

# Observation or Insight? Unraveling the Impact of Characters' Image on Interpersonal Communication in Contemporary Chinese TV Series

Haocheng Dai<sup>1</sup>, Diyana Nawar Kasimon<sup>2</sup>, Lay Hoon Ang<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D candidate, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>3</sup>Associate Professor, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia,

Correspondence: Haocheng Dai, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

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## Abstract

A salient determinant of effective interpersonal communication resides in the cultivation of a positive personal image. The intricate interplay between self-image, individual behaviors, and communication abilities highlights the far-reaching influence of personal perception on social interactions. In the contemporary landscape of Chinese television series, exemplified by the production 'Nothing but Thirty', a deliberate effort is made to depict characters that embody the evolving roles of women in modern society. Drawing from relevant literature, this study conducts a comprehensive analysis of characters' image in 'Nothing but Thirty', examining content such as appearance, language, non-verbal cues (body language), and varied scene settings. Adopting a rigorous qualitative case study methodology and leveraging content analysis grounded in the coordinated management of meaning theory and social exchange theory, the research aims to dissect the nuanced dynamics of interpersonal communication as portrayed in the series. The findings illuminate that the dynamic characterizations in contemporary Chinese TV series function as reflective mirrors, capturing the intricate layers of modern interpersonal communication and societal intricacies. This narrative analysis extends beyond the purview of conventional storytelling, offering a scholarly exploration of the intricate fabric of human interaction.

**Keywords:** interpersonal communication, character's image, appearance, language, non-verbal (body language), scene settings

## 1. Introduction

In both professional endeavors and personal realms, effective communication emerges as an indispensable aspect of human interaction. The divergence in communication efficacy among individuals stems from varying conceptualizations of this intricate process. The multifaceted nature of communication effectiveness is intricately entwined with factors such as the communicator's attitude, chosen communication strategies, linguistic modalities (verbal, written, or non-verbal cues), and the timing of communication.

Practically speaking, the diverse psychological and social characteristics arising from disparate living environments and social experiences significantly influence the dynamics of interpersonal communication (Ramaraju, 2012; Khairani et al., 2019). Personal experiences, education levels, and living environments contribute to the formation of distinct knowledge bases and comprehension capacities. Generally, seamless communication tends to thrive among individuals with shared knowledge and professional backgrounds, where psychological and social characteristics serve as dimensions of personal image. The positive personal image, as underscored by Khairani et al. (2019), emerges as a pivotal determinant influencing the intricacies of interpersonal communication.

As China's per capita income experiences sustained growth, heightened societal emphasis on women is evident, leading to a concomitant elevation in their social status and value (Zhang, 2020). In this new era, Chinese television series have taken the initiative to craft narratives authentically portraying female characters in alignment with real-life experiences.

Despite the growing significance of personal image in this evolving landscape, scholarly attention to the ramifications

of personal image on interpersonal communication remains limited. This paper endeavors to fill this research gap by delving into the nuanced impacts of personal image on interpersonal communication, employing a case study approach centered on the Chinese TV series 'Nothing but Thirty'.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Interpersonal Communication*

Interpersonal communication, as delineated by Ramaraju (2012), emerges as a dynamic and multifaceted process characterized by mutual interaction and co-construction. The roots of this phenomenon are embedded in the societal context, with early scholars like Joseph (1972) contextualizing interpersonal communication within the evolving dynamics of societal values, myths, and symbols.

Building upon this historical backdrop, Bourgon et al. (1998) offer a comprehensive definition, portraying interpersonal communication as a nuanced interplay of relationships, behaviors, and interactional states. Their characterization underscores the influence or control achieved through communicative acts, emphasizing the socially constructed nature of this phenomenon.

Practical implications are explored by scholars such as Shelia (1990), who advocates for the use of dramatic dialogue as a paradigm. However, a critical consideration of the applicability of insights derived from staged dialogues to real-world interpersonal exchanges is essential.

Delving into the symbolic nature of interpersonal communication, scholars like Braithwaite et al. (2021) emphasize its pivotal role in identity formation and relationship dynamics. Non-verbal cues and embodied aspects are recognized as integral components, contributing to the richness of communication beyond symbolic exchange.

Manning (2020) contributes a practical foundation by highlighting the importance of direct connections and recognizing the dynamic nature of relationships, subject to evolution and change.

Expanding the scope, Iqbal's (2019) consideration of face-to-face settings beyond physical proximity adds an intriguing dimension. Exploring communication dynamics in virtual platforms, with considerations for non-verbal cues and immediacy, enhances our nuanced understanding of this process.

Identifying factors influencing effective communication, Shrivastava and Prasad (2019) shed light on elements such as the ability to paraphrase and the use of concrete language. Acknowledging the complex interplay of these factors in diverse contexts and cultures contributes to a more nuanced understanding of effective communication.

This paper integrates the concept of 'scene' into the evolution of interpersonal communication theory represents a commendable effort to contextualize communication. Further exploration of the specificity and generalizability of these scene factors across diverse interpersonal contexts will undoubtedly enhance the applicability of this conceptual framework.

In conclusion, the multifaceted understanding of interpersonal communication is continually enriched by various perspectives. From its socially constructed nature and symbolic richness to the dynamic interplay of factors, interpersonal communication emerges as a complex phenomenon that requires ongoing exploration, considering diverse facets, including the intriguing concept of scene.

### 2.2 *The Relationship between Character Image and Interpersonal Communication*

Character image, encompassing abstract facets like personality and internal attributes, serves as a profound influencer in interpersonal communication, extending beyond the visible realm into the nuanced interplay of appearance, words, and nonverbal cues across diverse scenes. This conceptualization aligns with the assertions of scholars such as Sampthirao (2016) and Khairani et al. (2019), who identify character image, also termed personal or self-image, as a pivotal determinant shaping the dynamics of interpersonal communication.

Personal image, a complex amalgamation of outward presentation and inner qualities, transcends the superficial components of dressing, appearance, and grooming. It offers a comprehensive reflection of an individual's life state, accomplishments, ego dynamics, social comparisons, and cultural influences. This nuanced perspective positions personal image as a multifaceted construct that plays a pivotal role in shaping not only self-perception but also how one is perceived by others.

Functioning as a significant bridge in communication, a positive personal image fosters respect, trust, and an openness to in-depth understanding. Beyond intrinsic qualities, the success of character image construction, as highlighted by scholars, hinges on the meticulous integration of costumes, makeup, and props. This holistic approach acknowledges that the external elements are not mere embellishments but integral components influencing the overall communicative impact.

In conjunction with verbal communication, body language emerges as a potent tool in enhancing personal image and cultivating a conducive communication atmosphere. Patel (2014) underscores the importance of body language, incorporating facial expressions and gestures. Gestures, viewed as fundamental components of language, contribute unique information to spoken messages, enriching the communicative context (Clough & Duff, 2020). The symbiotic relationship between speech and gesture, as supported by evidence, underscores the significance of nonverbal cues in augmenting the depth and richness of communication.

Furthermore, personal appearance, operating as a non-verbal symbol, assumes a powerful role in expression and communication. Makeup, hairstyle, and clothing are emphasized as prominent contributors to image building, influencing both self-perception and external judgments. The intricate interplay of intentional and unintentional messages conveyed through personal appearance becomes evident, with uniforms serving as a tangible example. Uniforms not only convey power and authority but also evoke deference and compliance, underscoring the substantial impact of appropriate appearance in establishing credibility and steering clear of unintended negative messages during interpersonal communication (Ali, 2018).

In summary, the interrelation between character image and interpersonal communication involves a holistic consideration of various elements, with personal image acting as a central force shaping both self-perception and external interactions. This comprehensive understanding acknowledges the intricate dynamics between internal attributes and external manifestations, positioning character image as a pivotal factor in creating a compelling and effective communicative presence.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### *3.1 Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory*

The coordinated management of meaning (CMM) theory, initially proposed by Pearce and Cronen in 1980, has undergone continuous refinement and expansion over the years, establishing itself as a significant contributor to communication theory, particularly within the realm of interpersonal communication. According to this theoretical framework, individuals actively participate in the construction of social worlds through communication. Everyday communication manifests in various forms, such as conversation, play, argumentation, peacemaking, or work meetings, employing diverse mediums like talk, gesture, social media, books, or film.

Within these communicative interactions, individuals not only engage socially but also contribute to the creation of meaning within the conversation. This process is intricately connected to interpersonal relationships, where individuals explain and interpret their actions and reactions. Communication, as per the CMM theory, is a dynamic process occurring through interaction and conversation, wherein individuals suggest and attribute meaning to each element of the dialogue, thereby constructing social realities in daily life (Imran et al., 2019).

Importantly, communication is depicted as fundamentally relational, possessing both representative and constitutive dimensions. Moreover, it is highlighted as a process of managing meaning (Jensen & Penman, 2018). The CMM theory delineates six levels of meaning: cultural patterns, life scripts (the Self), relationship, episodes, speech act, and content. For instance, cultural patterns encompass the prevailing context that individuals bring into a relationship. The understanding and interpretation of meaning during a conversation are intricately linked with speech acts, which encompass actions performed through speech, such as complaints, insults, promises, assertions, and doubts.

The CMM theory introduces three fundamental concepts—coordination, coherence, and mystery—to elucidate the dynamics of the meaning management process (Jensen & Penman, 2018). In the context of interpersonal communication, the theory posits that both parties engaged in communicative dialogue interpret each other's semantics based on their individual experiences and cognitive frameworks. This mutual interpretation influences each participant, fostering a dialogue environment where consensus gradually emerges.

#### *3.2 Social Exchange Theory*

The social exchange theory, initially formulated by American sociologist George Homans in the early 1950s, serves as a fundamental framework for understanding the dynamics of interpersonal communication. This theory, rooted in a 'cost-benefit' analysis applied to individuals engaged in social relations, has been defined by scholars as a process initiated by an actor towards a target, involving reciprocal attitudinal or behavioral responses that shape the resultant relationship (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Central to the social exchange theory is the conceptualization of social life as a series of sequential transactions between two or more parties (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Grounded in the idea that 'interaction between persons is an exchange of goods, material, and non-material' (Barbalet, 2017), this perspective extends to the realm of interpersonal communication, viewing all activities between individuals as quasi-economic transactions.

Examining the equilibrium of a communicative relationship, the social exchange theory identifies three primary factors: social rules, relative resources, and individual satisfaction (Barbalet, 2017). Social rules, encompassing elements such as competition, group gain, status consistency, altruism, rationality, and reciprocity, govern the exchanges, while resources, including status, information, goods, love, money, and services, contribute to the dynamic nature of these interactions.

Importantly, social exchange theory significantly influences the satisfaction of social needs within interpersonal interactions, shaping the evolution of relationships. In the developmental process of relationships, individuals engage in a continual assessment of emotional investments and returns, linking specific role relations to distinct social exchanges. Different role relations give rise to diverse behaviors and characteristics.

Within this framework, interpersonal communication emerges as the exchange of information between two or more individuals, inherently grounded in the principles of social exchange theory (Mitchell et al., 2021). This perspective underscores the transactional nature of interpersonal communication, emphasizing reciprocal exchanges that impact the satisfaction of social needs and contribute to the overall dynamics of interpersonal relationships.

#### 4. Research Methods

A case study is one of the most widely used strategies of qualitative social research. It can be an empirical inquiry investigating a phenomenon in its real-life context. It is a research strategy or design rather than a method of data collection. It enables the researcher to explore in depth an event, activity, or process (Priya, 2020). This research chooses 'Nothing but Thirty' contemporary TV series as case, examine the interpersonal communication among the women portrayed in the TV series, explore the influence of the image of young women characters in contemporary TV series on their interpersonal communication.

Nothing but Thirty, a Chinese TV series, mainly portrays the everyday life and challenges of three 30-something women living in Shanghai. Gu Jia, Zhong Xiaoqin, Wang Manni are the three actress and appearance, language, non-verbal-language (body language), and different scene setting are the elements of character image. Thus, this research uses qualitative content analysis to analyze the impact of appearance, language, non-verbal-language (body language), and different scene setting on their interpersonal communication. Through content analysis, this study selected the corresponding content in the TV series 'Nothing but Thirty' based on the four contents related to characters' image sorted out in the literature, combined with the behavioral motivations and purposes in social exchange theory, and speech act in coordinated management of meaning theory comprehensively explores the impact of characters' image on interpersonal communication.

#### 5. Findings

As previously delineated, this paper systematically examines the impact of appearance, language, non-verbal communication (body language), and varied scene settings on interpersonal communication. The ensuing findings correspond to the four contents: appearance, language, non-verbal communication (body language), and diverse scene settings.

##### 5.1 The Impact of Appearance on Their Interpersonal Communication

In the intricate fabric of human interaction, appearance stands as a profound and multifaceted determinant of interpersonal communication dynamics. Beyond mere aesthetics, one's physical presentation serves as a powerful communicator, shaping initial impressions, fostering connections, and influencing the trajectory of dialogue. This study delves into the multifaceted interplay between appearance and interpersonal communication, aiming to unravel the subtle nuances and profound implications that govern this relationship. As we navigate the complex terrain of social exchange, understanding how appearance influences the intricacies of communication unveils a deeper comprehension of the intricate dance that unfolds in our day-to-day connections. Through this exploration, we endeavor to shed light on the intricate mechanisms through which appearance becomes an integral part of the rich tapestry of interpersonal communication.

*Gu Jia dressed up, formally, tied her hair, went to the table, pulled out a chair and sat down to eat.*

*Xu Xuanshan: Oh, my dear wife, do you have a party today*

*Gu Jia: What's wrong? I'm in very formal dress. (Take the chopsticks from Xu Huanshan and pick up the food) I'll accompany you to the company later.*

*Xu Huanshan: Why do you want to come to the company today?*

*Gu Jia: I haven't been there for a long time. I want to go and see everyone in your company. Well, I have made an appointment talking about the tea factory near your company.*

*Xu Huanshan: OK.*

Gu Jia's choice of light makeup and soft curly hair typically reflects her elegant taste as a sophisticated urbanite and a devoted mother. However, a significant shift in her makeup and hairstyle signals a departure from her usual demeanor, embodying a newfound strength in her personality. This alteration in her appearance becomes a powerful non-verbal signal, conveying confidence in her approach to interpersonal communication, where non-verbal cues often wield substantial influence.

Examining the communication dynamics through the lens of CMM theory, Gu Jia and Xu Huanshan engage in the management of meaning and coordination. Gu Jia's real-life stories, such as discussing the tea workshop and visiting Xu's company, are intricately coordinated with Xu's stories, creating a harmonious outcome where Xu Huanshan agrees to Gu Jia accompanying him to the company.

In line with the principles of social exchange theory, both Gu Jia and Xu Huanshan evaluate the emotional investment and returns within the communication. Gu Jia's decision to accompany him to the company holds benefits for Xu Huanshan, garnering envy from colleagues due to Gu Jia's role as his wife. Simultaneously, Gu Jia gains an opportunity to potentially discover any betrayal in their marriage. The delicate balance of emotional exchange leads Xu Huanshan to accept Gu Jia's proposition, preventing potential anger and self-initiated revelations.

The significance of one's appearance in interpersonal communication cannot be overstated. Initial impressions based on appearance often shape the treatment one receives. Gu Jia's strategic use of makeup not only elevates her self-esteem but also instills confidence in the audience, suggesting that she holds the reins in the communication process, ultimately compelling Xu Huanshan to acquiesce to her request.

*When Wang Manni met Liang Zhengxian the first time, she walked up to the bar in a slip dress, on high heels, with curly hair and heavy makeup.*

*Liang Zhengxian: (to the bartender) Please bring her a drink. It's on me.*

*Liang Zhengxian: You are not a guest in this class cabin.*

*Wang Manni: How can you tell? (Clinking glasses) What's the difference between me and the other women in this bar?*

*Liang Zhengxian, a woman in this cabin, doesn't glue her heels, especially a pretty woman like you.*

When meeting Liang Zhengxian, Wang Manni has curly hair and slip dress, which reflect the romantic sincere feeling and her inner ambiguous feelings and her heavy makeup is giving people the first impressions that she is seeking for love.

Clothes and make-up send messages in interpersonal communication. It is telling an information about a person's occupation, hobbies, social class, temperament, cultural accomplishment, belief concept and living habits. From the clothes and make-up of Wang Manni, Liang Zhengxian receive the information and it becomes the topic in the communication process, according to the CMM theory, people co-create meaning through the messages they send and receive in conversation. The communication is shaping the relationship between the two parties involved.

According to the social exchange theory, the model of interpersonal relationship can reflect three different interpersonal needs, including dominant needs and emotional needs, which can be turned into the motivation of communication, thus promoting communication. In the communication, both Liang Zhengxian and Wang Manni have the emotional needs, which drive the communication.

Most people can accurately decode information from general appearance and dress cues, including personality characteristics, information about behaviors, biological traits, health and hygiene, and social roles (Johnson et al, 2002). The appearance and dress cues facilitate the communication and promote the relationship establishment between the two parties involved.

*Wang Manni returned back to Shanghai and met friends at a bar. Wang Manni was in simple and plain formal clothes. She went to Liang Zhengxian, when he appeared in the bar, and Liang Zhengxian stood up to move towards her*

*Liang Zhengxian: I saw you when I came in, and I was hesitant to say hello to you.*

*Wang Manni: Being hesitate is right. It's not like before when we meet, we talk with each other*

*Liang Zhengxian: I know, I owe you a sorry. I am sorry for my wrong before.*

*Wang Manni: (smiling) Never mind.*

*Liang: (musing for a moment) You seem to have changed a lot.*

*Wang Manni: People always change, just early and late.*

*Liang Zhengxian: (smiles) Zhao Jingyu and I are separated. In the future, I will live in Shanghai.*

*Wang Manni: (looking down in silence)*

*Liang Zhengxian: Come on, buy you a drink.*

*Wang Manni: Sorry, my taste has changed.*

Wang Manni's image undergoes a transformation upon her return to Shanghai, as evidenced by her shift from a previous simple fashion style to more sophisticated and plain formal attire. This change reflects the depth of Wang Manni's emotions and her mature approach to life.

In the dialogue, both the communicator and the audience collaboratively construct the content, delving into their self-awareness and relationship dynamics, as posited by the CMM theory. The relationship between Liang Zhengxian and Wang Manni is discerned – they are two lovers. Liang Zhengxian has inflicted emotional pain on Wang Manni, prompting her transformative journey. Wang Manni, having undergone this change, desires to break free from the unchanging Liang Zhengxian. Despite separating from Zhao Jingyu, Liang Zhengxian now seeks Wang Manni to become his lover.

Applying the social exchange theory, Liang Zhengxian attempts to improve his relationship with Wang Manni, going so far as to offer her a drink. Conversely, Wang Manni strives for authenticity and individuality in this interaction, signaling to Liang Zhengxian that she has evolved.

The significance of appearance in interpersonal relationships is context-dependent and varies based on personal values. Clothing and makeup serve as tools through which individuals define and communicate their social identities. Observers can glean social information from individuals' outfit choices, as clothing and makeup inherently carry meanings representative of personalities and values (Feinberg et al., 1992).

*Zhong Xiaoqin walked gently toward Chen Yu., wearing a white skirt and with big red lips.*

*Chen Yu: I did tell you met here at eight o'clock, did not I? Now, it's eleven o'clock.*

*Zhong Xiaoqin: Don't think too much about it. I just went to have my hair done (gently touch the freshly made hair with hand) and have a made-up. I always wait for you. This is the last time we met. You have owned me, now pay back three hours, waiting for me, that is not too much.*

Zhong Xiaoqin, epitomizing the archetype of the ordinary or virtuous woman, typically embraces a leisurely fashion style that exudes a sense of charm and cuteness. However, faced with the prospect of divorce, Zhong Xiaoqin undergoes a deliberate style transformation, opting for bold crimson lips and elegant long skirts to underscore her self-driven journey towards personal growth.

Guided by the coordinated management of meaning theory, the dynamic between Zhong Xiaoqin and Chen Yu becomes a collaborative construction of reality. Within this narrative, Chen Yu patiently awaits Zhong Xiaoqin for approximately three hours as she attends a fair and undergoes a makeup session. The dialogue unfolds with the recounting of past instances where Chen Yu habitually arrived late, subjecting Zhong Xiaoqin to prolonged waits. In the present context, Zhong Xiaoqin's deliberate delay serves as a symbolic act of retribution, compelling Chen Yu to endure a protracted wait—a symbolic repayment for his prior transgressions. This contextual backdrop shapes the trajectory of their conversation.

Drawing insights from the social exchange theory, Chen Yu seeks an understanding of Zhong Xiaoqin's intentional delay, while Zhong Xiaoqin endeavors to communicate her dissatisfaction with his historical tardiness. Given Chen Yu's track record of making Zhong Xiaoqin wait, her calculated act of reciprocity emerges as an assertion of fairness, retribution, and corrective discipline.

Clothing and fashion, as embodiments of visible social identity expressions, constitute a form of non-verbal communication. They convey an individual's thoughts, emotions, desires, and group affiliations, serving as communicative tools for expressing personal and social identities. In the realm of interpersonal communication, clothing and fashion fulfill communicative purposes by deploying symbolic codes that signify transformative messages. Zhong Xiaoqin's choice of attire and makeup communicates a narrative of empowerment, signaling to Chen Yu a profound shift in her demeanor and newfound strength (Akdemir, 2018).

### *5.2 The Impact of Language on Their Interpersonal Communication*

Language functions as a paramount instrument for interpersonal communication and information dissemination within social and organizational contexts. Constituting a system of symbols or auditory cues, its principal aim is the effective conveyance of information between individuals or entities. Despite the commonality of language usage, disparities in language literacy contribute to nuanced interpretations of shared information. Upon scrutinizing the intricacies of language utilization, discernible traits and characteristics emerge. Individuals characterized by patience, collaboration,

supportiveness, and compassion tend to engage in topic-centric communication, often employing closed-ended questions in their interactions. Conversely, those exhibiting traits of extroversion, enthusiasm, and self-motivation, emblematic of an enterprising spirit, typically adopt an enthusiastic feedback style within the realm of interpersonal communication. The subtleties inherent in language style thus serve as a reflective surface, elucidating the diverse personalities and communication preferences intrinsic to individuals within this academic discourse.

*Zhong Xiaoqin: Tell me, if I give birth to this child, how bad can it be?*

*Gu Jia: Do you want to hear the truth?*

*Zhong Xiaoqin: I have to know the biggest price; I need to know that whether I can afford it.*

*Gu Jia: The truth is, having a baby is a particularly bad thing. (Episode 3)*

According to the coordinated management of meaning theory, the collaborative construction of social reality unfolds in a scenario where Zhong Xiaoqin contemplates giving birth to her baby. Her concerns revolve around the affordability of this decision, while Gu Jia's experiences lead her to view childbirth as a particularly challenging endeavor. The interaction between the two contributes to the shaping of a shared social reality around the concept of childbirth.

Examining the situation through the lens of the social exchange theory, Zhong Xiaoqin seeks information about the implications of giving birth, specifically whether it is a negative experience. In contrast, Gu Jia endeavors to convey the truth to Zhong Xiaoqin, emphasizing the challenging nature of childbirth as a reality she should confront.

The language employed in this dialogue offers insights into Gu Jia's image as a mother. Despite her maternal role, she exudes an enterprising personality, a strong sense of crisis, and a compelling desire to exert control over the situation, influencing the unfolding narrative within the framework of their relationship.

*Zhong Xiaoqin: If marriage is like this, why should I get married?*

*Zhong Xiaoqin's mother: Why do you want to get married? Why don't you get married when others do? You want to be a leftover woman, don't you?*

*Zhong Xiaoqin: I got married just because you said I should get married.*

*Zhong Xiaoqin's mother..... What do you mean women don't have to get married, be independent, don't be bound by the family..... When she got old, she knew what it was to be lonely, what it was to die, and how miserable it was not to marry. You listen to mom. Mom's been married. Mom understand the marriage, don't I? Chen Yu is very good man, he has good appearance, and he is a self-motivated person. he, as a student from such a small place, has entered the university, but also sleeked a position at the TV station as a big editor, how many of young people can compare with him?*

*Zhong Xiaoqin: Mom, I tell you, it is because of your attitude so that Chen Yu mistreating me everywhere! (Episode 8)*

The CMM theory highlights the dynamic nature of conversation, emphasizing the reciprocal influence between speakers as they engage in dialogue. The evolving context of a conversation plays a pivotal role, shaping the meaning and direction of the communication process. In the specific context outlined, the dynamics involve Chen Yu's perceived inadequacies in treating Zhong Xiaoqin, Zhong Xiaoqin's mother advocating for her marriage to Chen Yu, and Chen Yu's status as a university graduate and television station editor. These contextual elements significantly impact the communication's meaning.

Within the framework of CMM, both participants in the conversation maintain their individual perspectives while remaining open to the influence of the other. The culmination of their interaction results in a state of 'discordant coordination', wherein they understand the same behavior differently in various situations. Furthermore, the theory posits that relationships serve as guiding forces for behavior and offer predictive insights into the future. In this particular dialogue, the relationship at play is that of a mother and daughter.

The conversation serves as a canvas to depict Zhong Xiaoqin's image as a good girl, shedding light on her character within the framework of her relationships and the unfolding context.

*Wang Mani: Uncle Yu, you said that I felt that Shanghai was not my home when I was in Shanghai, and now I have returned, I feel that my home here is even no more a home to me.*

*Uncle Yu: In the past two years, I rented this small loft to a seafarer; he went back to the ship after staying for less than a year. He said that every time he went to sea, he would be on a boat for two or three years, and no boat would be a home for him, and when he got to the shore, he would go wherever he went, and the more he drifted, the more he couldn't find a home (episode 31).*

In line with the coordinated management of meaning theory, the fabric of dialogue is intricately woven with speech acts

that encompass a spectrum of expressions, including complaints, insults, promises, assertions, doubts, and more. To unravel how speech acts contribute to the plot, delving into the content becomes imperative. Every conversation intertwines the narrated story with the underlying real story. In the instance of Wang Manni, the tale told revolves around her experiences living in Shanghai and Uncle Yu renting a room to a seaman, who shares his perspectives on transitioning from shipboard life to land. Yet, the genuine story emerges when Wang Manni returns home after years in Shanghai, only to confront a changed hometown, leaving her with profound doubts. Uncle Yu refrains from providing direct answers but instead chooses to convey meaning through storytelling, possibly to avoid bluntness or to encourage Wang Manni to deeply grasp the intended significance.

Applying the lens of the social exchange theory, Wang Manni's quest for answers regarding her disconnected feelings both in her hometown and Shanghai prompts her inquiry to Uncle Yu. Rather than offering a direct response, Uncle Yu opts for storytelling, perhaps intending for Wang Manni to introspect and discover the answers on her own.

Furthermore, the language utilized in the dialogue serves as a mirror reflecting Wang Manni's image. Her exposure to the allure of big cities, coupled with a potent sense of vanity, renders her discontent with the confines of a small town, shaping her character and influencing her communication dynamics.

### 5.3 The Impact of Body Language on Their Interpersonal Communication

Indeed, body language stands as a pivotal element in contemporary communication. It serves as a non-verbal channel through which we express our confidence, tension, and a spectrum of emotions, including anxiety. The adept use of body language not only facilitates more effective communication but also holds the power to influence and shape the behavior and thoughts of the other party involved in the communication process. Research by Patel (2014) and Çalışır (2015) underscores the significant impact of body language on communication dynamics. A mastery of positive body language enhances one's expressiveness, making the conveyed messages more compelling and persuasive. Moreover, it fosters an environment where the other party is more receptive to the conveyed points of view. In essence, recognizing and harnessing the potential of body language contributes not only to effective communication but also to the ability to exert influence and foster understanding in interpersonal interactions.

*Gu Jia: .... I came to you today because you get in touch with my son, and you touched my bottom line.*

*Lin Youyou: It seems that your bottom line is not Xu Huanshan,.....*

*Gu Jia: ... What do you mean by showing this to my son? Do you want to tell him that his mom and dad will divorce? I tell you, if my son has any psychological problems, or if he is autistic, you are underestimating what a mother can do. Do you know how Xu Xianshan begged not to leave home? You don't think about it (the divorce).*

*Lin Youyou: I know, he said, you two don't divorce because of having a child, what if you don't have children? Let's make a try.*

*(Gu Jia give Lin Youyou a slap)*

*Gu Jia: Listen, it is the last time I warn you, if you dare to get in touch with my son again, you can try! I have already terminated this room, the landlord will take it in three days, if you still want to save some dignity for yourself, I advise you to leave as you come here (episode 39).*

Creating meaning in conversation is a shared responsibility within the communication process, as posited by the coordinated management of meaning theory. Both the sender and receiver contribute to this meaning-making process. In the context of CMM theory, managing meanings is intricately intertwined with the context and narratives that shape our understanding. Illustrating this, the scenario involves Xu Huanshan's extramarital affair with Lin Youyou, wherein Lin Youyou visits Xu Huanshan's son to discuss their parents' divorce. The meaning derived from the communication is Xu Huanshan sternly instructing Lin Youyou not to touch their son before abruptly leaving the city.

Drawing insights from the social exchange theory, Lin Youyou seeks confirmation of Xu Huanshan's love, while Gu Jia aims to caution Lin Youyou against interacting with her son and advises her to leave. The emotional tension, fueled by Lin Youyou's involvement with Gu Jia's son, prompts Gu Jia to express her anger with a slap.

Recognizing the role of body language in enhancing communication skills, it's important to note that body movements, like words, carry their own content and meaning. In this case, Gu Jia's slap signifies her displeasure with Lin Youyou's actions. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that expressions of anger through physical gestures may hinder effective communication.

While body language can enrich language expression by making information more vivid and intuitive, fostering understanding and acceptance, it also serves as a conduit for emotional communication. Facial expressions, gestures, and even the act of smiling or frowning convey the speaker's emotional state, enhancing the overall appeal and affinity in communication. It's imperative to recognize cultural nuances in body language to ensure effective cross-cultural communication (Uzun, 2021).



#### 5.4 The Impact of Different Scene Setting on Their Interpersonal Communication

Individuals commonly adopt varied communication methods depending on the specific scenarios they encounter. Interpersonal communication, in essence, takes on different characteristics in diverse scene settings. The environment or scene setting serves as a crucial backdrop for communication, and its impact on effective communication cannot be understated. Regardless of the form it takes, communication is intricately influenced by a myriad of factors within the comprehensive context of its surroundings. The scene setting, as a pivotal arena for interpersonal communication, significantly shapes the dynamics of effective communication. In the realm of interpersonal communication, a thoughtful approach involves initially considering the inherent nature of the subject matter to be communicated. Subsequently, the determination of the scene's impact on communication is made, a decision grounded in the intrinsic qualities of the content itself. This strategic alignment ensures that the communication environment complements and enhances the nature of the communication, contributing to its overall effectiveness.

*At night, Zhong Xiaoqin listened to Chen Xu's persuasion to see Chen Yu*

*Zhong Xiaoqin: Chen Yu? (went to the balcony)*

*Zhong Xiaoqin: Chen Yu*

*Chen Yu: Why are you here?*

*Zhong Xiaoqin: Why do you sleep here? Are you okay?*

*Chen Yu: I'm okay*

*Zhong Xiaoqin: You don't seem to be OK, do you?*

*Chen Yu: Have you eaten then? There doesn't seem to be much to eat at home, so you can order some takeaway*

*Zhong Xiaoqin: Chen Yu, what are you doing? You want to die young at the age of thirty-three, don't you?*

*Chen Yu: I don't die, I am just tired and panicked, and I want to rest for a while recently. What a big deal that make for all of you come to see me? We don't have anything to do with each other, why are you so careful? (Episode 30)*

In the somber setting of Chen Yu's home, a poignant scene unfolds where a person, grappling with illness and adversity, receives a visit from a caring friend, who also happens to be his ex-wife, Zhong Xiaoqin.

Within the analytical framework of the coordinated management of meaning theory, the intricacies of coordinating actions and crafting meanings in the communication process find expression through speech acts. The dialogue between Zhong Xiaoqin and Chen Yu is punctuated by various speech acts, encompassing complaints, assertions, and inquiries. Notably, Zhong Xiaoqin poses several questions, prompting assertions from Chen Yu in response.

Simultaneously, the lens of the social exchange theory offers insights into the dynamics at play. When confronted with illness, the primary needs revolve around companionship, care, and words of encouragement. Zhong Xiaoqin, cognizant of these needs, endeavors to express her care for Chen Yu and seeks to glean more information about his current situation through thoughtful questioning.

This poignant communication exchange within the confines of Chen Yu's home epitomizes the convergence of both CMM and social exchange theory, showcasing the nuanced interplay of coordinating actions, making meanings, and the reciprocal dynamics of care and support in the face of adversity.

*At a jewelry store*

*Wang Mani: Diamonds and jewelry carry women's dreams, and no matter what situation women are in, they should have the right to dream (have the right to own diamonds and jewelry).*

*Ms. Chen: This is the dream of all women; it is not expensive.*

Within the opulent confines of Wang Mani's high-end shopping mall, particularly in a lavish jewelry store, a captivating tableau unfolds as Ms. Chen, adorned with a canvas bag filled with vegetables, meticulously selects a set of accessories worth millions.

This opulent backdrop serves as a nuanced canvas for analysis through the prism of social exchange theory. In any social interaction, both parties harbor distinct purposes and favored activities, anticipating compliance from the other to fulfill their individual objectives. This intricate dance of social exchange involves the deliberate influence of one party over the actions, thoughts, and emotions of the other. Trust, emerging as a relational structure, is posited as the culmination of positive social communication.

Applying these tenets to consumer communication, the emphasis lies in crafting an optimal communicative effect

characterized by clarity, consistency, and efficiency. The interpersonal communication deployed assumes a pivotal role in shaping consumers' expectations regarding a brand's attributes and benefits. This dynamic interplay within interpersonal communication resonates through the consumer psyche, ultimately imprinting upon attitudes and steering the course of purchasing intentions.

In essence, the sophisticated ambiance of the high-end shopping mall, coupled with the unconventional narrative of Ms. Chen's vegetable-laden entrance, becomes a stage where the intricate dance of social exchange theory unfolds. The chosen communication strategies wielded in this affluent setting become conduits for shaping perceptions, nurturing trust, and ultimately influencing the intricate interplay between consumers and their brand affinities.

*At a hotel private room*

*Gu Jia: Hello, Mr. Wan,*

*Mr. Wan: Hi, Gu Jia, you invited me, but I waited for you here, it doesn't seem to be suitable.*

*Gu Jia: It's not five o'clock yet. It's you who arrived early.*

*Mr. Wan: (laughing), you said that you are quite embarrassed to make an appointment, you see that we have dinner before the day is still bright. You arranged a second one for me didn't you. Well, please don't worry,*

*I have ordered all the wine and dishes.*

*Gu Jia: Sorry, (with a head up), Mr. Wan. You should understand a wife and mother like me. My child is still waiting for me at home.*

*Mr. Wan: Why do you always make me understand you. What is more, (with a finger clicking on the table) you apologize to me by treat me here today.*

*Gu Jia: Yes, (nodding) I officially apologize to you today.*

*Mr. Wan: (Turning the dishes on the table, gesturing Gu Jia to sit down)*

*Gu Jia: (Reluctantly putting down the bag, holding up a small glass of wine, taking a small sip of the wine, then drinking it all in one gulp. Showing the empty glass to Mr. Wan before preparing to pour the wine)*

*Mr. Wan: Wait a while, standing and drinking is so tiring. Come here (patting your thighs) to drink.*

*Gu Jia: (Holding a pot of wine and a glass, walking towards Mr. Wan) I apologize for Xu Huanshan.*

The backdrop is set in the private confines of a hotel room, where Gu Jia endeavors to extend an apology to Mr. Wan on behalf of Xu Huanshan, as per the dictates of the CMM theory. The narrative unfolds as a critical episode precipitated by Xu Huanshan's impassioned actions, resulting in the alienation of a significant customer base comprising 50% of the total orders. Gu Jia, cognizant of the peril this poses to the company's financial stability, assumes the responsibility of salvaging the situation by extending a heartfelt apology. However, this endeavor takes an unexpected turn in the face of Mr. Wan's unreasonable demands, leading Gu Jia to delineate her boundaries and opt for a strategic withdrawal. The interpretation and enactment of these episodes are inherently nuanced, contingent upon the intricacies of the relationships involved.

Drawing from the social exchange theory, a robust framework for deciphering the dynamics at play, one discerns that individuals wield a decisive influence in the exchange process. Within this theoretical paradigm, actors determine their behaviors based on a careful calculation of costs and benefits, independent of external constraints. Mr. Wan's unreasonable demands, perceived as inequitable by Gu Jia, prompt her to exercise agency, forsaking the exchange and concluding the communication.

In the interplay between scene setting and communication strategy, a clear dominance emerges. The negotiation within the private confines of the hotel room takes on the characteristics of a transactional deal, where both parties articulate their requirements for the exchange. The unfolding dynamics underscore the pivotal role of scene setting in shaping the trajectory of communication strategies, offering a strategic vantage point from which interpersonal negotiations unfold.

## 6. Discussion

In cinematic and television productions, language manifests primarily through dialogue, playing a pivotal role in character image construction. The use of language depends on interpersonal behavior (Yilmaz & Peña, 2015), different behavioral motivations lead to different communication methods, and different characters' image dominate their respective ways of speaking. Simultaneously, body language emerges as an equally vital facet, serving as a potent tool in character portrayal within these artistic realms.

The delineation of character image and inner activities heavily relies on the interplay of verbal expression and non-verbal cues. An individual's general use of nonverbal behaviors was positively correlated with the pleasure and

affection motives (Myers & Ferry, 2001). While scripted lines convey explicit meanings, body language becomes instrumental in conveying nuances and subtleties that transcend verbal articulation. Beyond its role in character depiction, body language assumes a significant function in propelling the narrative of cinematic and television works, offering a means to convey the unspoken depths of a character's psyche.

Moreover, the outward appearance serves as a visual manifestation of individual preferences, identity, and life attitudes, contributing significantly to character development. Gul (2021) states that when a person first meets or interacts with someone, they evaluate their appearance. Therefore, appearance is an important part of constructing the character image and interpersonal communication in TV series. Scene settings further amplify the character's image, with different environments spotlighting varied personality traits and eliciting diverse emotional responses.

In contemporary Chinese TV series, interpersonal communication is affected by many contents that make up character's image, including appearance, language, non-verbal and different scenes. From a unilateral perspective, different content analyzes of characters' image will deduce different degrees of impact on interpersonal communication. In general, characters' image will directly dominate the occurrence, process and results of interpersonal communication.

## 7. Conclusion

The multidimensional portrayal of Gu Jia, Zhong Xiaoqin, and Wang Manni, spanning appearance, language, non-verbal communication (body language), and distinct scene settings, meticulously crafts their individual personas. Gu Jia emerges as a resilient figure, driven by familial devotion and characterized by strength, high emotional intelligence, independence, and decisiveness. Zhong Xiaoqin embodies the archetypal good girl, exuding sweetness and amiability while grappling with a subtle reliance on others. In contrast, Wang Manni, the Shanghai drifter, radiates vibrant energy coupled with ambitious aspirations.

This differentiation in personal image reverberates through the intricacies of interpersonal communication. Within the realm of contemporary Chinese TV series, the variances in characters' personas manifest in distinct language styles and speech patterns. These linguistic nuances extend beyond mere vocabulary, encompassing tone, intonation, and a nuanced alignment with the core cultural meanings embedded in the narrative of contemporary television series. Moreover, individuals with contrasting characters or personal images adeptly convey their attitudes, emotions, and intentions through a rich tapestry of non-verbal cues—facial expressions, postures, and eye movements. The meticulous crafting of characters within TV series profoundly influences communication dynamics, encapsulating not only verbal and non-verbal contents but also the specific settings in which these interactions unfold. Crucially, the contemporary social milieu, intricately reflected in TV series, plays a pivotal role in shaping these characters. The diversification of contemporary societal norms gives rise to a kaleidoscope of character images, thereby delineating the connotative essence of interpersonal communication. These characters, with their diverse attributes and communication styles, serve as conduits for portraying language nuances and non-verbal intricacies, offering a vivid reflection of the evolving socio-humanistic fabric of the present era.

Nowadays, a large number of viewers are attracted by the plots of contemporary TV series, and many similar plots will resonate with the audience. Because of the name 'TV series', most people will stop their understanding of the content in the virtual situation created by the director, and only focus on the appearance of the content of the TV series. In fact, through the content analysis of contemporary TV series, we can gain insight into contemporary TV series are the representation of reality on screen. In essence, the dynamic characterizations showcased in contemporary Chinese TV series serve as a mirror reflecting the multifaceted layers of modern interpersonal communication and the intricacies of societal complexities, weaving a cohesive narrative that transcends mere storytelling to mirror the rich tapestry of human interaction.

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## Authors contributions

Dr. Dai, Dr. Diyana and Dr. Ang were responsible for study design and revising. Dr. Dai was responsible for data collection. Dr. Dai drafted the manuscript and Dr. Ang and Dr. Diyana revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. Dr. Diyana guided the content analysis process, Dr. Ang reviewed and revised the article in detail.

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