing, 2025(1): 47-50.
- [12] Cheng Lu, Shao Lu. A Study on the Construction of Female Images in Micro-Dramas from the Perspective of Empathetic Communication[J]. Media Forum, 2024, 7(18): 4-6.