

1. Emerging Feminist Perspectives: My 14-Year Journey into Queer Literature

*In the summer of 2012, the air in the student dormitory seemed to have solidified in the sweltering heat. I lay on my bed, sweat soaking my pillow, but nothing could diminish my excitement for the new book in my hands—*The Lost Tomb*. As my fingers brushed over the pages, the texture of the paper brought a slight sense of coolness.*

Wu Xie, a kind, gentle, and extraordinarily intelligent scholar, came alive on the page. Then there was Zhang Qiling, a cold, taciturn, and highly skilled martial artist who always appeared just in time to save Wu Xie from danger, like a guardian destined to protect him. As I read about their shared perils, a thought arose in my mind: If Wu Xie were a girl, wouldn't they make the perfect couple?

At that moment, my roommate suddenly rushed over, excitedly exclaiming, "Don't you know? There's a lot of slash about these two online." Her words felt like an open door, leading me into an unknown world. With curiosity and a bit of trepidation, I clicked on the link she sent me—what appeared on the screen was a male-male romance novel about Wu Xie and Zhang Qiling. I was startled; this was the famous Danmei literature¹ I had heard about.



Figure 1. A slash art of two male characters, created by book fan "Misha."

Since 2012, I have extensively read over 100 Danmei web novels and immersed myself in Danmei communities, gaining a deep understanding of its 14-year development history. Initially drawn by the compelling premise of two men balancing strength and tenderness, I became captivated by Danmei literature. This fascination led me to explore notable works like *Mo Dao Zu Shi* and *Tian Guan Ci Fu*.

This immersion has sparked my academic curiosity as well. Why is Danmei

¹ **Danmei literature:** A genre of literature that features romantic and emotional relationships between male characters, often written by female authors and primarily targeting a female readership. While it is considered a subcategory of queer literature, it is not entirely synonymous with it.

literature primarily disseminated in the private spaces provided by the internet? Why is the theme of love in Danmei literature centered on male homosexual relationships, making it a "female-oriented" genre of online literature (where "female-oriented" refers to the fact that the vast majority of authors are women, and the vast majority of readers are also women)? And why do Danmei works authored by women often embody a contradictory narrative that is both traditional and rebellious? On one hand, the depiction of male-male relationships frequently mimics mainstream heterosexual romance tropes, with one man being feminized (e.g., In Danmei literature, a typical motif is: "The power-imbalance dynamic of a dominant-submissive relationship between male couples, where the weaker male partner suffers both physical and emotional torment, and fans derive pleasure from watching this masochistic storyline."). On the other hand, these works tend to exhibit misogynistic tendencies, particularly in their portrayal of women who conform to societal stereotypes (e.g., the gentle, angelic woman often cast as a malicious antagonist who interferes with others' relationships). These questions have led me to deep academic reflection.

My early passion for literature guided me to pursue an undergraduate degree in Chinese Language and Literature at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. During my studies, I delved into feminist literature, analyzing the marginalization of women in *Jane Eyre* and exploring feminist classics like *The Madwoman in the Attic*. In the Foreign Literature course, I examined Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, engaging with the complexities of women's struggles and liberation. Additionally, in Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature, I presented an analysis of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy in *The Second Sex*. These academic experiences sparked my contemplation on how women construct utopias and project their desires within Danmei literature. In the popular culture course, I studied Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, which deepened my understanding of hierarchical discipline and the panopticon theory.

In the "female space" constructed by the internet, Danmei literature highlights female aesthetic appeals and expressions. I have delved into the gender political implications behind Danmei literature and believe that its appeal to female audiences mainly lies in its modification and reconstruction of mainstream gender. By modifying masculinity and linking male homosocial relationships with male homosexual relationships, Danmei literature constructs masculinity as an object of gaze and sexual object. It successfully creates a viewing position for women through the structure of male homosexual desire, offering a way for women to derive voyeuristic pleasure from watching men, thus developing a new mode of female sensual consumption.

2. Navigating Platform Censorship: My 5-Year Journey in Queer Media

One afternoon in 2020, I was already an established video creators on China's mainstream social media platforms, focusing on daily uploads of Danmei slash videos. That day, I eagerly created a new video and uploaded it to Kuaishou. However, Kuaishou's review system struck swiftly, like a bolt of lightning shattering my hopes. Not only did the platform issue a warning, but it also used data algorithms to reduce the video's visibility. The reason given was "the content contains behavior or speech that might cause discomfort to others or promote unhealthy trends."

I was filled with fury, for the video contained neither sexual innuendos nor violent or bloody scenes, and there were no sensitive words. It merely depicted a mundane argument between a pair of male lovers: one boyfriend, in the heat of the argument, asked the other to sleep separately, while the other comforted him with the tenderness one might show a pet. To see such a simple everyday conflict condemned in this manner was deeply infuriating. Confronted with this unexpected censorship warning, I didn't hesitate to engage in an intense hour-long phone call with an administrator via Kuaishou's instant communication platform. I demanded to know why the video's distribution was being restricted, questioning why such a trivial daily moment was deemed inappropriate. The administrator's voice on the other end sounded resigned and weary: "In principle, we neither support nor oppose content about male homosexuality, but this content does not conform to public morals." His words were like a cold, indifferent verdict, striking me with their harshness.

My queer video was branded with an unjust accusation, and this was a recurring tragedy in my five years of creating and publishing queer media—merciless restrictions from platform review processes. At that moment, I deeply felt that the field I loved so much was being mercilessly shackled by invisible rules.

During the five years of media history practice, the disputes with platform reviews mentioned above have occurred no less than 30 times, involving multiple layers of regulatory measures such as account bans and violation warnings. Through negotiating with platform reviewers, I have learned to purify and censor my video expressions, making the content better suited for survival on mainstream social media in China. This process of self-discipline aligns closely with Foucault's theory of discipline. My detailed description of achievements on social media is intended to demonstrate my firsthand practical experience and insights, which help me conduct better research: I have created over 300 short videos, manage 16 accounts with 1.4 million followers, and have accumulated over 100 million views.

The challenges I faced when publishing Danmei videos have further sparked my academic interest. I am eager to explore questions such as: How do internet censorship mechanisms in mainland China shape and influence the presentation and dissemination of Danmei content? What specific restrictions are imposed at different stages of

censorship? How do these restrictions drive changes in the content strategies of Danmei creators, and how do they adjust to evade regulation? How do these adjustments impact the symbolic expression of Danmei culture and the relationship between creators and audiences? Lastly, how do fan communities interpret and respond to Danmei content under censorship, and how does this affect the broader recognition of Danmei culture in society?

Because I am deeply involved in the Danmei literature and media communities, I have established connections with many Danmei voice actors, Danmei slash video creators, queer fangirls, female Danmei authors, and professionals in the queer media industry. Therefore, **leveraging my network, I aim to use ethnographic and field research methods to conduct my doctoral research.**

Meanwhile, I furthered my understanding of screen language and queer media theories. In 2019, I enrolled in the Master's program in Broadcast Television Program Planning and Research at the Communication University of China, where I studied until I graduated in 2022. During those three years, I not only gained practical experience in the TV variety show industry but also learned a great deal about media theory.

In addition to managing my own Danmei media work, I also joined a company that produces Danmei audio dramas—Sina Network Technology Co., Ltd. There, I focused on adapting Danmei novel copyrights into paid audio dramas and employed transmedia storytelling strategies. Furthermore, through the company's voice acting talent show and its live-streaming app, I had the opportunity to meet many talented voice actors.

3. Building on Existing Work: My Contribution to Doctoral Research

Exploring Theoretical Aspects in Queer Media: Theoretical exploration of queer audio dramas is still in its infancy, despite their emergence as a distinct art form around 2020. Existing literature has examined the adaptation of queer literature under the constraints of mainstream media in China, but there is a significant gap when it comes to understanding the historical development and survival strategies of queer audio dramas within the regulatory framework of digital platforms. Drawing on my extensive experience in this field, my research seeks to fill this gap by offering a focused study on queer audio dramas. This work will not only contribute to the broader field of queer theory but also provide insight into how this media form navigates and evolves within specific cultural and political environments.

Highlighting the Lack of Ethnographic Research on Danmei Radio Dramas in Mainstream Social Media: I have identified a critical absence of ethnographic research concerning Danmei radio dramas within mainstream social media platforms. This gap presents an opportunity to conduct in-depth studies that explore how Danmei interacts with and is shaped by these platforms.

Leveraging Interdisciplinary Thinking: My interdisciplinary approach enables me to bridge the gap between queer , feminist theory and media studies, providing a unique perspective that enhances research in both areas.

In summary, my fourteen years of reading experience in queer literature, five years of media work dealing with platform censorship, and my academic background in literature and media have deepened my understanding of queer literature and media. I am committed to conducting future research with rigor and passion, and I look forward to potential collaborations and discoveries with experts in the field.