Design and Application of a Methodology for Assessing the Strength of Female Leadership in Chinese Literary Works

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Abstract: Classic works of literature have created many unique figures of female leaders. These works provide excellent material to support this research on the perception of female leadership in their time period. In order to investigate the performance of female leadership in Chinese literature, this paper designs a model for assessing the strength of female leadership in literary figures based on a corpus and Nvivo qualitative research method and integrates it with the analysis of the literary context to form a paradigm for assessing the strength of female leadership in literary figures. At the same time, this research applies and validates this assessment paradigm by selecting female leaders from three different Chinese literary works of different periods. The significance of this research lies in the design of an interdisciplinary model for assessing the strength of female leadership based on leadership theory and realizes qualitative analysis of the strength of female leadership in literary figures. This research also gives three prospects, hoping that future research will be based on a social gender perspective, that more attention will be paid to the role of literature in historical leadership studies, and that a method for assessing the strength of female leadership in literary figures in an international context will be devised.

Keywords: Literary Image, Female Leadership, Corpus, Qualitative Study

1. Introduction

A country's classic literature is a national treasure. A large number of classic literary works have created many distinctive and classic figures. These literary figures embody the social and cultural traits of different eras and carry the values and qualities of an era, so they deserve to be studied and explored in depth by researchers. If we focus on the leaders in Chinese literature, they have evolved with history and are full of unique charms. Among them, some of the classic female leaders in literature have attracted our attention: have the literary comprehension of the leadership styles of female leaders changed with the times? It is true that the comprehension of leadership styles in literature comes from the author's understanding of the leaders of the specific time, and that it is the author who incorporates her own perception of the time in which the work was written into the conception of female leaders so that these female leaders have traces of the leadership styles of the corresponding time. In the history of leadership studies, the softer leadership style of women (or "female leadership") was gradually discovered and valued, to the extent that it led to a new change in management studies; and in the real world, women leaders at different times are subject to differing popular understandings of what it means to be a leader, revealing different strengths of female leadership - all of which are documented in the literature that reflects the qualities of the times, making them vivid examples of female leadership. Taking this a step further and analyzing the continuum of female leadership traits across historical periods, this research promises to reveal changes in the perception of female leadership at a societal level, and the results of this transmutation will vividly respond to the points made by many researchers who have studied the transmutation of female leadership across time. It is therefore crucial to devise a method to assess the strength of female leadership in literary figures. The author argues that the target assessment method should not only integrate leadership theories and research methods commonly used in literature but also define the strength of female leadership in literary figures from the perspective of qualitative analysis, in

order to gain insight into the distinctive leadership styles embedded in the leaders of the period.

To sum up, based on the "contingency theory of leadership" and "trait theory of leadership", this research designs a method to assess the female leadership strength of literary figures. It is hoped that the assessment of the female leadership strength of literary figures can be achieved based on a corpus research method and a qualitative analysis framework. Meanwhile, the author believes that the environment in which the leader is placed (social and organizational environment) affects the display of leadership ability, and therefore analyses the context in which the literary figure is placed based on the "contingency theory of leadership", and incorporates it into the design of the method for assessing the strength of female leadership in the figure. This research then validates the method by selecting three classic literary figures from Chinese literature and applying the method to them. Overall, this research builds on leadership theories to assess the strength of female leadership in literary figures and integrates qualitative analysis and linguistic research methods to design this leadership assessment method and finally implement it in an empirical application in Chinese literary works. This research also affirms the value of literary works for the study of leadership in a specific period, and it is expected that the design of this interdisciplinary leadership strength assessment method will provide more possibilities for future empirical research on female leadership.

2. Literature Review

Leadership is an important topic in management, conceptualized and used by people as early as the 14th century. Throughout the history of leadership research, since the beginning of the 20th century, scholars have proposed different theories of leadership from different entry points: trait theory of leadership, in which the source of leadership is some specific qualities that leaders possess either innately or acquired; behavioral theories of leadership, which turns to the study of specific behaviors of leaders, arguing that effective leadership behaviors can be acquired through later shaping and training; contingency theory of leadership, which separates out some situational factors, arguing that the effectiveness of leadership depends on situational factors; average leadership style describes charismatic and instrumental leadership according to the leader's role in change, and argue that effective leadership requires providing vision, inspiration and a focus on action. In present-day leadership research, niche research areas such as leadership in context and female leadership have received much attention. In his discussion of the value of leadership studies, Zhu (2021) suggests that leadership studies not only seek to explain leadership activities themselves but also attempt to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of leadership in practice[1]. Research such as the aggregation of leadership traits and the analysis of leadership types in different contexts can help the management of a company or organization to achieve an understanding of the role of a leader and thus better improve management and leadership effectiveness.

In the exploration of the development and evolution of female leadership, it can be found that research on female leadership is mainly based on the study of gender differences in leadership styles. Gu (2020) summarizes past research and clarifies that female leaders will exhibit more transformational leadership styles, while men tend to have more transactional leadership styles[2]. Such differences in leadership styles naturally lead to differences in management behaviors, with Zhou (2011) suggesting that female leaders have a softer management style and are more reflective of human-centered management traits[3]. Focusing on female leaders in China, Du (2015) points out that traditional female leaders under the social system were neutral or masculine in the 1950s and 1960s, with the slogan that women were "quasi-men", advocating gender equality at the expense of women's collective self-perception[4]. As the new socialist China promoted women's emancipation, women's self-perceptions became clearer and their sense of self-identity increased. At a time when traditional leadership types were losing their edge, the transformational leadership qualities of female leaders were well-positioned to help organizations adapt and achieve their goals more effectively.

According to Wang (2011), the literature of each era is a product of the period in which it is written, reflecting the understanding of a particular concept at a particular time, and the literary figures in literature reflect the cultural image of the country at a particular time[5]. Each work is produced by the writer in a specific time and space, in a specific context, and under a specific mood, and is closely linked to the spiritual state, living customs, values, and aesthetic ideals of people in that time and place. Literary works are mirrors reflecting the environment of their time and a mapping of social reality, while the literary figures in literary works epitomize the image of the characters of a particular time. Focusing on female leaders in Chinese literary works, where the understanding of female leaders also comes from the author's perception of the current society in a specific era, thus giving rise to the conception of the image of female leaders in the works.

From the perspective of leadership research, in the past studies on female leadership, empirical analysis of female leaders in the real society dominated by Chinese scholars, and there are few studies that analyze the leadership qualities of female leaders based on the literary figures of literary works, and the development of female leaders in different periods is often limited to the review of theories and research on the current situation; from the perspective of literary works, most of the existing literature on the portrayal of female figures is generalized literary criticism, and there is little qualitative analysis focuses on female figures in these works.

Generally speaking, literature is an important material for reflecting the characterization of a particular time period and its environment. Female leadership is an important research topic today, and an analysis of female leadership in Chinese literature at a particular time will help to understand the cognitive qualities of Chinese female leadership in different periods. Therefore, based on leadership theory, this research combines corpus research and qualitative research methods to design a method for assessing the strength of female leadership in literary figures, in order to analyze the characteristics and changing trends of leadership images in different Chinese eras.

3. A Methodology for Assessing the Strength of Female Leadership in Chinese Literary Works

3.1 Literary Works and the Selection of Leaders in Them

This research argues that a prerequisite for the effective implementation of this assessment method is the ability to identify target appropriate leaders in literature. In line with the many former pieces of research on gender leadership styles, this research has chosen to focus on female leaders in literature, taking into account the biological gender perspective of leadership categorization. As for the classification and definition of literary works, this study mainly refers to Wang's (2011) classification of human literature in terms of time[5], i.e., classical literature and modern literature. The author agrees with Wang's view on the value of literature in time, and also considers literary history as a product of the time in which the writer lived; similarly, considering the specificity of the large volume of texts and the distinct expressive nature of the figures required for the assessment method, if we take the "four-division" methods of Chinese literature, i.e., poetry, prose, fiction, and drama, as an example[6], the novel (or the narrative category of the "three-division" methods of foreign works) is the most likely to be the ideal textual material. In summary, in order to explore the qualities of female leadership in a particular social period, the fictional genre of literature should be chosen for its chronological classification, because of its strong periodical value, material richness, and character distinctiveness.

When it comes to assessing the strength of the female leadership of a literary figure, the key point is also the correct choice of the right female figure in the literature. The first step is to identify the leadership qualities embedded in the literary figure, as defined in this study by Miao and Huo (2006) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences' "Science and Technology Leadership" Research Group, which defines the concept of "leadership" as the ability of a leader to engage and influence those being led and stakeholders in a particular situation and to consistently achieve group or organizational goals[7]. This is a relatively generalized understanding of leadership behavior. This idea suggests that the selection of a literary figure does not have to be limited to a managerial role, but rather that the presence of an action or idea of the self that has an impact on others and promotes change is an act of leadership. Similarly, this research is based primarily on a biological gender perspective and examines the qualities of female leadership, which does not mean that the literary figure search needs to directly find female leaders with female leadership characteristics (e.g. flexible management style, maintaining close relationships with subordinates), but rather objectively uncover the characteristics of female leaders in different eras: they may have shown different degrees of female leadership in different eras, or perhaps They may have exhibited different degrees of female leadership in different eras, or they may have exhibited leadership styles that were diametrically opposed to female leadership. The research suggests that a more generalized definition of leadership behavior should be used when selecting female leaders in literature and that the common characteristics of female leadership should be avoided to interfere with the selection of literary figures, in order to objectively explore the understanding and perception of female leadership in a particular era.

3.2 A Corpus-Based Approach to the Judgment of Leadership Traits in Literary Figures

3.2.1 Collection of corpora, the introduction of qualitative analysis tools, and statistical description

The corpus collection is a summary of the selected literary works, combined with the basic characteristics of the figures analyzed, and finally forms the original corpus in text file (.TXT) format,

which is used for the subsequent analysis. For the qualitative analysis, the NVivo series of software is recommended as the analysis tool and is combined with its node citation and corpus statistics functions to carry out the subsequent analysis. The study concluded that the word frequency statistics of the original corpus could help the researcher to understand the style of the selected texts to a certain extent. Therefore, it is recommended that Nvivo's own word frequency statistics be used to export words and phrases commonly used in the corpus while importing the corpus and to analyze the writing style in the articles by counting and weighting the percentages. At the same time, it is important to ensure that the chosen figures and phrases that reflect their regular performance and leadership actions appear relatively prominently in the word frequency statistics, which indicates that the chosen figures are major characters in the literature and that there is a wide range of material to support them.

3.2.2 Corpus labeling methods and trait statistical analysis

Before conducting the selected corpus for labeling, this research defined the dimensionality of leadership traits. As shown in Table 1, the research classified leadership traits into three categories, namely female leadership traits, traditional leadership traits, and shared leadership traits, where female leadership traits and traditional leadership traits are a set of opposing conceptual pairs that are compared and differentiated by the performance of the two types of leadership in eight dimensions, which echoes Tong's (2004) findings on the comparison of gender leadership: female leadership which represents the flexible, humane leadership of women is the new style of leadership required by modern organizations, which is the opposite of the authoritative, commanding leadership traits of traditional leadership[8]. The seven shared leadership dimensions and traits are drawn from the Five Forces of Leadership model designed by Miao and Huo[7].

Table 1: Dimensions of Leadership Traits Scale

Dimension	A1 Traditional Leadership Traits	A2 Female Leadership Traits	Dimension	B Shared Leadership Traits
Suggestive attitude	Put his/her own ideas first	Listens to subordinates' suggestions	**Knowledge and ability**	Knowledgeable and comprehensive
Relationship with subordinates	Deliberately keep a distance from subordinates	Close relationship with subordinates	**Decision-making**	Powerful decisiveness
Results and human feelings	Focus only on the results	Results and human feelings (empathize with subordinates)	**Ideal**	Have high ideals.
Power and responsibility and autonomy	Poor autonomy under relative power and responsibility	Empowerment and creativity stimulation	**Passion and positivity**	Actively engage in a cause and achieve success.
Rewards and punishments	Have a definite amount of rewards, and punishment	Pay attention to personalized reward and punishment care	**Willing to challenge**	Be willing to challenge and meet changes
Insight	——	Gain a sharper insight into the organization's problems	**Forward-looking**	It has a good perspective on the future.
Exemplary motivation	Relying on the worship brought by the distance of power	Set an example by example	**Resist frustration**	Have a strong ability to resist setbacks and repair problems
Empathy	——	Often empathize with subordinates		

Note: It is not that the traits of "Insight" and "Empathy" are not present in traditional leadership, but the relative significance of the traits is weak, so for the sake of convenience, leadership behaviors in which both traits are present are directly attributed to female leadership.

Firstly, the distinction between the three general traits is used as the primary label to complete the initial screening; secondly, the performance of specific dimensions under a single general trait is used as the secondary label to indicate the nodes, and the number of nodes and differences provided by the secondary label is also referred to in the later statistics, while the primary nodes are only used for initial classification and identification; finally, after all the selected segments have been categorized, the number of nodes of the second level tags can be obtained based on the first level tags (overall trait tags). These numbers can be recorded in an Excel spreadsheet, and the data can be represented at a scale level through visualization tools, as shown in Figure 1.
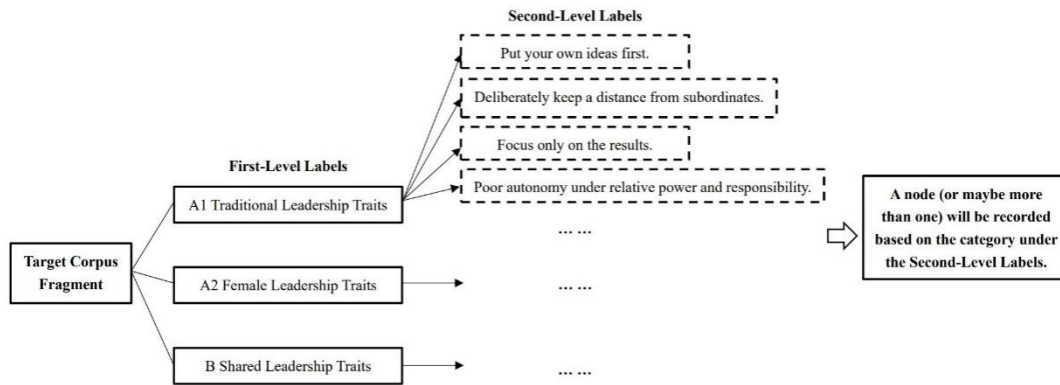
Figure 1: Flow chart of NVivo node calibration based on Dimensions of Leadership Traits Scale

3.3 Female Leadership Strength Assessment Model Design and Scoring Approach

The strength of female leadership was assessed by reference to the number of nodes for each trait under the previous categories. A female leadership strength assessment model was designed to calculate the corresponding scores for the female leadership traits of a specific leader in literary works (no matter male or female). The purpose of the model is to calculate the degree of distinctness of the female leadership traits of a specific leader in literary works, and the discovery of more nodes relating to traditional leadership traits means that the strength of female leadership is weakened so that traditional leadership traits are necessarily scored as minus and female leadership traits are scored as a plus. The shared leadership trait only reflects the strength of the generalized leadership of the selected figure and does not reflect the female leadership trait and should not be counted in the score. If the scoring base is set at 5, the composite score for the number of female leadership trait nodes (F) is 5F; the composite score for the number of traditional leadership trait nodes (T) is -5T; and the composite score is C*0 regardless of the number of shared leadership traits (C). The objective of the study was to calculate the strength of female leadership traits by calculating the number of each type of leadership trait as a percentage of the total and multiplying it by the corresponding score base to obtain the final strength profile. Therefore, Score(fl) is defined as the female leadership strength score of the literary figure, and S is the sum of the number of each type of leadership trait in the literary figure(S=T+C+F), and the model of female leadership strength score in the literary image obtained by weighting is:

$$Score(fl) = \frac{T}{S} * (-5) + \frac{C}{S} * 0 + \frac{F}{S} * 5 \qquad (1)$$

3.4 Introduction of the Period Setting of A Literary Work

After obtaining a score for the strength of female leadership in a specific female character, this research wanted to bring in the era behind the literature, taking into account the consideration of the organizational context and situation in the "contingency theory of leadership". Also, in the case of China, Du (2016) has characterized the image of women in different societies: in the 1950s and 1960s, China promoted the slogan of women as 'quasi-men', advocating gender equality at the expense of women's collective sense of self-identity[4]; later, the new socialist China promoted women's emancipation, bringing about a clearer perception of women's self. These differences in understanding of women's identities and leadership characteristics across generations will inevitably have an impact on the author's literary portrayal of female leadership. The introduction of the literary context will help the researcher to understand the reasons for the strength of female leadership in this literary figure, and thus to realize the integration of the individual leader with the social environment.

4. Application of Evaluation Methodology for Assessing the Strength of Female Leadership Based on Three Chinese Literary Works of Different Times

The development of society, the expansion of the Internet, and the arrival of the era of the knowledge economy have changed the inherent advantages of traditional leadership characteristics, which makes female leaders who are good at flexible and humanized management start to step on a new stage, and the female leadership adopted by them has become an important trend theory of organization management.

In the previous era, female leadership was either hidden in the framework of traditional leadership or directly ignored by mainstream social values. Only through the exploration of literary works can we explore whether the leadership style of female leaders in a certain period has strong female leadership traits. Therefore, to verify the value of the above assessment method of female leadership strength in literary images, this research selects three Chinese literary works of different times to explore the application of the method.

The three literary works selected for this methodological application study are all long novels, namely *Dream of the Red Chamber* written by Cao Xueqin in the Qing Dynasty (A.D 1612-A.D 1921), *The Song of Youth* written by the contemporary writer Yang Mo in 1958, and *Frog* written by the contemporary writer Mo Yan in 2009. The three novels portray female leaders in three different periods of China (the feudal period of the Qing Dynasty, the period of the Second Sino-Japanese War, and the early days of implementing "family planning" programs in New China): Wang Xifeng, Lin Daojing, and Wanxin.

4.1 Literary Image Leadership Characteristics Determination and Descriptive Statistics

The three selected female figures have been interpreted and judged by the text to have strong leadership embodiment. In the researchers' view, Wang Xifeng, as a character in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, is spirited, all-round, and extremely capable, and her excellent leadership and organizational skills are demonstrated in her governance of the Jia's house; while Lin Daojing in *The Song of Youth*, amid the Second Sino-Japanese War, constantly leads her ideological transformation and awakening of consciousness amidst the changes in the general environment, and her endogenous revolutionary motivation and transformative influence reflect a very prominent leadership style; then in *Frog*, Wan Xin, a female obstetrician in the village, leads the implementation of family planning policies in rural China, showing her strong decisive power and strategic skills in many conflicts and demonstrating her strong leadership skills.

After the original corpus was collected and screened for image relevance, three text files were compiled and imported into Nvivo11 for subsequent tagging and analysis. After the word frequency statistics function that comes with Nvivo, the statistics table of the corpus was obtained as shown in Table 2. The results support the hypothesis that the frequency of words reflects the style and distinctness of the text: *Dream of the Red Chamber*, as a literary work of the feudal period, has a high frequency of words for character relationships and titles, whereas Wang Xifeng is often called "Nai Nai(i.e. Madame)" to express the respects. In *The Song of Youth*, the high frequency of the word negation, "eyes" and "heart" attest to the changing thoughts and rebellious spirit of the heroine, Lin Daojing; the most frequent word in *Frog* is "aunt ", a term that Wan Xin, the heroine, is often addressed by in the book.

Table 2: Word frequency statistics of the corpus

Discourse name	Word	Length	Counting	Weighted percentage (%)
Dream of the Red Chamber	Nai Nai	2	203	0.54
	Baoyu	2	169	0.45
	Sister	2	154	0.41
	Grandma	2	139	0.37
	Old Lady	3	139	0.37
The Song of Youth	No	2	38	0.52
	Eye	2	37	0.51
	Get up	2	36	0.50
	In the heart	2	28	0.39
	All of a sudden	2	26	0.36
Frog	Aunt	2	521	4.17
	Little Lion	2	62	0.50
	Child	2	48	0.38
	Woman	2	38	0.30
	Come out	2	34	0.27

4.2 Literary Figure's Female Leadership Strength Rating

In conjunction with the leadership trait scale, the study completed the node labeling of the secondary labels for the leadership traits of the three selected literary figures, i.e. the construction of a leadership

trait richness database for the personas. Subsequently, the study derived the number of leadership trait labels for each of the three female leadership figures to form an Excel and used it for scoring analysis. It is found that Wang Xifeng had the highest total number on the sum of leadership traits, while Lin Daojing lacked the traditional leadership traits (zero nodes), and the three characters showed differentiated characteristics in terms of the total number of leadership traits. Based on the calculation of the research-designed model for scoring the strength of female leadership in literary images, the study obtained a score table for assessing the strength of female leadership in literary images as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Evaluation Score of Leadership Strength of Women in Three Literary Images

Dimension	Wang Xifeng scored	Lin Daojing scored	Wan Xin scored
S-Sum of Leadership Traits	148	77	112
T-Traditional Leadership Traits	78	0	8
C-Shared leadership traits	12	59	69
F-Female Leadership Traits	58	18	35
Score (fl)-Female Leadership Strength	**-0.68**	**1.17**	**1.21**

Looking at the scores for Wang Xifeng, Lin Daojing, and Wan Xin, it can be seen that the leadership strength scores gradually increase with the setting era of the characters. Wang Xifeng's score is negative, indicating the dominance of traditional leadership traits in her leadership traits; while Lin Daojing's score makes a big leap from -0.68 to 1.17, showing the strength of female leadership traits. Wan Xin's score was higher than Lin Daojing's, which indicates that the strength of female leadership performance has gradually become prominent with the development of Chinese society, and female leaders have also gradually found an applicable flexible management style.

4.3 Analysis of Leadership Transitions in the Three Selected Literature Works across Time

This research brings the characteristics and analysis of the three female leadership figures into the literary works themselves, hoping to better understand the causes of these differentiated female leadership strength scores in the context of the leadership environment and social background in which the leaders are portrayed. The study also aims to characterize the leadership types of the three female leaders and to illustrate how female leadership strengths evolve in relation to the analysis of leadership style theory.

Wang Xifeng, a female leader in the Qing dynasty, is situated in a feudal society where the leaders are mostly men. The author Cao Xueqin defines an outstanding family manager as an "authoritative leader", and we can find that when we focus on the leadership qualities of Wang Xifeng. Those repeated descriptions of her deliberate distance from her subordinates and the establishment of a clear system of rewards and punishments are intended to portray a more transactional leader in the traditional leadership style. In *The Song of Youth*, Yang Mo focuses on Lin Daojing's change of mind, repeatedly describing his ability to resist setbacks and fix problems, but also his determination to join the revolutionary cause out of his change of mind and insistence on revolution. In a time of regime upheaval and war, Lin Daojing strives for leadership in his own ideological transformation and also focuses on uniting his revolutionary comrades around her, being able to set an example in herself and often resonating with those suffered people. Lin Daojing's common leadership traits are evident, but she also demonstrates a certain intensity of female leadership, caring for her subordinates and having a remarkable ability to empathize with them, reflecting her management style as a transformational leader. In *Frog*, Wan Xin comes to a time when the family planning rule is being implemented in new China, and author Mo Yan has created a very complex image of a transformational leader. Wan Xin's ability to be sensitive to organizational issues devise individualized forms of reward and punishment, and set an example by example, undoubtedly reflects her strong female leadership performance. In the context of the implementation of China's family planning policy, Wan Xin was able to grasp the changes in the policy and use flexible forms of leadership, compounding her feminine and communal leadership style.

The study provides a good example of the application of the method for assessing the strength of female leadership in characterization presented in this paper through the selection of female leadership figures in three different Chinese literary works from different eras. When the data on the strength of female leadership presented in these three works are used to examine the transmutation of female leadership in Chinese literature, it is evident that female leaders have gradually shifted from an initially strong traditional leadership style to a flexible management style of female leadership. This also supports the view of some Chinese scholars that women's leadership styles have evolved from 'masculine' to

flexible[4]. Therefore, the study is also based on a literary perspective and confirms that female leadership traits are increasingly being recognized by modern management models.

5. Significance of the Study and Outlook

The significance of the study is that this methodology for assessing the strength of female leadership is both scientific and innovative. By constructing a qualitative model of assessing female leadership strength that overlaps linguistics and leadership, this research has been able to integrate leadership theory and provide a new way of thinking and assessment method for studying the transmutation of women's leadership across time. At the same time, the study highlights the social phenomena and values of the times embedded in the literature, which can be a good reference for understanding the strength of female leadership across time. Perhaps because of the time that has elapsed, the discovery of the strength of women's leadership in historical images of leadership has mostly been done through secondary sources, but the author believes that contemporaneous works of fiction can also be one such source. The significance of this study also lies in the application of this assessment method, as the transmutation of the strength of female leadership in three Chinese literary works from different periods is a good response to some scholars' research on the evolution of female leadership in China, which also confirms the value of a literary perspective in the discovery and qualitative study of historical female leadership.

The definition of female leadership in this study is based more on gender style and behavioral differences, i.e. female figures are mainly chosen to study female leadership traits, which is in line with Gu's (2020) trend of focusing on the gender differences in the study of female leadership today[2]. However, this is always an analysis based on a relatively backward biological gender perspective, and female leadership is not a trait that only a single female leader possesses. Therefore, the researchers look forward to conducting a new study on the assessment of female leadership strength based on a gender perspective and selecting appropriate literary images for future research. Furthermore, the study expects that future leadership research will pay more attention to the value of literature and that this qualitative research method used to study female leadership will be applied to more leadership topics (e.g. research on leadership styles) through dimensional reconfiguration. Finally, it is argued that this method of assessing the leadership strength of female figures has a relatively homogeneous country application, as the design of the assessment dimensions is strongly linked to the Chinese leadership model. The study hopes that future research can be conducted from a leadership perspective and that a more generalized assessment dimension can be constructed to design a method for assessing the strength of female leadership in literary images in an international context.

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