

Huike Wen: *Time-Travel TV dramas, Romantic Relationship and Gender Representation in Chinese media*

Starting in the 1990s, many TV dramas from Japan and South Korea have been impacting Chinese culture. They have brought the sentiment of modern romantic love into China, and “have exerted a powerful influence on the development of contemporary Chinese youth culture.” With Chinese audiences’ attraction to imported TV similar dramas made in mainland China have had to find different ways to portray young people to avoid being criticized as “poor imitations.” The solution for Chinese-made dramas is to be “more in touch with social reality and social problems” (Zhong, 2010). But the popularity of time-travel television dramas changed the solution, or at least it appeared to change it. Unlike most time-travel TV dramas in the west, which often excite the scientific imagination (Wittenberg, 2012), Chinese time-travel TV dramas focus on love and relationship. Moreover, unlike other Chinese TV dramas, in focusing on the representation of love the time-travel dramas also do not overtly address social reality and social problems either.

In this project, I want to explore the following questions: How is the feeling of subjectivity constructed in the description of the experiences of the time travelers? How are the elements of the hyper-masculinity, such as honor and power, embedded in the characterization of a sentimental romantic relationship? And is this representation different from the Hollywood style of superheroes or heroines? How is history constructed as a space rather than a time concept in order to politically rationalize the current version of idealized romantic relationship and gender roles? I hypothesize that although the love stories in time-travel dramas are a fantasy, they are like other

portrayals of love in modern media in that while they may appear to be unpredictable and arbitrary, this is “in appearance only.” (Bourdieu, 1976). In fact, these portrayals of love do still “represent reactions to the respective society and the trends for change within it” (Luhmann, 1998). The time-travel TV dramas cast young and nice looking men and women, then dress them up with glamorous clothes, and reproduce the contemporary tensions between genders. These elements together with the plots of the stories make time-travel TV dramas, whose protagonists wear ancient clothes and hairstyles and live in a palace, not very different from many Japanese and South Korean ‘idol dramas’ and ‘trendy dramas’. They also share elements with modern love stories set in a modern metropolis, such as power and gender roles in the representation of romantic relationships. However, what is distinctive is that such representations are entangled with the feeling of subjectivity of the modern heroes or heroines who travel back to the ancient dynasty.

This LARC project will enable me to complete a research paper, already in draft progress, and presented at the 2012 Popular Culture Association Conference.

In this project I will be working closely with two students—Natalie Lyman and Kerry Lee. I will specifically ask Natalie to assist me in collecting theories about love and hyper-masculinity in the representation of super heroes in western media and comparing them with those in East Asian media. Kerry Lee’s research on the representation of romantic relationship and gender roles in South Korean television dramas will help me compare them with those in Chinese media. As a team, we will research the theories on the representation of the romantic relationship and the heroic elements in the construction of feelings and sentiments.

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Gong (Palace, 2011)
Startling, 2011)



Bubu Jing Xin (Every Step is Startling, 2011)



Xun Qin Ji (Seeking the Qin Dynasty, 2001)



Shen Hua (Myth, 2010)