

Marketed Popular Romantic Fiction: A Brief Exploration of Women's Values-- Taking "Xing Han Can Lan, Xing Shen Zhi Zai" as an Example

Keyu Shi

Chinese Historical Studies,
University of Hong Kong, Hong
Kong, China

Corresponding author: U3621112@
connect.hku.hk

Abstract:

Popular literature is defined as literature that is read by a large number of people in a certain period of time to meet specific requirements of the people, mostly for the goal of mind and soul entertainment, with the coexistence of artistic and economic qualities. A trendy topic in popular fiction is romance novels. There are particular websites for romance novels in China, such as the Jinjiang Literature Website. Many novels published in paper form are first serialized on this website. If the response is good, publishers will contact the authors to publish them. Popular romance novels also conform to the characteristics of many popular cultures; for example, popular literature usually has some fixed sets of pictures or often cultural symbols. Therefore, it is easy for readers to read and feel happy. In this essay, I would like to discuss the popular romance novels in the market. This article will use literature analysis and case study methods to study it. In the end, the result is that although popular romance novels have been marketed, they can also be used to awaken women's consciousness in the most potent way of communication, thereby enlightening them.

Keywords: Women's Value; Self-empowerment; Popular Romantic Fiction; Market Trend

1. Introduction

Popular literature is defined as literature that is read by a large number of people in a certain period of time to meet specific requirements of the people, mostly for the goal of mind and soul entertainment, with the coexistence of artistic and economic quali-

ties. Popular literature is a genre of writing that takes on many forms in various works. It is a consumer commodity with many spiritual manifestations in various works [1]. Popular romantic fiction is written for the masses in society; thus, it would follow the market trend. However, does it only write for the economy or the popular trend? It is undeniable that

popular romantic fiction allows females to express their pursuit of self-empowerment, self-value and the equality of women and men. In this article, I will focus on “*Xing Han Can Lan Xing Shen Zhi Zai*,” as an example to support my argument.

Exploring the significance of the marketization of romance novels and the awakening of women’s self-worth can make the public more aware of their purpose in consuming cultural products. At the same time, the public will know more clearly what is real and what is fiction when reading novels of the same genre. In this way, readers can enjoy literary entertainment products with a critical eye rather than being influenced by wrong values without thinking. Ultimately, readers can enjoy popular literature while critically looking at the values in between with a proper perspective. As a result, readers can learn the right values and weed out any exaggerated or distorted ideas.

2. Market Trend

2.1 Psychological Satisfaction

Popular romantic fiction has many readers in the market because this kind of popular fiction can bring them feelings like hope, happiness, and content. Readers can acquire psychological satisfaction and unconscious needs [2]. Besides that, popular romantic fiction usually describes an ideal romance focusing on a single, developing relationship between the heroine and the hero. Often, all romances finally resolve the differences between the couple and harvest a beautiful love [2]. These romantic scenes and happy endings create a beautiful dream for the reader. Therefore, these romance fictions provide emotional value to predominantly female readers.

In “*Xing Han Can Lan Xing Shen Zhi Zai*,” the heroine, Cheng Shaoshang, has three main wooers. The Hero named Ling Buyi also has many wooers. The important one is that Cheng Shaoshang has a different relationship with the three males, but Ling Buyi, from the beginning to the end, only loves Cheng Shaoshang [3]. To a maximum extent, this kind of love that the man only loves the one forever could satisfy female readers’ psychological needs for romantic love.

2.2 Simple Content

Popular romance fiction with repetitive plots can dominate the market because they are easier to read and understand than serious literature with deep content and complex plots. It is also easier for readers to bring in their selves and thus gain emotional value. Although often the plots of many of these novels are the same, this does not deter

female readers from enjoying romance novels. After all, they can escape the world and have a beautiful dream. The fundamental premise of the popularisation theory is that the key to the triumph of popular fiction is in its focus on amusement, enjoyment, and the structured aspects of popular fiction rather than the solely literary quest for uniqueness, emphasis on new aesthetic principles that run counter to the conventional way of writing [4]. Thus, the point of this popular fiction is not to create, have literary underpinnings, or convey insightful philosophies about life. Instead, they focus on achieving mass production and realizing economic benefits, which makes popular literature marketable. It is evident that even if the characterization and plot are not very profound, it is enough to satisfy the readers’ needs [5]. Thus, it is because the content is not deep enough. Instead, it makes the fiction accessible and then popular.

Popular romantic love stories, such as “*Xing Han Can Lan Xing Shen Zhi Zai*,” use simple words, simple character relationships, and simple plot settings to tell the story. Undeniably, many plots are similar to other books in the same genre. For example, the heroine and hero are the newly promoted young lady of the General’s house and a highly decorated General who has always held a high position. Many other ancient romance novels have similar characterizations. The setting of a general and a noblewoman is popular in ancient Chinese romance novels. Probably because many girls have “dreams of uniforms.” Besides that, the women of the royal family have a lot of backroom battles. It could be because of the men, or because of their own cliques, or simply because they are pampered and bossy. Examples like this also take up a lot of space in ancient romance novels of the same genre. In this novel, the author also describes the fights between various women. For example, Wang Ling, a small group, has always been incompatible with Cheng Shaoshang’s team [3].

2.3 Consumerism Culture

Consumerism culture promotes romantic fiction being popular. This has led to the production of a series of derivative products, which have contributed to the economic prosperity of the cultural industry. Consumption is a place that focuses on dealing with one another, including both slavery and exploitation and signalling contestation and resistance. She proclaims that film studies are overwhelmingly production-orientated [6]. In this way, it is evident that popular romance fiction, from one aspect, also tries to make itself commercialized. Popular fiction has enormous financial potential as a commodity. Popular books have a significant element of commerciality. The more the work’s

popularity, the higher its income, and the greater the likelihood that it will be promoted via other channels in order to increase its popularity and income [7]. Thus, popular romance fiction will be remade into a TV series or film. It will have associated character miniature dolls and also themed posters. There will be related theme songs for the game. There will also be all sorts of related cultural and creative products. This makes this novel even more popular. The market thus creates a cultural IP. Anything about this IP will have economic value. As this IP gets hotter and hotter, the related products get hotter and hotter. The more popular the related products become, the hotter the IP becomes. In this way, it goes down the road of consumer culture.

“*Xing Han Can Lan Xing Shen Zhi Zai*” has been created to be a popular IP in the cultural industry. This book was made for a TV series. On social media, there are also many short video bloggers who create self-titled content through secondary editing. For example, if someone searches TikTok (Mainland China), they will find hotspots like “Xing Han Can Lan Nesting Hugs,” “Xing Han Can Lan Mixed Cut Crush Feeling,” etc. It reveals that this IP spread in traditional media, TV, and social media platforms. Besides, this IP has many derivative cultural productions, including postcards, bookmarks, beautiful letterheads, character dolls, themed mugs, and pillows! This cultural production is like Fans’ periphery. Any stuff with the IP on it could become a series production to sell.

3. Female Pursuit of Self

3.1 Self-Empowerment

The heroines’ settings in popular romantic fiction are full of wisdom. These heroines refuse to be vulnerable and are determined to be controlled. Instead, they seek self-empowerment and self-reliance. First of all, the ideal heroine in romance novels is distinguished from her more typical counterparts by possessing extraordinary brilliance or a particularly fiery nature [2]. However, these books also start by conveying conflicting views about women’s gender by connecting the heroine’s character or actions to characteristics and actions often associated with males [2]. Plus, in fact, almost every heroine in these female-sponsored fantasies expressly states that she will not submit to the masculine urge to silence women by taking away their distinctive voices [2]. Radway notes that all this writing about women’s voices in romance novels makes it better for society to erase their desires in real life [2]. But I don’t think so because literature is meant to express and convey ideas. The setting of this heroine, unwilling to be bound and controlled, gives more female readers the idea of not

becoming disadvantaged and pursuing self-empowerment and self-reliance, thus liberating the stereotype that women have to be disadvantaged. This kind of thinking also makes women unwilling to be reduced to objects but to pursue their human subjects.

In “*Xing Han Can Lan, Xing Shen Zhi Zai*,” Cheng Shaoshang is a heroine who doesn’t depend on her parents or men. She has her own pursuits and loves her career. She doesn’t like to read about deep philosophical ideologies but loves to make things with her hands. She is willing to try to make her own swing. She also knows the war strategies and can make simple mechanisms to attack people. Cheng Shaoshang represents females who want to pursue self-empowerment, self-confidence, self-independence, and self-love. For example, in book 2, “In fact, I can’t even use my father’s power for the rest of my life. I love to cultivate the soil and plant, draw pictures and do work, and when I think about it, these are the only things that keep me in line” [3]. Cheng Shaoshang knows clearly that she wants to be self-reliant and likes to be self-sufficient. The author shows this concept of being a self-empowerment female in the plot description and the narration of the heroine’s inner drama.

3.2 Self-Value

Recent popular Chinese romantic fiction depicts women as superwomen with high self-value. They do not estimate their value through men but themselves. In traditional Chinese society, marriage is the first event in a woman’s life. Marrying a good man is very important. Even today, marrying a good man means a lot, including social power, social hierarchy, etc. However, from another perspective, women are supposed to have their own self-value rather than relying on a man to acquire status because of human subjects. For example, in a genre called NUZUN in Chinese popular romantic fiction, alternative routes to women’s empowerment are also examined by female writers. The heroine’s identity in this book is not limited to romantic love; her achievements in the military, politics, and business are all characterized as gratifying and validating [8]. It is clear that women have the capability to achieve their own life goals by themselves. So why do women need to judge themselves by looking at if they marry a good man? That sounds funny. That may be because, under a patriarchal society, men want to consolidate their own social status. Thus, they want to use this way to restrict women’s thoughts. However, in matriarchal romances, the heroine finds meaning in life outside of a simple proclamation of love [8]. In this way, the notion that women use love to judge their social worth is then liberated. Romance novels of this genre offer mod-

ern women a whole new concept of giving self-worth. Women are also human subjects, so women, like men, do not need to be dependent on anyone; on the contrary, to be dependent on anyone is a sign of a lack of self-worth. Women should build up their self-worth from themselves instead of relying on men. After all, relying on others is temporary, and what you have earned by your own efforts is truly your own. In this way, women themselves will be more confident and self-loving.

Although “*Xing Han Can Lan, Xing Shen Zhi Zai*” is not a NUZUN fiction, it also has many similar elements. The heroine, Cheng Shaoshang, never thought that marrying Ling Buyi was the best thing for her because she could use his power. Instead, she thinks Ling Buyi’s social status and political power have no connection with her. She does not like others to call her Ling Buyi’s wife because she has her own name, but someone’s wife. Besides that, in one scene, she makes delicious food for the Queen, but Ling Buyi gets the reward. She does not understand because she makes this, not Ling Buyi [9]. These emotional activities all show that Cheng Shaoshang is a woman who establishes her own social status by herself, and she never thinks of relying on any men. She never judges herself by her love but only by her own capabilities in society.

3.3 Equality

The equality of women and men is also an important topic when discussing feminism in popular romantic fiction. Gender equality and peace between men and women should be better understood behind the “women’s” view. There should be a greater awareness of the equality and harmony between men and women hidden behind the “female” gender view. The ultimate objective of feminist writing should be to encourage women to have the same rights as men based on the acknowledgement of gender differences. The ultimate purpose of feminist writing ought to be to provide women with the opportunity to acquire the same rights as men by acknowledging their gender distinctions. Our sky will be broader in the society of the future only when men and women work together [10]. Speaking of which, it brings us to TV shows adapted from the romance novel. The whole drama stands in the position of Cheng Shaoshang, who is portrayed as a woman in love, family, and career aspects of the all-around growth process. It does not simply focus on the love between a man and a woman but also includes the righteousness of the family and the country. The pursuit of gender equality is more prominent in the drama. For example, the TV series conveys the concept of equal love: “The best love in the world is to walk side by side, not one high and one low, one main and one auxiliary” [11].

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, popular romance novels are a product of marketization. Distinguished from serious literature, which has to bring people’s thinking and opinions, its primary role is to entertain people. Therefore, romance novels can be good at giving people emotional value and satisfying their psychological needs. In addition, precisely because it is part of famous pop culture, its content and plot are simple and easy to understand. Popular romance novels are also part of the business chain as a product of marketization. They not only generate revenue through book sales but also contribute to the growth of derivative cultural industries. These industries, in turn, create more opportunities for the production and consumption of romance novels, forming a self-sustaining cycle. It will complement and create benefits with its derivative cultural industries.

However, in recent years, Chinese popular romance novels have taken on a more feminist tone. *Xing Han Can Lan, Xing Shen Zhi Zai* is a prime example. This novel, with its plots and ideas that transcend the male perspective, has been instrumental in awakening women’s self-worth. It’s not just a story, but a journey of self-improvement, self-reliance, self-confidence, and self-love for female readers. These novels have created a market that celebrates women’s strength and independence, empowering female readers to recognize their own worth and potential.

References

- [1] Li Qiang. Some Theory Research about Popular Literary in China since the New Period. Master’s Degree Dissertation, Hunan Normal University, 2003.
- [2] Radway J. A. Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature. The University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- [3] Guan Xin Ze Luan. *Xing Han Can Lan, Xing Shen Zhi Zai*. Jiangsu Phoenix Literary Publishing House, 2024: 1-4.
- [4] Tan Guanghui. Four Theories to Explain Bestsellers and Popular Fiction from the Production Side. *Chinese and Foreign Cultures and Literary Theory*, 2019, (42): 218-227.
- [5] Xu Lianghong. Formal Direction and Normative Innovation of Contemporary Chinese Popular Literature. *Journal of Nantong University (Social Science Edition)*, 2016, (05): 58-63.
- [6] Storey J. Cultural theory and popular culture: an introduction (Chang Jiang & Tian Hao, Trans.). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.
- [7] Tao Dongfeng. Popular Culture Curriculum. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2011.
- [8] Feng J. Romancing the Internet: Producing and Consuming Chinese Web Romance. BRILL, 2013, 5.

[9] Fei Z. Love Like the Galaxy. (Shanghai) Net Drama Review, 2022.

[10] Deng H., Wu X. On the Development of Feminist Literary Concepts in China. Journal of Shenyang Normal University

(Social Science Edition), 2009, (06), 93-96.

[11] Li M. Women's Consciousness and Strategies of Film and Television Expression in "Xing Han Can Lan". World of Sound Screens, 2023, (13), 47-52.