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Résumé de l'article

Dans le présent article, Kozar étudie la construction de représentations négociées de la masculinité chez les lecteurs masculins de romans d’arts martiaux et de romans d’amour, à travers leur interprétation de deux différents types de personnages masculins que l’on rencontre couramment dans les romans typiquement chinois : le héros (haohan) et le savant talentueux (caizï). S’inspirant du concept de «masculinités hégémoniques» (Comwall et Lindsfame 1994), l’auteure examine comment le héros et le savant sont juxtaposés historiquement à travers leur genre respectif et comment leurs qualités servent à souligner, à compléter ou à remettre en cause les constructions sociales de l’identité sexuelle dans l’esprit de certains lecteurs. Elle se questionne également sur la façon dont les lecteurs envisagent des questions aussi importantes que la lecture comme évasion et/ou compensation, l’identification et le phénomène du goût immodéré pour la lecture.

PAPERBACK *HAOHAN* AND OTHER 'GENRED GENDERS'
Negotiated Masculinities among Chinese Popular Fiction Readers

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In *The Interpretation of Fairytales,* Holbek perceptively demonstrates that most fairytales contain both a hero and a heroine, and that mistakes have been made in the classification of many stories as "masculine" based on the heroine's seeming passivity in the final move. He argues that, as with tales such as A-T 313 *The Girl As Helper In The Hero's Flight,* it is often the case that the male character has assumed the more "feminine," supporting role. Once the hero passes all his trials thanks to her guidance and intervention, he then triumphantly claims his apparently submissive bride (Holbek 1987:159). Similarly narrow misreadings of other narrative genres, both in written and oral forms, occur when particular audience characteristics are too widely assumed. For example, speaking of the western medieval romance, Crane states that it "...has the name of a feminine genre, although its historical audiences were surely mixed."[2]

I suggest that for certain genres of Chinese popular fiction, notably romances or *aiqing/yanqing xiaoshuo* (愛情／言情小說), and martial-arts fiction or *wuxia xiaoshuo* (武俠小說), specific gender labels exist which presume a set of mutually exclusive, delimiting audience attributes not supported by ethnographic research. Specifically, I refer to the idea that the former genre is geared toward female audiences, while the latter is intended for consumption by a male readership. This discussion examines the tastes, reading habits and attitudes of male readers of "traditionally male" *and* "traditionally female" Chinese popular fiction in terms of the dominant models of masculinity reflected in each of those genres. Integrally related to the novels themselves are the ways in which readers, through their choices of material and patterns of reading behaviour over time, negotiate their own personal understanding of a "split and contradictory construction" (Penley and Willis 1993:xviii), based not on biological givens, but on an unstable, socially construed link which "... is not necessary but contingent" (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994:34) — the connection between masculinity and being a man.

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1. This research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada.
2. See Crane's comprehensive bibliography for additional recent research dealing with the medieval audience and gender (Crane 1994:10).

Despite its rather curious spelling, my use of "genred genders" in the title is deliberate, as it presents both a visually striking inversion of the usual concept of "gendered genres" and the implication that, vagaries of English orthography aside, perhaps this phrase has come to signify a degree of misplaced emphasis. Perhaps, as Crane observes, we should be prepared to focus less on: "...how historical men and women 'perform' romance," and turn our attention to: "...how romances 'perform' gender rather than the reverse — how they construe masculinity and femininity, how they work out the paradigm of difference and the challenge of intimacy and how they relate gender to other expressions of social identity" (Crane 1994:12).

I think that this perspective can be productively applied to present-day male readers of not only romances, but also a contemporary, culturally-specific adventure genre such as martial arts or "kungfu" fiction. Although neither can be considered an "exact fit" when juxtaposed with western chivalric romances, there are several shared points of correspondence which will be outlined later.

In addition to this brief but, hopefully, illustrative comparison, this analysis is primarily concerned with three issues. First, I attempt to define both genres in light of readers' opinions and insights, and give some indication of the historical antecedents of each fictional form, paying particular attention to the masculine paradigms and overriding values as embodied by their respective hero-types. Second, I examine readers' perceptions of their own experiences with texts and their relation to the questions of identification with the narrative or characters, reading "addictions," and reading as compensation. Third, I conclude with a brief discussion of factors which may contribute to readers' acceptance, rejection, or selective reinterpretation of variant masculinities. I want to stress, however, that "Chinese readership" as a potential field of ethnographic inquiry — even when the audience is limited to men or women exclusively — represents a sadly under-explored area. For reasons of accessibility, the scope of this work is restricted to readers of a particular social and educational background. Given these limitations, before I consider the points outlined above, I want to clarify who my readers are, and how I managed to get them to talk to me about reading, as well as some of the key considerations which are involved in the study of "Chinese popular literature."

Chinese Popular Traditions: Bridging Oral, Written, Elite and Folk Cultures

Because of the long history of interaction between literary and oral traditions in Chinese popular culture, it is sometimes useful to think of generic or narrative antecedents to extant classes of fiction. While antecedents are certainly not likely to provide clear "origins" of particular manifestations of

popular cultural performances among contemporary audiences, they do provide an understanding of the history of certain traditions. Through an appreciation of the continuities and changes which shaped earlier traditions, it is possible to develop some insight into the enduring popularity of modern ones. It is important to remember that Chinese oral and written traditions rarely evolve in complete isolation. As Wang notes: "Though it is true that in some cases the two traditions (oral and written or popular and literary) develop independently, more often than not, they influence and draw on each other" (Wang 1989:839).

Although many scholars have adopted significantly conflicting positions as to whether a given genre or individual work comes from primarily literary or oral sources,[3] it appears that Chinese popular culture has long been able to incorporate successfully aspects of both elite and folk traditions. Referring to *bian wen*, a tenth-century system of written narratives which merged and reworked established elite and folk heroic story-cycles dating from the sixth century and earlier, Johnson states that this popular genre: "... must have helped bring some elite attitudes — even if considerably modified — into the popular realm, and some folk beliefs and ideas into the elite realm. Thus it functioned in its small way as a bridge between the elite and the common people" (Johnson 1980:96). While I will return to these issues in the next section as part of a diachronic examination of the traditions which precipitated the emergence of popular martial arts and romance fiction as readers know it today, it is significant to note that many readers identify particular works of "Chinese classical literature," such as the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) historical/military romances *Water Margin (Shuihu zhuan*, 水滸傳) and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguo zhi yanyi*, 三國志演義) as precursors of their favourite genres.

Before moving on to discuss methodological issues, I want to provide working definitions of two terms. First, as I use it in this discussion, "Chinese classical literature" denotes works which belong to long-standing literary traditions, although this general classification does not mean that this literature is necessarily either written in classical Chinese or exclusively literary in origin. Accordingly, *Water Margin* and *Three Kingdoms* are both examples of classical literature, even though the former is written in a lively, vernacular style and the latter, as McLaren demonstrates, may owe much to chantefables and broadsides of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), which themselves would have been based on oral material (McLaren 1985:162,170,188). Second, it should be noted that the classification "historical/military romance" refers to

3. Compare, for example the respective positions taken by Idema and Liu on the question of the influence of Song Dynasty story-telling on short stories or *hua ben* (話本) and its subsequent effect on the development of elite and popular fiction (Idema 1974; Liu 1967:107).

particularly structured classical novels. They are characterised by lengthy, largely fictionalised narratives comprised of many chapters which generally highlight and elaborate historical, political and military events. Although they may contain "romantic" sub-plots, these are often greatly minimised in comparison to the other content.

Summary of Methodological Design and Description of Readership Profile

This discussion of reader aesthetics and cross-generic perceptions among male martial arts and romance readers is based on information collected from 1993 to 1995 from a sample of thirty-five Mandarin-speaking men. I conducted both tape-recorded and unrecorded interviews in which I was permitted to take notes, as well as two questionnaire surveys.[4] For the latter, a Chinese-language pilot questionnaire was first distributed by hand, and a revised version developed based on the patterns of response in an attempt to minimize ambiguity, repetition and the overall investment of time required on the part of respondents to complete the entire survey. Revised questionnaires were distributed in Chinese or English, depending on respondents' language preferences, in either printed or electronic format.[5] In some cases, participants requested that we establish an informal dialogue about reading over the medium of electronic mail. In these instances, all replies were logged.

While participants' responses are quoted extensively throughout my work, anonymity is maintained unless individuals specifically gave written permission to refer to them by name. My field notes indicate an unusually high rate of return for a questionnaire study. Most of the people who expressed an initial interest or curiosity in my field research completed and returned the questionnaire. I was told by several that this was because I was investigating a topic which is important and enjoyable for many people, and I displayed a willingness to accommodate language and "technological" differences to the best of my ability.

A general profile indicates that most respondents are highly educated and are either studying or employed as researchers, frequently — but certainly

4. Upon completion of the doctoral thesis to which this research contributes, all field data pertaining to this study will be deposited in the Memorial University Folklore and Language Archive. Tape and questionnaire numbers refer to the author's classification.

5. I have discussed elsewhere the various kinds of software which can be used to send and receive text files (e.g., as electronic mail messages or material downloaded from Internet sites) which in turn display and print Chinese characters. See "Performances in Character: Nicknaming and Humor on the Chinese Net," in Michael Preston, ed., *Computer Applications to Texts and Textual Traditions*, New York: Garland Publishing Inc., forthcoming.

not exclusively — in the pure and applied sciences. Although the majority originally come from Mainland China or Taiwan, present locations vary, particularly in the cases of the electronically distributed surveys, as prospective respondents could access the electronic bulletin boards where I posted the questionnaire from potentially any electronic site address in the world. As a result, although many respondents were based at universities in Britain, I also received replies from Europe and North America. The sample of respondents discussed here represents approximately forty-three percent of the people who elected to participate in my study. For the purposes of this discussion, surveys and interviews by male readers who indicated that they most preferred either martial arts or romance fiction were selected for further comparative analysis.

Heroes and Talented Scholars: Martial and Romantic Models of Masculinity

According to many scholars, masculinity should not be taken as a unified concept which presents a single interpretation of the constellation of socially, historically and culturally determined attributes which surround the male gender. Cornwall and Lindisfarne, for example, develop the notion of "hegemonic masculinities," which they describe as dominant paradigms of idealised, "normative maleness." These archetypal patterns not only give rise to "subordinate variants" of masculinity adapted to different local contexts, but are also subject to historical shifts and displacements as well as the possibility that more than one such prevailing model may operate in parallel. They assert that:

> Rarely, if ever, will there be only one hegemonic masculinity operating in any cultural setting. Rather, in different contexts, different hegemonic masculinities are imposed by emphasizing certain attributes, such as physical prowess or emotionality, over others (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994:20).

In Chinese popular fiction, two hero-types representing two hegemonic masculinities stand out, the *haohan* (好漢) of martial-arts fiction and the scholar, or *caizi* (才子, literally, "talent") of the romance genre known as *caizi-jiaren* (才子佳人) or "scholar meets beauty." My ethnographic research suggests that not only are these two patterns historically coexistent, but also covariant and sometimes even complementary as well. One respondent, a 39-year-old post-doctoral researcher who enjoys martial-arts and fantasy fiction and whose reading repertoire seems to contain a considerable amount of influence from Chinese classical literature, did not define *haohan* in terms of martial ability and valour alone. His description depicts the male

protagonist as possessed of a restrained but sensitive nature, and at least a measure of the *caizi's* way with words, after the fashion of a kind of warrior-poet:[6]

> The typical male character has a complex personality. He has a sense of humor but is not perfect. His masculinity is mainly reflected in wisdom rather than power. If conditions permit, the best thing is a certain amount of literary talent. One example is *Three Kingdom's* Zhuge Liang.[7]

Whether these hegemonic masculinities are conceived of as fixed oppositions or fluid constructs, however, is at least partially dependent on where or indeed *if* readers perceive any potential sites of intersection. Readers whose aesthetic patterns are strongly genre-specific may see the hero-types as having little or no common ground. On the one hand, several of the readers polled in my survey stated that while they tended to prefer a particular type of novel over others, they read across a variety of genres and did not unilaterally exclude any. On the other hand, some readers showed marked and rather exclusive propensities for certain kinds of genres and characters. For instance, while he admittedly dabbled with the martial-arts fiction of perhaps its most celebrated writer, Jin Yong (金庸), a 40-year-old researcher made it known that kungfu fiction was not high in his affections. During a group interview, this man, referred to in the dialogue which follows as 'A,' made a bold and startling admission in the mixed company of his colleagues. His "confession" initially proved a great source of amusement for his male contemporaries. One of his more vocal associates, quoted as 'B' below, responded with some good-natured teasing in an effort to draw attention to his co-worker's unusual — and up until our interview, apparently largely unknown — literary tastes. In reply, the avowed romance reader highlighted one of the *haohan's* major faults, a shortcoming even die-hard kungfu novel fans grudgingly admit — the fact that the hero, at least as he is typically scripted, doesn't appear to *have* any:

> **A**: <says suddenly, in English>: "I like romances!"
> **B**: <Loud, drawn-out> "OH-HO!" and surprised laughter from other participants.>
> [SK: "What kinds of romances do you like?"]
> **A**: <in English>: "Any kind."

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6. All transcribed responses presented in this article, whether based on questionnaires or taped interviews, have been translated from Chinese unless otherwise noted. English segments are preceded by a notation such as "<in English>." Underlined material enclosed in square brackets denotes additional information added by the author, in order to clarify the subject or other referent of a respondent's statement.
7. Questionnaire response, respondent QHR-03.

{Others mention different authors, determine that A likes famous female romance novelist Qiong Yao, and " ... that other one from Hong Kong," which A fails to name. He takes suggested names from the rest of the group, but mostly concentrates, musing to himself, "And which others?"}
A: <very affirmatively> "Oh yes, romances are good reads!" <his choice of words is a pun on "good-looking" in Chinese, and there is laughter from all> "But I don't like science fiction, all science fiction is low-level stuff."
B: <interjecting> "That's right. Science fiction is too complicated. But many people like Jin Yong's martial arts fiction."
A: "That's right, I've read a little martial arts. Kungfu."
B: <teasing> "But 'A' doesn't like kungfu novels. He likes romances! <A woman's voice interrupts quietly in background, unclear>
A: "It's all rubbish, it's all fake! <laughter from all> The heroes are not handsome, first-rate [ ] heroes lack excellence, wouldn't you say? The heroes have no meat to them, no substance. No — <laughs, then in English, says carefully> *errors*."[8]

If all this sounds like a variation of the adage that a man can be "a lover or a fighter" — but not both — such an impression is not too far off the mark, although it needs to be refined slightly in order to properly reflect the ethos expressed by these novels. It may be more accurate to say that a hero cannot pledge himself equally to the causes of *qing* (情, "love," or "emotional sensitivity") and *yi* (義, "righteousness" or "altruism") as each principle, though not necessarily incommensurable, requires an individual's complete dedication. I will return to the concept of *qing*, its centrality to romance and the shaping of the romantic hero, but first I want to examine the masculinity of the *haohan* as it is constituted and reproduced in martial-arts fiction as a function of the hero's devotion to *yi*, and his situation relative to the story-world, the *jianghu* (江湖) or "rivers and lakes." This term, roughly analogous to "the greenwood" of many western ballads, basically designates the distinctive subculture which simultaneously marks the genre's narrative setting as closed to or outside normal society, and signifies its open potentiality for adventure — enacted through a complex internal structure of relationships, loyalties and avenged betrayals.

Although chivalrous romances were certainly an established prose genre by the early Ming Dynasty, the narrative themes existed in elite poetry as well as a variety of popular forms, such as legends, ballads, Buddhist sermons and recitations, and plays, all of which significantly predate this era. According to Liu, by the Tang Dynasty (618-907) tales of chivalry had evolved into sophisticated literary forms, while by the Song (960-1279) and Yuan periods (1271-1368) evidence suggests that such stories, regardless of their future disputed status as purely "oral traditions," were favourite topics for storytelling

8. Group interview, #T95VAR-26, tape-recorded interview by author, Glasgow, 12 October 1995.

and popular drama. Some stories, such as "Prince Tan of Yen," and "The Maiden of Yeh," — which anticipates later conventions by including such features as supernatural elements and a martial *heroine* — suggest a provenance considerably earlier than the Tang Dynasty (Liu 1967:72, 82-86, 99).

When asked to enumerate the essential characteristics which define martial arts fiction, most readers mentioned several common features. The first and most important of these is a hero with a strong sense of justice and excellent fighting skill. Second, kungfu novels frequently have a plot which revolves around either specific revenge against a rival individual or "clan" — a common name for the various fighting lodges whose members may be related by shared values and adherence to a particular martial school rather than familial ties — or a more general lack which must be redressed by martial intervention. Third, there is a heightened sense of community or brotherhood which is usually located in the *jianghu* rather than mainstream society. Fourth, the hero frequently searches for and finds one or more mentors who impart to him the secrets of martial excellence. Finally, the majority of readers note that kungfu fiction tends to contain more violence than other genres, and often fewer fully developed romantic elements.

The hero's ability to uphold justice is of course directly linked to his martial potential, both in terms of his application of fighting skill to defend the cause of righteousness at any given moment, and the future increase and refinement of those skills. As one reader explained:

> <in English> If someone has *de* (virtue) it's very important according to the theory. If you don't have a strong sense of morality probably you can't get somewhere in terms of your martial arts. Probably such ideas are still in the novels, and also in practice, that's just a reflection.... And those people [ ] value *yi* very much. The conception of *yi* I think governs brotherhood, fraternity and friendship in that specific sense. They envelop those things because "friendship" in English sometimes just means "sociability," or "acquaintance." So the elite of that community — the *jianghu* — are called *haohan*, "good man." But it doesn't mean "good man" in English. In English "good man" means a kind person, but *haohan*, that means a person who is really masculine or heroic. And *jiang yiqi*, promoting righteousness.[9]

As can be seen from the foregoing discussion, the heroes of martial-arts novels seem to have a surfeit of *yi* and a relative deficit of readily discernible emotionality, or *qing*. Although these stories may contain some love interest, particularly if the nature of the romance is such that it is

9. HE Yubin, #T95HYBc-11, tape-recorded interview by author, Edinburgh, 31 August 1995.

unrequited, thwarted, or otherwise misunderstood for most of the narrative — thus reflecting, to some extent, the tensions of unresolved combat by which the hero must continually prove himself —, the romantic theme is never permitted to completely dominate the story line. Cawelti cites this as one of the quintessential features of the adventure genre, which is similarly mirrored in romances to the extent that while they, too, may contain adventure, those aspects remain subordinated to the romantic plot (Cawelti 1976:40).

In many respects, western chivalric romances can be positioned on a kind of continuum of heroic motivation intermediately between Chinese chivalric and romantic fiction. While heroic Chinese and western knights-errant shared a deep concern for justice and righteous conduct, the former came together from many social classes and were outside not only the accepted Confucian social order but also largely beyond the enforced jurisdiction of even Imperial authority, while the latter were historically bound to class, Crown and society (Liu 1967:196-197). Because Chinese knights did not follow any codified ideal for romantic behaviour such as "courtly love," courtship did not generally become in these stories a means of "...redoubling and extending masculine relations," that is, a corresponding expansion of the masculine bonds tested and forged by combat and fellowship (Crane 1994:54).[10]

Where strong, successful, heterosexual relationships do exist in kungfu fiction, such as between the hero and heroine Guo Jing (郭靖) and Huang Rong (黃蓉) in Jin Yong's *Shediao yingxiong zhuan* (射雕英雄傳, *The Eagle-Shooting Heroes*), they may in fact unfold more like those found in some western romances to the extent that the developmental pattern of courtship manifests at best an unstable symmetry. Consider the fact that, in the medieval tradition, the western knight positions himself in the service of his idealised and unattainable lady even though that service may eventually dictate that he lose both his love and his life. Similarly, lovers in kungfu fiction sometimes resemble the medieval Erec and Enide to the degree that their relationship, though ultimately transcendent, is frequently beset by tests, misunderstandings, and the risk of permanent, mutual loss in prolonged and ill-fated separations. The following excerpt has been translated from an on-line Chinese magazine. The commentary, which examines *The Eagle-Shooting Heroes*, is by a male reader writing under the pen name of Dong Xie (東邪) :

> Everyone knows, in the novel Jing and Rong are well matched as a pair of characters. Indescribably, in the second half of the novel, Guo Jing and Huang Rong discover something, they seem to possess a strange and

10. See also p. 17, 39 for further discussion.

> wonderful sort of symmetry.... But later it was found that Guo Jing's treatment of Huang Rong was in error because her father Huang Yaoshi murdered his teacher.... Sadly, she severed her ties with Guo Jing and "made a clean break," but this mistake was erased after a certain number of complex events and twists (in the plot).... "There is no wind without waves, one wave has three breaks." These two people had to pass through countless crises which both destroyed and moulded and forged their true emotions into something precious, something very touching.[11]

By contrast, a perfect symmetry — of appearance, disposition, class and especially literary talent — which remains fundamentally unaffected by any externally divisive factors, along with intensified, mutual responsiveness to *qing*, are the hallmarks of the chaste "scholar-beauty" romance tradition. Just as two distinct subgenres of martial-arts fiction emerged, one emphasizing martial success through physical development, the other through supernatural cultivation (Liu 1967:129-130,134-135),[12] likewise there are two traditions of "scholar-beauty" romances, the chaste and the erotic (McMahon, 1995:99-125,126-149).

In the chaste tradition, there is little or no sexual description. The pair of lovers might be better described as a matched couplet rather than a couple, particularly as their mutual affection and desire is sublimated into poetry: "...the intercourse of the lovers is verbal, modeled on the polite medium of the written word, through which the youths pass the test of marriage by that time-honored means of establishing one's worth, poetic expression" (McMahon 1995:123). Conversely, although the heroine of an erotic romance might be basically chaste herself, the so-called scholar-hero of these novels certainly is not. He has multiple concubines and mistresses, and a deliberate — and descriptive — sexual and domestic asymmetry is introduced which develops the hero as a central rather than complementary figure.

A further contrast between these two traditions obtains in the treatment of cross-dressing. In the chaste tradition, cross-dressing may be used by both sexes to illustrate the lovers' mutual compatibility, an affinity which finally only falls short of the outright exchange, or complete reciprocal effacement, of both genders and their associated social attributes. Most commonly, the

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11. While his exact identity is unknown— his alias is also the name of a fictional character— that the commentator is male is confirmed in another part of the essay, where he says he "is like most guys" and describes, among other things, his fantasy about finding a woman like Huang Rong. See "*Huikan Shediao chu*," (回看射雕處,"The Eagle-Shooting Heroes Revisited"), *Xin yusi*, (新语丝, *New Threads*) vol. 19, August 1995. *New Threads* is an electronic magazine available for anonymous ftp at cnd.org.

12. Because of the close association of Chinese physical culture with aspects of cosmology, Liu notes that the precise differences between the two subtypes have become increasingly blurred in twentieth-century kungfu fiction.

heroine successfully assumes a male disguise for a period of time, a feat which bears witness simultaneously to her superior, "masculine" virtue and her lover's "feminine" compliance with — and in some cases, temporary imitation of — her behaviour. Although prolonged disguise as a woman ultimately debases the male heroic identity, masculine disguise momentarily establishes the heroine not as the feminine counterpart of the hero, but as a fully realised *duixiang* (對象, literally, "corresponding image"), who is free of the constraints of gender, completely constituted and reflected in the hero's projected gaze (McMahon 1995:99,113,115).[13] Similarly, cross-dressing in the erotic tradition exists in an inverted form: the hero adopts feminine guise more frequently than the heroine, using it as a means of heterosexual and/or homosexual seduction.[14]

For the male readers of romance fiction who participated in my study, the distinguishing features of the romance genre, like its history, are more difficult to specify. Although kungfu novel readers outnumbered romance enthusiasts in this particular sample, a limited number of generic prerequisites emerged during ethnographic investigation. Most readers feel that a good romance must incorporate three aesthetic features. The first can be described as strength of relational characterisation: the principal lovers must be coherently defined and developed in a fashion appropriate to the unfolding of events in their relationship. The second important requirement is that the author must demonstrate beauty and refinement of language and style, though this does not mean that sexual description must be either completely absent, or couched in euphemistic, high-flown terms. Third, the elements of the narrative must combine to "pull at the heartstrings" and resonate with the reader's experiences, feelings and attitudes.

When asked about the precursors of their favourite genre, readers tended to be somewhat more vague and generally cited a much less ancient literary pedigree. Most readers, even those who were now more often avid consumers of modern paperbacks, made special reference to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) classic *Honglou meng* (紅樓夢, *Dream of the Red Chamber*) as both an archetypal romance and a work that they had read again and again.

Dream of the Red Chamber details the declining fortunes of the extended Jia family, particularly focusing on the many loves but rather ambiguous sexuality of its effeminate, narcissistic hero Jia Baoyu. Baoyu is

13. For additional discussion on the concept of *duixiang* as a gender-transcending correspondence intentionally displaced from the female body and identity, see:"Male Narcissism and National Culture: Subjectivity in Chen Kaige's *King of the Children*." (Chow 1993:112-114).

14. There is a tradition of Chinese homoerotic fiction which is beyond the scope of the present paper (McMahon 1988:76-78;Hinsch 1990).

neither a scholar-talent nor a dissolute rogue, but he is convinced of the superior purity of the world of women. In the treasured company of his numerous female cousins, servants, and others, he seeks to reject, or at least reconfigure, the traditional demands of masculine behaviour and achievement which familial politics and society increasingly enjoin upon him as he comes of age. Like some modern male protagonists of contemporary Chinese fiction and film, Baoyu's character "...partakes of a narcissistic avoidance of the politics of sexuality and of gendered sociality that we would, in spite of the passive "feminine" form that it takes, call masculine." (Chow 1993:114).

Because Baoyu loves many women, or is at least deeply in love with the *concept* of women, McMahon positions *Dream of the Red Chamber* between the chaste and erotic romance traditions (McMahon 1995:177). Later manifestations of the genre adopt what might be called a tragic, "chastened erotic" perspective, which deliberately upsets the perfect symmetry of the lovers, their relationship and the image which their matched devotion reflects back on the less-than-perfect world in order to provide a source of romantic tension and a sense of pathos. One such school of popular fiction, called somewhat derogatorily "mandarin duck and butterfly" (鴛鴦蝴蝶) because of the genre's partiality for traditional romantic metaphors, became distinguished in the early part of this century from the elite, western-influenced fiction of the May Fourth writers (Link 1981:8,10-12; Hsia 1984:207, 214-215).

Like much popular western "entertainment fiction" of the time, however, these Chinese romances provided a wide-ranging audience of moderately literate men and women with inexpensive "comfort reading," first in the form of newspaper and magazine serials and then as paperback novels. From the readers' responses I have collected, it is possible to trace an occasionally discontinuous line of descent from the later "scholar-beauty" romances, through the "mandarin duck and butterfly" phenomenon to modern romances. Although the protagonists may be in different surroundings, the heroines not quite so delicate — or consumptive — and their heroes not quite so ultra-sensitive, there is still a concern for beauty and symmetry running through these novels which some readers find appealing:

> [ ]: Her description about feeling is very touching and beautiful. I read one of her books by chance just after the ending of the notorious Cultural Revolution, during which anything about feeling was considered to be capitalist and unhealthy. I immediately liked it and have read most of her works till now. Although the writing style remains basically the same for all her novels, I seldom get bored. I don't think there is any writer in mainland China who is as good as she at writing romances. There is a huge contrast between the way people choose their partners in this practical

> world and that in her book, which makes them more beautiful. I would rather stay in her book than come into this world.[15]

In the next section, I survey aspects of the complex world of "comfort reading" to examine individuals' personal insights into their own reading experiences.

Reading the Self: Reading as Identification, Addiction and Compensation

The three issues covered in this section, readers' identification with the hero and/or other facets of the narrative, reading addictions, and the compensatory effects associated with the consumption of popular literature, are all related in some way to the concept of reading-as-escape. Although the reading of popular fiction is commonly derided as "escapist activity" favoured by individuals who supposedly find prolonged exposure to the demands of real life somehow aversive, as Roberts points out, escape can be a positively constructed activity, in which readers deliberately *escape to* a pleasurable experience rather than from one that they would rather temporarily avoid (Roberts 1990:96-98).

In her seminal ethnographic study of female romance readers, Radway found that when readers used the word "escape" to describe why they read — and it should be noted that, on questionnaires, other descriptive terms were chosen in preference if listed — they used it in two ways. First, "escape" signified the slightly subversive activity of actually designating time for themselves as readers, even though that meant taking time away from domestic concerns. Second, it meant vicarious identification with a heroine whose psychological and other personal needs were considered and met by an attentive hero — in other words, identification with someone whose life was such that she did not need to "escape" (Radway 1987:89-90).

Given that I am a woman from a very different cultural background, perhaps it is not surprising that few of the men I questioned freely admitted that they actively identified with the hero or another character in the narrative. From what many of them *did* say, however, I am reluctant to dismiss this silence in the data as solely a function of either shyness on their part or "researcher bias effect" on mine. Instead, I want to suggest that the social, cultural and linguistic competencies Chinese male readers bring to the text, being without question qualitatively different from those of say, an upper-middle-class,

15. Informal response based on electronic questionnaire, QRE-13i. This respondent's reply is presented in the original English.

white, female reader, help to create a qualitatively different kind of identification.

For one thing, according to most of the male and female Mandarin speakers I asked, "identification" commonly carries the sense of distinguishing the self, something or someone *from* rather than relating *to* surrounding classes of objects, people or events. Also, most people concurred that a really good Chinese novel has neither a happy nor a sad ending, but an open one which suggests incomplete narrative closure. A *haohan* may achieve his objectives, but inevitably, as his various manifestations over the centuries attest, he will live to fight another day. A scholar may forfeit his perfect lover to the imperfection of mortal existence, but, once found, a truly reflected corresponding image never entirely fades. The never-ending, almost serial potential of some Chinese popular fiction suggests an analogy with western soap operas. Modleski found that soap operas allow the viewer to become both a subject and a spectator, adopting the role of an "ideal mother" figure (Modleski 1990:193). In a comparable fashion, I suggest that readers of Chinese popular fiction may assume not the position of the hero or main supporting characters, but that of a kind of patriarch — or even a trickster — who carefully observes the actions and passions of characters from a respectable but informed distance.

Most readers mentioned the prospect of becoming addicted to reading, particularly with reference to kungfu novels. Addiction is seen as a harmful side-effect of overindulgence in reading because of the individual's apparent loss of self-control over what should be a pleasurable but contained activity, and the more obvious, and potentially more serious, suspension of the normal patterns and reciprocal expectations of social interaction. Reading is usually a solitary pursuit, and since a person's identity in Chinese society is at least partially defined by family and interpersonal relationships, the reader who strays too long among the "rivers and lakes," for example, removes himself from not only the everyday society he knows, but the society *by which he is known*. A 29-year-old law student, describing why he reads kungfu novels, touched on the positive and negative aspects of the devoted reader's compelling, solitary quest:

> I wouldn't deny that the novels have succeeded in creating an atmosphere which either helps you explain your own philosophy and world views or enables you to live a life which is always too far for you.... The end result after one's reading of these novels may not, however, be encouraging: he becomes more aloof. On the other hand, he will certainly acquire some satisfaction if he tries to be different from others.[16]

16. Preface to questionnaire, QRE-05, in English.

It is conceivable, however, that temporary, "controlled addiction" to reading may not only be constructive in some ways, but also inevitable. Roberts uses the term "addiction clusters" to denote delimited but intensive reading patterns that can also be multiple and discontinuous (Roberts 1990:75). In talking to readers, I soon become aware that male readers in particular, no matter how enthusiastically they read, are careful to avoid speaking of themselves as "fans." To them, a "fan" represents a kind of "virtual reader" whose love of novels is excessive — in other words, who has a problematic "fiction addiction." Appreciating their own reading habits involves distancing themselves from this concept of the fan who is literally consumed by his own consumption. However, evidence points to the possibility that most readers have experienced something akin to addiction clusters, even though these periods of heightened involvement with texts may only last for the duration of a series, or even a single volume. Among questionnaire respondents in this sample, seventy-two percent of readers said that they preferred to read a good book "all in one breath/mouthful" (一口氣讀完， *"yi kouqi du wan"*) if they had the opportunity. Of these, forty-eight percent did not take breaks to eat or sleep. Finally, a total of fifty-nine percent stated they felt that "life was missing something" if they could not read at all.

In her discussion of the compensatory nature of women's reading, Radway emphasized the emotional gratification and support readers found in the act of reading particular kinds of novels (Radway 1987:95). Many of the readers in this study likewise highlighted the compensation provided by reading popular literature, citing this as one of the main reasons for its popularity. Before closing this section, I want to suggest that, because of the different hegemonic masculinities involved, readers are compensated equally, but in different ways. In selecting and rejecting particular genres or examples with a given genre, readers negotiate an understanding of themselves as men, and part of knowing who you are, or what you have, is an awareness of who you are not, what you lack, or what is useful and important that may lie outside your experience.

In the case of romance and kungfu fiction, compensation may follow the central ideas or motifs expressed in the narratives. Early on in my research, another reader, like the romance enthusiast discussed above, told me in a quiet, firm voice why he read love stories. He was almost fifty, older than most of his peers, and well-respected. Those who knew about it politely overlooked his slightly eccentric fondness for "books for ladies." "It's simple," he said, "I was a young man during the Cultural Revolution. We were sent to the countryside, and *we were not allowed to fall in love.*" Similarly, kungfu fiction

provides its readers with heroes who correct social wrongs, and solve problems in a just and expedient fashion:

> The social system is limiting, so people cannot find the solution in, what do you call — true, actual world. So they just read that kind of *gong fu* [...] novel look for a fair system and fair things in the novel! It's kind of, what do you call — compensation? [SK: Compensation.] Yeah, compensation. I think it's a very important factor for so many people to read that kind of novel.[17]

In the final section, I want to examine briefly some of the factors which may influence the stability of readers' perceptions of other genres and their audiences in light of notions of masculinity which are themselves, in many respects, always open to negotiation.

Reading Other Readers: Some Concluding Thoughts on What "Real Men" Read

As a process, the word "negotiation" incorporates several nuances. It comprises not only the sense of multiple parties engaging in verbal or written settlement to resolve a contentious issue or situation, but also primarily signifies the potential for movement. It implies both the transference of meanings and values attached to objects and actions, and the ability of subjects or agents to get around challenging obstacles. In referring to how readers negotiate masculinity through reading behaviour, I am drawing on the latter meanings, especially since the concept of masculinity, as we have seen, is never immutable. Individuals' generic preferences and reading styles are potentially unstable, and may shift in response to a variety of personal and social forces. These alterations may also signal changes in readers' constructions of masculinity as applied to themselves and to the wider social context of the modern Chinese male.

Many readers noted with some regret that their responses to my study reflected their experiences of reading when they were younger, that is, when they could better afford the time. However, their answers also very often revealed shifts in attention to different elements of the heroic models to which they related first as young students and later as mature men. An enduring kungfu novel reader who read within the genre first to glean descriptions of combat techniques and training secrets might concentrate now on stories which foreground a hero's struggle to achieve intimacy or emotional expression as well as or in place of martial supremacy. Several romance readers admitted that

17. WANG Zhongning, #T93WZN-01/2, tape-recorded interview by author, St. John's, 16 October 1993, in English and Chinese.

they initially turned to the genre not necessarily for any kind of pornographic gratification, but "to learn something about love," whereas they now read because having learned does not preclude the persistent desire to dream — in contemporary speech *zhao duixiang* (找對象) is still used to refer to the seeking of a lover or partner.

The key to acceptance of models of masculinity among the male readers I studied appears to lie in plausible, balanced presentations of the different heroic paradigms — if indeed hegemonies can, by definition, ever attain any semblance of shared parity. Perfect, all-powerful *haohan* and hypersensitive, "*qing*-riddled" *caizi* are, for the modern reader, two sides of the same caricature.

Readers who accept or categorically reject other genres are not, as Roberts argues, as far apart as we might think: "It is not in their admirations that they differ but their aversions" (Roberts 1990:63). In terms of genres which purport to represent masculinity, some readers may simply have — at any given stage of their lives — a more clearly defined template than others of what a "real hero" should look, sound, and act like. With time, that image might transform until the reader, in a spare moment, finds himself perusing other shelves, rereading and reworking his own ideas of masculinity in books he may have once rashly sworn he'd never open, this time with a wiser, if slightly embarrassed, private smile.

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