

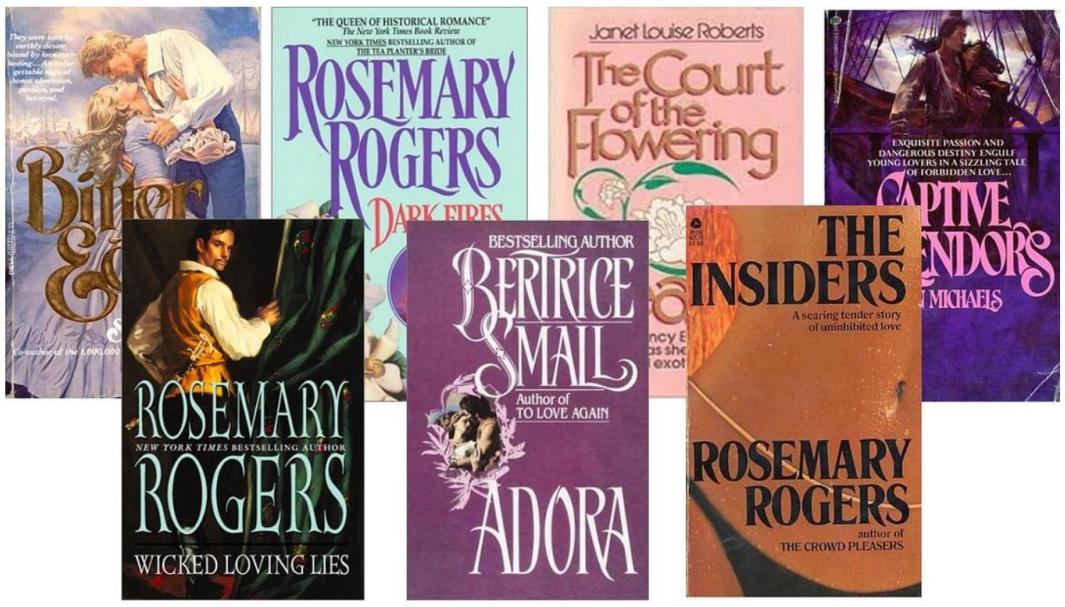
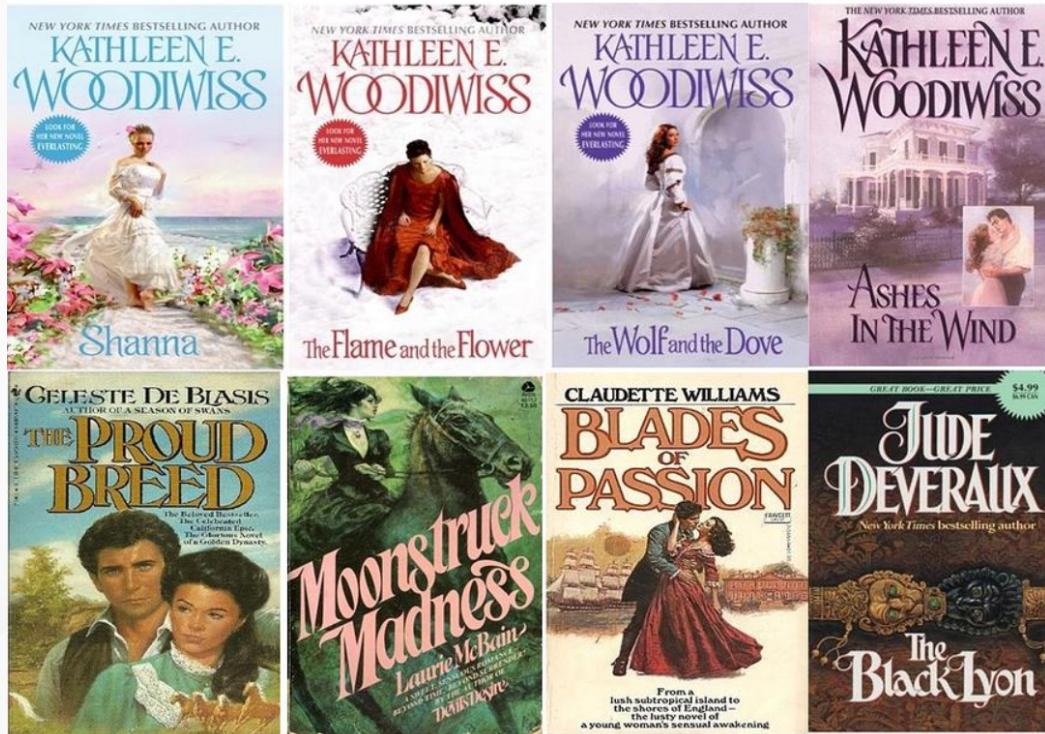
A traditional Chinese ink wash painting of a woman reading a book while sitting on a chair. She is wearing a light-colored robe and has a small object in her hair. The background includes a window with vertical blinds and a small framed picture on the wall.

AEJMC 2025

Connected Reading, Collective Power Douban Literary Communities and the Transformation of Women's Resistance

Yi Zhu

Xiamen University



Radway's *Classic Finding* (1984)

- ◆ Women's romance reading = "limited resistance" to patriarchy
- ◆ *Private, isolated, compensatory*

Digital Era Phenomenon

- ◆ Chinese literary platforms → feminist communities
- ◆ *Douban groups evolved from book discussion to feminism discussion*

Women's Reading as Resistance

Early Foundations

- Herzog (1941): Women's active selection of radio programs
- Hall (1980): Audiences produce "negotiated" and "oppositional" readings
- Reader-response theory: Readers as collaborative meaning-makers

Radway's Study

- Reading as everyday resistance: "mini-vacations" from domestic demands
- Key insight: Social practice of reading = resistant act
- Created autonomous psychological space for female subjectivity

“

These women never get together to share either the experience of imaginative opposition, or the discontent that gave rise to their need for the romance in the first place. (Radway, 1984, p. 212-213)

”

Female Reader Empowerment in Chinese Webnovel

"Write-while-publishing"

Serialization

- Real-time reader feedback shapes narrative development
- Commercial model: Reader clicks/subscriptions = Author income
- Authors respond to reader preferences for financial success

Gendered Platform Design

- Female-oriented platforms: Jinjiang Literature City, Qidian Girls' Net
- Clear gender divisions create unique reading spaces for women
- High-quality female readers and authors concentrated on specific sites

Female Reader Empowerment

- Economic power: Female readers as "financial sponsors" of content
- Content influence: Driving more diverse female protagonists & life choices
- Safe expression: Web platforms bypass conservative state-run publishing

Douban Literary Groups as Networked Feminism Counterpublics

Douban as Literary Discussion Platform

- Founded 2005 as rating site for books, films, and music
- "Literary centrality": Users organized around textual content evaluation
- 300 million monthly active users, primarily educated middle-class women
- Group function enables sophisticated interest-based literary communities

Douban as Feminist Counterpublic

- Protected discourse spaces through application-based admission
- Semi-public environments enabling sensitive discussions
- Literary discussion as alternative channel for gender issues
- Fraser's counterpublics: "Parallel discursive arenas where subordinated groups circulate counterdiscourses"

Research Question

RQ1: How does the digital environment transform women's reading from the "private, isolated, limited resistance" into more connected forms of collective resistance?

RQ2: How does the interactive creation model of Chinese webnovel empower female readers to influence literary content and develop alternative gender narratives?

RQ3: How do the platform affordances of Douban create spaces for women readers to develop shared interpretive frameworks and feminism consciousness through literary discussions?

Methodology - Netnography

Research Sites



小说打分器

Novel Rating Machine

- Established 2019,
- 200,000 members
- general community
- currently less active



世界莴苣联盟

Global Lettuce Union

- Established 2020
- 4,691 members,
- feminist orientation -
- "Upholding the spirit of loving women, evaluating literary works"

Data Collection

- Participant observation (June 2024 - ongoing)
- Applied for membership and participated in group discussions
- Observed: thematic distribution, interaction patterns, identity expression
- Tracked evolution from literary evaluation to gender issues

Methodology - In-depth Interviews

Participant Recruitment

- 10 interviewees recruited through volunteer recruitment and private messages
- All women with feminist consciousness and active webnovel discussion participation
- Ages: primarily 18-25, high educational levels

Interview Process

- Conducted via Tencent Meeting (audio calls)
- Duration: 60-120 minutes each
- Semi-structured format focusing on :
 - Personal reading history;
 - Experiences in discussion groups;
 - Evolution of feminism consciousness;
 - Connections between online communities and feminist identity formation.

"I Am Not Alone"

From Isolated Reading to Networked Solidarity

Group Features

- Female-centered spaces enable honest discussions
- Collective recognition of problematic content
- Formation of supportive reading communities

Key Changes

- Private reading → Social activity
- Individual discomfort → Shared validation
- Isolated readers → Connected communities

The Affective Labor of Reading

How Literary Discussion Forges Feminist Consciousness

Evolution of Discussion Topics

- Literary criticism → Gender-informed critique
- "Values" becomes central evaluation criteria
- Fiction scenarios → Real-world gender issues

Critical Framework Development

- Sophisticated analysis of patriarchal narratives
- Collective meaning-making through shared reading
- Literature as gateway to feminist discourse

"Give Us a Better Heroine!"

Reader Empowerment in a Participatory Ecosystem



Beyond Individual Feedback

- Organized group campaigns for better female characters
- Shared evaluation standards across community members
- Collective boycotts of problematic content



Community Impact

- Collective recommendations shape reading choices
- Promotion of feminist-friendly works

Beyond Literature

From Community Discussion to Public Engagement



Discussion

Transformation of Reader Experience

- Connected communities replace isolated reading
- Readers gain influence over content creation
- Qualitative change in resistance potential

Literature as Political Gateway

- Fiction discussions evolve into feminist discourse
- Safe entry point for sensitive gender topics
- Platforms foster alternative discourse spaces

Reconceptualizing Romance Reading

- Challenges "inherently patriarchal" assumptions
- Context and community determine political significance
- From individual compensation to collective mobilization



AEJMC 2025

THANK YOU

yi_zhu0908@outlook.com