

**Graduate School of International
Culture and Communication Studies**

Examination Report on the Doctoral Dissertation

Applicant	
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Dissertation Title · Subtitle : (English)	The Mirror of Contemporary Chinese Women: ----- Images of Women in Contemporary Chinese Romantic Fictions
Dissertation Title · Subtitle : (Japanese)	現代中国女性の鏡: ----- 現代中国のロマンス小説における女性像

*Even if the dissertation is written in English, a Japanese language translation of the title and subtitle must also be submitted.

2023/6/26

YYYY/MM/DD

To Dean of Graduate School of International
Culture and Communication Studies,

Examination Committee

Chief Examiner _____ PINNINGTON, Adrian J. _____ 印 Signature

(Affiliation・Title: GSICCS / Professor)

Sub-Examiner _____ HSIAO, Li Chun_____ 印 Signature

(Affiliation・Title: SILS / Professor)

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(Affiliation・Title: Waseda U. / Emeritus Professor)

The Examination Committee members report the results of the dissertation examination and the oral defense below.

1. Degree : Doctor of Philosophy (in International Culture and Communication Studies)

2. Curriculum Doctorate (*Katei Hakase*)

3. Examination period

Dissertation examination : From 2023/5/11 To 2023/6/16
YYYY/MM/DD YYYY/MM/DD

Oral defense : 2023/6/16
YYYY/MM/DD

4. The results of the dissertation examination and the oral defense

*Please write down Pass or Fail in both categories.

Dissertation examination : PASS

Oral defense : PASS

5. Summary of the Dissertation

As per attached sheet

6. Table of Contents

As per attached sheet

7. The results of the dissertation examination and the oral defense

(About 3,000 characters in Japanese or 1,000 words in English)

(1) Evaluation and summary of the dissertation examination

(Including Summary of the Dissertation)

Under the title “The Mirror of Contemporary Chinese Women: Images of Women in Contemporary Chinese Romantic Fictions”, the candidate has created an innovative contribution to the understanding of recent developments in popular romantic serial novels created, in the main, by and for younger Chinese women, distinguishing four specific variations in type (‘Cinderella,’ ‘New Gifted Youth and the Beauty,’ ‘Female Young Werther’ and the Female Charlotte,’ and ‘the New Female Consort Prince’), according to their literary antecedents both domestic and foreign, as well as according to their cultural and psychological functions in the context of recent transformations in mainland Chinese society. The originality of the argument lies not only in the details of this taxonomy, but also in the methodological approach employed. This successfully integrates detailed textual analysis of narrative structures and character images with an investigation of the specific (digital, social) communications media used to reach the desired audience and the (participatory, interactive) reading strategies thus fostered. The former makes appropriately eclectic use of both formal and aesthetic approaches, while the latter employs software tools such as GooSeeker to harvest data from Douban, the largest Chinese cultural product evaluation and rating website. The argument is thus fundamentally interdisciplinary, combining insights from literary history, media studies, and the sociology of gender.

The thesis divides broadly into three parts: an initial section, consisting of Chapters 1 and 2, which offers respectively an overview of the topic, the research questions posed, as well as the materials and methods used to explore them, and a detailed review of the dominant trends in existing literature in the field; the central section, comprising Chapters 3-6, each of which is devoted to one of the four sub-categories of contemporary Chinese romantic fiction, examining in detail (typically) three representative fictional works as case studies; and a final section, made up of Chapters 7 and 8, which offers in turn a detailed discussion of a series of general issues raised in the four preceding chapters, and a conclusion both summarizing the main findings and recognizing limitations to the research. The principal conclusion concerns the discontinuous, irregular transition observed in the contemporary Chinese romantic novel away from the traditional romantic story pattern of active male/passive female towards more diversified narratives, in parallel with the gradual, uneven progress towards female equality witnessed in the social sphere.

The three evaluators all agreed that the candidate’s written work satisfies the criteria for a doctoral thesis in the field of international culture and communication. These criteria principally include its empirical and theoretical originality, as well as its recognition of previous research in the area, its effective deployment of terminology and concepts as well as data and information, its logical development and conformity to academic conventions of citation and style, and its quality as writing in English. As a condition of the thesis being awarded a pass evaluation, the examiners requested a significant number of corrections of minor typographical, linguistic and formatting slips. Prior to filing this report, the chief examiner has confirmed with the other evaluators that all the revisions requested at the oral defense have been carefully implemented as intended.

(2) Summary of the oral defense (including Comments and Questions)

Ms Li’s Oral Defense Examination was conducted on campus in Room 11-801 on Friday, June 16th, from 5.30pm to after 7pm. This was attended only by the candidate and the three formal evaluators. There, following a brief introduction by the chief examiner, Ms Li delivered a 26-slide Powerpoint presentation lasting around 30 minutes on her doctoral research project under the slightly revised title. This was clearly organized, rich in detail, and well-articulated in clear English. It covered concisely the theme, purpose, organization, and conclusion of the thesis, and included an explanation of its main research questions, research concepts, research methods, and research materials. In addition to these general matters, specific slides covered the organization of the thesis, with sections devoted to each of the four sub-categories of contemporary Chinese romantic fiction

distinguished by the candidate. Since the first sub-category was covered extensively in the candidate's Preliminary Review with the same three examiners, it was dealt with relatively briefly here. In contrast, the Discussion section of the thesis were covered in particular detail, with individual slides focusing on issues such as the evolution of the highly idealized "Mary Sue" female icon, binary oppositions in the shaping of female images, and adaptations of Chinese romantic novels in other media.

The interventions from the three evaluators notably included questions or comments concerning the following topics:

- the functions of and the differences between the two collection tools used to harvest data from Douban
- variations in the implications of the concept of "patriarchal society" according to time and place
- the importance of social class with respect not only to the representation of fictional characters but also to variations in authorship and readership

Understandably, the candidate appeared slightly nervous during the question period, but nevertheless was able to respond appropriately to all questions, in the process indicating her in-depth knowledge of the field and mastery of the topic. Immediately following the public proceedings the evaluators conferred together, concluding unanimously that, through both her presentation and her responses to questions and comment concerning it, the candidate had fulfilled the requirements of the oral defense.

5. Summary of the Dissertation

Abstract

As a representative and significant genre of contemporary Chinese popular literature, Chinese romantic novels today flourish in the context of internet mass culture. This genre has developed a mature mode of production within the culture industry, and has thus emerged as not only a literary phenomenon, but also a social and cultural phenomenon that deserves extensive attention and research. The rise and development of contemporary Chinese romantic novels has not only promoted the flourishing of internet literature, but also provided a new model and opportunity for the development of cultural industries. Moreover, since most of the authors and readers of these works are women, the construction of female images is also one of the core elements of this type of popular literature. Examining Chinese female images in popular cultural products under a patriarchal society through contemporary Chinese romantic fiction provides us with an interesting perspective on contemporary Chinese society. However, contemporary Chinese romantic novels received little or no academic attention for a long time. Although the situation has improved greatly in recent years, as increasingly more scholars have begun delving into this type of popular cultural product, contemporary Chinese romantic novels nonetheless still represent a rare topic of research.

Within the field of research on Chinese romantic novels, past studies can be broadly divided into two categories: 1. those focused on analysis of text, narrative, or character images; and, 2. those focused on audiences and/or media. The studies that focus on text, narrative, or character analysis typically utilize textual analysis to assess and categorize the characters and narratives in these novels. The studies that focus on audience or media, on the other hand, typically implement survey and interview methods to explore their readership. However, it should be noted that the main shortcoming of existing research on contemporary Chinese romantic novels is that they generally do not combine character or narrative analysis with audience analysis. They usually treat character, narrative, or audience as independent objects of study. However, one of contemporary Chinese romantic novel's most prominent features is that the author and reader community often participate in the process of shaping the narrative and characters of these novels together.

The research focuses on the following three questions: 1. How can the patterns of female images and sub-genres in contemporary Chinese romantic novels be classified? 2. How can case studies be utilized to analyze the characters, especially female characters, and narrative in contemporary Chinese romantic novels? 3. What social and cultural issues do contemporary Chinese romantic novels engage with via their fictional narratives? Although the answers to these three questions cannot explain everything about contemporary Chinese romantic novels, they do reflect the state of female characters and narrative in contemporary Chinese romantic novels to a large extent. In this research, I categorized the fictional romantic stories in contemporary Chinese romantic novels published after the 21st century into four categories based on the image of the heroine and the story mode. These categories are labelled "Cinderella", "The Gifted Youth and The Beauty", "Female Young Werther and Male Charlotte" and "The New Female Consort Prince".

The above four categories constitute the main patterns of contemporary Chinese romantic novels since the beginning of the 21st century. In this study, I have selected representative works as case studies to explore the characterization of the main characters and narrative modes among these four genres. In addition, due to the material conditions of production of Chinese contemporary romantic novels, both authors and readers are involved in the novel creation process. In analyzing specific case studies, I refer to the attitudes and response of readers as revealed in Douban's short comments. Particularly, due to the controversy among readers surrounding the heroine's image in the "The New Gifted Youth and The Beauty" and "Female Young Werther and Male

Charlotte” categories, I have collected high-frequency evaluative words in comments describing the heroine and analyzed them. Therefore, unlike previous studies, the analysis of characters and narratives in this research does not rely solely on text analysis but also combines an aspect of audience feedback as a reference. This is the difference in research methodology between this research and previous studies. Although my findings from the research are not yet conclusive, they do provide new ideas and approaches for future studies on contemporary Chinese romantic novels.

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