

DOCTORAL THESIS

Repressed Sexuality — Disguised Masculinity in Chinese Danmei Adapted Series

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ABSTRACT

Since 2014, danmei (boys' love) series, adapted from subcultural literature of danmei web novels, have become an established genre of drama series in China, with phenomenal works each year. The genre reached its full blossom with the unprecedented success of *The Untamed* (2019) and *Word of Honor* (2021), which both depicted gentle and androgynous male characters and their homoerotic relationships and affections. However, the shows' popularity further led to social concern and debates, and finally, the state's intervention as the two works were canceled for broadcasting. In January 2022, the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) issued a total ban on the genre, and state media criticized it for insidious harm to the public and youth especially.

Based on Foucault's idea of bio-politics and neoliberal governance, I propose queer biopolitics to show how, through danmei, the state institutions are implementing, through different policies and regulations, the queer biopolitics to maintain its governing. Queer biopolitics, in this research, refers to the mode of governance, enacted through government's labelling of gender fluidities, such as soft masculinities, as queer and rebellious; and, consequently, the government's attempt at national de-queering through popular danmei narratives.

This study explores the rise and fall of the danmei adapted series and its conflicts with the dominant state discourse and gender politics. By focusing on the most popular danmei adapted series of each year, from the perspective of masculinities, it tries to reveal how this genre goes against and embraces the state ideology at the same time. What kind of masculinities are altered and censored and what are remade by fans. Through these masculinities, what kind of sexuality is repressed and what is liberated. How the shows' bypassed state censorship in the first place through negotiation and self-censorship and how they reached their popularity through strategic choices of stars, platforms, etc. Finally, it investigates the shows' social repercussions and debates and how they led to the state's most severe ban on the genre.

Key words: danmei, masculinities, queer, gender, censorship