

Contemporary Chinese Romantic Fiction: Analyzing the “Female Young Werther and Male Charlotte” Genre

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Abstract: *On the one hand, to a certain extent, romantic fictions satisfy female readers’ fantasies about love. On the other hand, these novels are also a kind of embodiment of social values. They play an important role in contemporary popular culture. In Chinese mainland today, a large number of romantic fictions have been adapted into films or drama series with large market value. However, contemporary Chinese romantic fiction has not attracted much academic attention. In order to address the lack of academic research in this area, this study mainly focuses on the characters in contemporary Chinese romantic fictions, especially female characters, as well as the social value of these novels. This paper takes the Female Young Werther and Male Charlotte (FYW&MC) genre as an example to analyze and discuss the character image and social value of contemporary Chinese romantic fiction. Here, I divide the FYW&MC genre into three subtypes and select three representative works, *Qiyue and Ansheng*, *Cry Me A Sad River*, and *The Best of Us*, as case studies to analyze and explain the social value and character image of the FYW&MC genre. In addition, readers’ emotional responses towards the works or characters are also among the points of concern in this study.*

Keywords: *romantic fiction, contemporary Chinese literature, popular culture, character image, audience attitude*

1. Introduction

1.1 The Classification of Female Images in Chinese Popular Fiction

In her doctoral dissertation, *A Brief Discussion of the Image of Women in Modern Chinese Popular Fiction* [14], Yu Xiaofeng divided the images of women in popular fiction from the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic Period of China into four categories: prostitutes, chivalrous women, housewives, and the women in the new era. A similar academic work is Liu Yuxia’s *A Study of Female Archetypes in Contemporary Chinese Romance Novels* [7], in which she classifies female characters in Chinese romance novels from the 1980s to the 1990s into four categories: Cinderella, Snow White, Nuwa, and Huo Xiaoyu.

Taking account of the above-mentioned research in particular, I have classified the female images (the heroines) in contemporary Chinese romantic fiction published for the first 20 years of the 21st century in Chinese mainland. The specific classifications are as follows: “Cinderella,” “New Beauty,” “Female Young Werther,” and “New Female Consort Prince.” This paper uses the heroines of the “Female Young Werther” type, which are found in the “Female Young Werther and Male Charlotte” (FYW&MC) genre, as a case study to discuss contemporary Chinese romantic fiction and the social values it engages with. This research will focus on the pattern of female images in contemporary Chinese romantic fiction and the audience’s perceptions of these female figures. It is worth noting that the cases in this study are all published works with visual adaptations.

1.2 The Data and Collection Tools

In terms of the audience’s emotions concerning and attitude towards the work, my research is based on the data of Douban, the largest cultural product evaluation and rating website in China. The reason that Douban is used is because in addition to its dominant position in cultural product reviews in China and its vast database, it also deals with social attributes. Audiences of cultural products do not just rate works on Douban, but also exchange specific comments and opinions about them on the platform. Douban’s data acts as a strong reference in the field of research targeting Chinese audiences for cultural

products.

Douban mainly includes three aspects in audience evaluation: scoring (ratings are presented on the page in the form of stars ranging from 1 to 5, with each star counted as two points; thus the highest score is 10 points, and the lowest score 2 points), short comments, and comments. In terms of audience evaluation and emotional tendency, Douban's short comments are the main object of study here. I used Houyi Collector to crawl the data of the short comments from Douban and the GooSeeker platform to segment texts and count the word frequency in the short comment texts.

1.3 Female Young Werther and Male Charlotte in Contemporary Chinese Romantic Fiction

The Sorrows of Young Werther is a famous novel by German author Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Since its publication in 1774, the work has attracted a large readership, even sparking the "Werther Fever" across late eighteenth-century Europe. In the novel, Goethe portrays a confused young man, Young Werther, who is discontented with society and suffers from unrequited love. Young Werther's discontent and confusion are replicated in the emotions conveyed by Chinese campus love romance novels of the early 21st century. Therefore, in this paper, I classify and name the characters in Chinese campus love romance novels in the early 21st century based on those in The Sorrows of Young Werther. However, it is worth noting that novels in this genre often narrate the story from the heroine's point of view, so that the narrative form can be seen as a kind of "Inverted Young Werther". Thus, in this paper, the characters of the "Young Werther" type are all female. Charlotte, the object of Young Werther's unrequited love in the original novel, will be used as a character type to refer to the heroine's love interest, the hero. In the title of this paper, "Female Young Werther and Male Charlotte" (FYW&MC) thus refers to the distinct character types found in Chinese campus love romance novels in the early 21st century.

The main characters are all teenagers or college students. In addition to the love interest in the main narrative of the novel, this genre uses a lot of space to reflect the friendship and school life of teenagers. These heroes and heroines, especially the heroines, are filled with the confusion, agitation and rebellion of adolescence. Compared with heroines in other types of Chinese romance novels, heroines in the FYW&MC genre tend to be more daring and less constrained by mainstream values. Their opposition to mainstream values can be embodied in the novel as challenging teachers or parents, or as experiencing abortion, unrequited love, and so on. In order to rationalize these acts of rebellion, authors often design a family of origin for these protagonists that is not conducive to growth. In other words, the authors believe that the reason why these teenagers become rebellious and mentally sensitive is their family and society. Moreover, such works often sanctify death. In the FYW&MC genre of Chinese romance novels, the authors use "death" as a means to fight fate or refuse to conform to mainstream values.

1.4 Classification of the "Female Young Werther and Male Charlotte" genre of romance novels

The FYW&MC genre of Chinese romance novels can be roughly divided into the following subtypes:

1) The first type of FYW&MC genre romance novel mainly focuses on the heroine's growth and the confusions of adolescence. Although the whole novel revolves around the love story of the hero and heroine, the relationship between them does not occupy a large proportion of the novel. The author focuses on the conflict and distress caused by love. The first type of FYW&MC genre is referred to as subtype A in what follows.

2) The second type of FYW&MC genre is close to a subcategory of A. These works also focus on the heroine's growth and the confusion of adolescence, but the difference is that the second type of FYW&MC genre focuses the depiction on the love story between the hero and heroine. Their distress and negative emotions become the spice of the love story. The second type of FYW&MC genre is hereafter referred to as subtype B.

3) The third type of FYW&MC is completely different from the previous two types. This genre reflects the adult heroine's nostalgia for her teenage years. The love story between the hero and the heroine and the confusion of adolescence appear in the novel in the form of the heroine's memories, which form the main part of the novel. The author rarely provides much description of the heroine's adult life. The third type of FYW&MC genre is referred to as subtype C in what follows.

This paper uses in turn as the representative works of the above three subtypes, *Qiyue and Ansheng*, *Cry Me A Sad River* and *The Best of Us*, to analyze the characters in the novels and the aesthetic orientation of the audience.

1.5 Character Classification

I refer to the characters in *The Sorrows of Young Werther* to classify the main characters in the FYW&MC genre of Chinese romance novels as follows:

Female Young Werther: these heroines are school girls with troubles in their inner world.

Male Charlotte: as the hero, this type of character is the love interest of the heroine.

Albert: This type of character is often a would-be rival, seeking to obstruct the hero or heroine's love by constantly hindering the development of the hero and heroine's relationship.

In the character analysis section of this paper, I will categorize and analyze the novel's characters based on the classification above.

2. The Case Studies

2.1 *Qiyue and Ansheng*

Qiyue and Ansheng was written by Annie Baby. The two heroines in the novel seem to be two independent characters, but their relationship is like entity and shadow. The main female characters in the novel are classified as follows:

Qiyue and Ansheng: The Heroines, Female Young Werther & Albert

The characters of the two heroines form a structure of unity of opposites. Similar to the same author's uses of multiple "surfaces" to describe a similar character analyzed elsewhere in my other research, *Qiyue and Ansheng* uses two characters to express the confusion and contradictory mentality of teenagers. [11] Qiyue's image represents girls who satisfy the expectations of their schoolteachers and parents. Meanwhile, she also represents the image of such young girls in the eyes of others. They are well-behaved daughters at home and hardworking students at school. However, because their lives encounter no obstacles, the author believes that these "good girls" lack courage when they encounter setbacks or challenges. In the story, Ansheng represents rebellious young women who do not conform to mainstream Chinese values. On the other hand, she also represents the rebellion and confusion hidden within the inner world of the "good girls." [1][5]

Qiyue and Ansheng seems like a trite story about two female best friends who fall in love with the same man. [1] In fact, however, the author communicates her own perspective of confused adolescent girls through the love triangle between the two heroines and Jiaming which represents the paradox of obedience and rebellion. Compared to other FYW&MC genre works, the character design of *Qiyue and Ansheng* is very special. The two heroines, Qiyue and Ansheng, are both Female Young Werther, but at the same time they are both Albert. They both fall in love with the same man so they both try to drive each other away from Jiaming and hurt each other. This is like the beginning of the novel. The two heroines are like entities and shadows, they have no way to really get rid of each other. The core focus of the novel is the love story between the two heroines and Jiaming. [9] However, throughout the work, the depiction of love is negative. For the heroines, Jiaming's love represents betrayal and hurt.

2.2 *Cry Me A Sad River*

On May 4, 2008, the New York Times published an essay titled China's Pop Fiction which referred to Guo Jingming as "the most successful writer in China today." (King, 2008)[4] The story *Cry Me A Sad River* analyzed in this section is one of Guo Jingming's famous works.

According to the classification of characters in this paper, I categorize the female characters in the novel as follows:

Yi Yao: The Heroine, Female Young Werther

Tang Xiaomi & Gu Shenxiang: Albert

The heroine, Yi Yao is a sensitive individual filled with self-contempt. Her father abandons her mother and her, so her mother has to work as an unlicensed prostitute to support the family. All these factors cause the heroine to have low self-esteem and she is afraid to stand up to school violence. Yi Yao also has a crush on Qi Ming and desperately hungers for affection, but is afraid to tell the hero directly. [3] The author uses a lot of psychological descriptions in his novel to reflect such images and

characteristics of Yi Yao.[12]

In the novel, Tang Xiaomi and Gu Senxiang act as obstacles to the relationship developing between the hero and the heroine. Tang Xiaomi is jealous of the heroine because of her crush on Qi Ming and she leads Yi Yao's bullying at school. Despite her bullying tendencies, Tang Xiaomi is a coward on the inside. When facing Qi Ming, she cannot courageously chase him. At school, Qi Ming ignores her and this behavior angers her which causes her to take her anger out on Yi Yao, who is weaker than her. This is also evident when she faces Qi Ming's real girlfriend, Gu Senxiang. Because Gu Senxiang is sheltered by her parents and teachers, and has a delinquent twin brother, she does not dare to openly bully Gu Senxiang at school. In the novel, Gu Senxiang is the opposite of the heroine. She has no flaws in her character. Notably, both the hero and Gu Senxiang attribute her death to the heroine. The image of Gu Senxiang makes Yi Yao's life in the story seem even more tragic. Yi Yao's suicide can be attributed to her.[3]

Yi Yao's mother is also a noteworthy female figure. In the story, Yi Yao's mother has to work as a prostitute to support Yi Yao. The depiction of prostitutes is very rare in contemporary Chinese romantic fiction. Even if a work contains similar images, the author usually tries to minimize the "sexual" element of such images in order to adapt to the reader's receptivity. However, in *Cry Me A Sad River*, the author does not make "adjustments" on this point. In the novel, when Yi Yao is bullied by her classmates at school, her mother's occupation is one of the reasons she is attacked. In addition, similar to other mothers in the same genre, the personality of Yi Yao's mother is aggressive. This woman, tormented by life, is grumpy and she abuses her daughter as a way to vent her dissatisfaction with life. [3] The presence of this character in the novel has the following two meanings: (1) Her love for Yi Yao sets off the hero's love for Yi Yao as being superficial and hypocritical; (2) Through the image of Yi Yao's mother, the author represents the image of a middle-aged woman in an urban marginal group.

Compared with subtype A represented by *Qiyue* and *Ansheng*, subtype B represented by *Cry Me A Sad River* focuses on the romantic relationship between the hero and the heroine. Although there are scenes of school violence and the hypocrisy of human nature in *Cry Me A Sad River*, the core story of the novel is the love story between the heroine and the hero. The overall tone of the novel is depressing but the language is rich. Such novels fit the sentimental mindset of some adolescent readers. Additionally, the novel has aroused great controversy because it contains numerous comments on or descriptions of sex, abortion, suicide and people in urban marginal groups.[6] The Douban short comments on the novel can be divided into two types: (1) Some readers think that the author adds too much dramatic conflict to the novel in order to show the heroine's suffering. These dramatic conflicts are too unrealistic or dramatic and they do not conform to mainstream values; (2) Other readers believe that the novel presents images of people of the urban marginal group. The reality of life for the marginal group is even more tragic than that portrayed in fiction. The above two opposing views reflect the fact that the urban marginal group is typically invisible in Chinese public cultural products. The general public is unfamiliar with these marginal groups and even think that they do not exist.

2.3 The Best of Us

The Best of Us is a work of romantic fiction written by Chinese mainland author, Ba Yue Chang An, [2] and published in 2013. The core story line of the novel is unrequited love between a female high school student, Geng Geng, and her male classmate, Yu Huai. In addition to the romance in the core story line, the author presents readers with a complete picture of high school life in Chinese mainland. According to the classification of characters in this paper, I categorized the female characters in the novel as follows:

Geng Geng: The Heroine, Female Young Werther

Chen Xuejun & Wen Xiaoxiao: Albert

The heroine, Geng Geng, is an ordinary girl with ordinary appearance and ability. She is unexpectedly accepted into Zhenhua High School, the best high school in her city, because of the reduced difficulty of the entrance examination. There, the heroine meets many extremely talented peers, which makes her life at school frustrating. In addition, her unrequited love for the hero, Yu Huai, also distracts her. [2] The author's shaping of the heroine's image and psychological activities has triggered a strong resonance among the audience. The positive short comments on the heroine can be divided into the following categories: (1) The readers think the heroine is like themselves in high school; (2) The heroine's story reminds readers of their own high school days; (3) The adult heroine does not become a member of the elite, but a common person like the readers. Unlike other works discussed as case studies, the heroine of

The Best of Us has almost no negative comments on Douban.

In this regard, it is interesting that Geng Geng, as the heroine of romantic fiction, is full of “shortcomings” in the character image. Such a heroine, full of “shortcomings”, has become one of the most popular female protagonists in contemporary Chinese romantic fiction. The readers’ love for Geng Geng comes from the “shortcomings” that make her image seem extraordinarily realistic, not vacuous and one-dimensional like some other works of same genre.[10][13]

Chen Xuejun and Wen Xiaoxiao are obstacles to the development of the relationship between the hero and heroine in the novel, but they are completely different from the same type of characters analyzed in the previous section. Their behavior in the story does not harm the heroine, and they are not even openly pursuing the hero in the story. They are only the heroine’s “imaginary enemies” in the relationship. There are two meanings of these rival characters’ images in the novel: (1) They are the antithesis of the heroine’s image: Chen Xuejun and Wen Xiaoxiao are exceptionally pretty and intelligent compared to the heroine, so that they set off the heroine’s ordinariness. (2) They trigger the heroine’s anxiety about her relationship in the story. The heroine’s psychological activities reenact the readers’ mindset of falling in love during their teenage years. This is also corroborated by the Douban short comments, in which many readers have directly pointed out that the interaction between the hero and heroine in the novel reminded them of their own first love.

There are two other very important female characters in *The Best of Us*, Geng Geng’s mother and Yu Huai’s mother. These two characters provide two very typical images of Chinese mothers. Geng Geng’s mother is an aggressive woman who divorced her husband for his weakness and lack of ambition. She loves Geng Geng, but her attitude towards her daughter is harsh and critical. She wants her Geng Geng to become as capable a person as she is, and is disappointed by Geng Geng’s behavior at school and mediocre grades. Another maternal figure in the novel is Yu Huai’s mother, who is a controlling woman. Because Yu Huai’s father is working overseas, the mother must take care of the family alone in China. Because of her husband’s prolonged absence, she gives her full attention to her son. These two female figures show readers two typical traits of Chinese mothers, aggressive and domineering. There is no doubt that they love their children dearly, but in their presence, their children do not have autonomy and can only grow up how their mothers want them to. [2] Such parent-child relationships are a very real reflection of one of the core conflicts in Chinese families, the suffocating parent-child relationship.

The Best of Us uses trivial moments of everyday life to portray the story of the hero and heroine’s unrequited love story in high school. Compared to other types of Chinese contemporary romantic fiction, the stories in the subtype C of the FYW&MC genre, represented by *The Best of Us*, are more trivial. They are usually made up of elements of school life or everyday life but that is the reason why subtype C resonates so much with readers: these stories are close to the readers’ lives.

3. Discussion

3.1 The Main Female Images

The main female images in the FYW&MC genre of Chinese contemporary romantic fiction can be divided into two categories: the heroine, Female Young Werther; and the obstructor, Female Albert. The characteristics of the Female Young Werther in the three subtypes are as follows: In subtypes A and B, the female images of the Female Young Werther type are sentimental. They live in single-parent families. They are ignored by their parents and teachers. These girls are confused about their futures. They often find the meaning of their existence in life through self-harm. Love is used as salvation for them, but love from males hurts them. In the narrative, this love even overwhelms them. In many works, the heroines find their fates in death. In subtype C, the female image of the Female Young Werther type is also a confused girl. However, the female Young Werther type’s image in subtype C is closer to real-life teenager girls in Chinese mainland. They are concerned about the boys they have crushes on at school, but they pay more attention to their own future, such as their grades at school. In the end of the story, these Female Young Werther characters are not like subtypes A and B. They grow up smoothly and remember their school crush as a memory. In addition to serving as obstructors, the female characters of Albert type are opposites to the heroine in some FYW&MC narratives.

Compared to subtypes A and B, the heroines in subtype C are seen as less controversial in their Douban evaluation. I take *Cry Me a Sad River* and *The Best of Us* as examples to explain this. In the short comments on Douban that directly refer to the heroine of *The Best of Us*, 57% of comments rate it five stars and 28% are four stars, while the ratings for *Cry Me a Sad River* are 19% five stars and 23%

four stars. The negative comments about heroines in subtypes A and B are mainly focused on over-dramatization. Despite many readers pointing out that these overly dramatic characters and plots exist in reality, many readers still think that such overly dramatic characters are unrealistic. The similar opinions and evaluations are relatively rare in the short comments about the heroines of subtype C works.

3.2 *The Wheel of Relationships: Family, Parents and Children*

The main characters in the FYW&MC genre of Chinese romantic fictions are minors and, in addition to the relationship between the heroes and the heroines, the author also focuses on the relationship between them and their parents. However, despite the fact that the parents of the main characters are not the central characters in the story of these novels, their images and relationships with the protagonists reflect some of the universal conflicts in Chinese families. Moreover, in the novel, the figures of these parents are like a kind of echo as they repeat the traits or fates of the hero and heroine in the story.

In the FYW&MC genre of Chinese romantic fiction, the image of the mother is often aggressive or possessive. Yi Yao's mother, Geng Geng's mother and Yu Huai's mother are all typical examples. They love their children, but in the course of the story, they also hurt their children with words or actions. They are completely different from the image of the "loving mother" in traditional Chinese culture and they are the real pillars of the family. In contrast, the father figure is "invisible" in the FYW&MC genre of Chinese romantic fictions.

In *Qiyue and Ansheng*, the fathers of the two heroines, Qiyue and Ansheng, are both "invisible," and Qiyue's father is not even mentioned in the novel. Ansheng's father does not appear directly in the story, and any information about him appears only in the narrative related to Ansheng's birth. Ansheng's father is not a man who is faithful in his marriage as he cheats on his wife with a woman who gives birth to Ansheng. However, after Ansheng is born, he never sees her nor does he fulfill his paternal obligations to her. To his wife, he is an unfaithful husband and for Ansheng, he is an unfit father. [1] In *Cry Me A Sad River*, Yi Yao's father abandons Yi Yao and her mother. Yi Yao's mother has to work as a prostitute to support her daughter. Even after Yi Yao's mother dies, he does not reach out to his daughter. [3] Like Ansheng's father, Yi Yao's father is a man who abandons his responsibilities. The absence of "fathers" in the family leaves these daughters desperate for intimate relationships and their "disappearance" is the source of the tragedy of the heroines' lives.

Unlike *Qiyue and Ansheng* and *Cry Me A Sad River*, *The Best of Us* devotes a good deal of space to directly describing the heroine's father. Because Geng Geng's father is cowardly, Geng Geng's mother divorced him. After her parents' divorce, the heroine lives with her father, but despite her father not wanting Geng Geng to be affected by his remarriage she has conflicts with his second wife. Ultimately, Geng Geng's father chooses to let his daughter make concessions so that he is able to maintain his current marriage. [2] Compared to Ansheng's father and Yi Yao's father, the father in *The Best of Us* takes on the responsibility of raising his daughter but he is still inadequate in handling family affairs.

To sum up, the FYW&MC genre is founded on the relationship between the heroes and heroines in the story, but also engages with the relationship between the protagonists' parents. The poor intimate relationship of parents increases the dramatic conflict in the novel and these poor intimate relationships also become one of the reasons for the hero's or heroine's confusion and rebellion. Meanwhile, the poor relationship of the parents in these stories also reflects the common phenomenon of family and marriage in China featuring an aggressive mother and a weak father. Pushy mothers not only try to control their children, they also try to control their husbands in their lives. Their spouses, the fathers in the novel, use escapism as a way to resolve the conflict between them. This toxic relationship also affects the relationship between the heroes and the heroines.

In the novels in general, the figure corresponding to the father is the hero figure and he tends to be like a younger version of his father. Such heroes are young and attractive, but also cowardly. Since these novels are set on campus, similar to the heroines the heroes are also ignorant teenagers. In some works, the heroes are more valued by parents and schools than the heroines. They are also more in line with the Chinese society's standard of a "good boy."

Among these works, the images of Jiaming and Qi Ming are most representative. In *Qiyue and Ansheng*, the author does not give much of a description of Jiaming and he is more like a symbol. This symbol represents the two heroines' imagination of love.[15] Although there is no specific depiction of him in the work, the author is still very clever in presenting the image of a cowardly young man to the readers. The author expresses her opinion to the readers: (1) The heroes or males are cowardly: they are afraid to face the mistakes they have made and do not want to take responsibility; (2) For women, real

“redemption” often comes from other women. Qi Ming in *Cry Me A Sad River* is a similar male figure. In the novel, Qi Ming has a crush on Yi Yao but due to the attitude of his mother and vanity, he chooses Gu Senxiang as his girlfriend. Although Yi Yao is isolated at school, he maintains their “friendship.” In reality, he does not want to help Yi Yao genuinely. Even when Yi Yao directly asks him for help, he acts as a coward in choosing to ignore it because of his mother’s attitude. [3] Interestingly, in the novel, Qi Ming’s father is indifferent to his family and he shifts all responsibilities for the family to Qi Ming’s mother. This cold and selfish nature is very similar to the characteristics that his son, Qi Ming, exhibits. In subtypes A and B, male images like Qiming and Jia Ming are very common. On the surface, they are “good boys” but they are actually cowardly and selfish in reality and their way of dealing with conflict is escapist.

Different from the Male Charlotte in subtypes A and B, the heroes in subtype C more closely resemble real male students in Chinese mainland. Such design can easily trigger the audience’s memories of school life and their campus crushes. This point is mentioned by many readers in the short comments of *The Best of Us* on Douban. Although, the heroes in subtype C possess more positive traits than the heroes in subtypes A and B, their love for the heroines is ambiguous. Therefore, although they are not cowardly, and they tend to not respond directly to the heroines’ displays of affection. Such design not only conforms to the management regulations of secondary schools in Chinese mainland, but also demonstrates that the heroes pay more attention to their studies and prospects than relationships.

To sum up, in the FYW&MC genre of Chinese romantic fictions, the hero and heroines are younger versions of their parents to some extent. They copy their parents’ personalities and it seems that their fates are similar to their parents.

3.3 Social Change and Audience Attitude

Although secondary schools in Chinese mainland usually prohibit students’ puppy love and parents are also against campus love between minors, the core story in the FYW&MC genre is the “campus crush” story. In this social context, the relationship between the hero and the heroine becomes the trigger of their conflicts with school and their parents. These struggles become the dramatic conflicts that drive the plot. However, these depictions of adolescent rebellion also cause readers, especially adult ones, to criticize the characters in the novels. Let us take the high-frequency evaluation terms in the short comments for the heroines on Douban as an example in the following Table 1 (based on 22 FYW&MC genre novels collected on Douban):

Table 1: 22 FYW&MC genre novels collected on Douban

Word	Frequency	English Translation	Property
作	18	Dramatic and spoiled	Negative
玛丽苏	15	Mary Sue	Negative
矫情	14	Picky	Negative
可爱	10	Lovely	Positive
绿茶 (婊)	9	Angelic bitch	Negative
贱	7	Mean	Negative
圣母 (婊)	6	Hypocritical	Negative
白莲 (花)	4	Dissembler	Negative
婊	3	Bitchy	Negative
傻	3	Stupid and silly	Negative
幸运	3	Lucky	Positive
敏感	3	Sensitive	Neutral

Lack of character development is a common criticism of popular literature, and the FYW&MC genre of contemporary Chinese romantic fiction is no exception. The plots that authors originally design to increase dramatic conflict make the heroine’s characterization seem overly dramatic or unrealistic in some novels. In addition, the inconsistency between the words and actions of the fictional characters is also a common fault in many FYW&MC genre works. The high-frequency words “Angelic bitch”, “Hypocritical” and “Dissembler” prove this. These evaluation terms reflect some readers’ views that the heroines’ characterizations in the novels are hypocritical. The only two positive words in the high-frequency form are “Lovely” and “Lucky”. Although these two words are positive comments about the heroine, they also reflect the lack of autonomy of heroines in FYW&MC genre works. They seem to be fighting against the outside world, while in fact, in the story, they do not have the ability to actively change themselves or their circumstances.

4. Conclusion

In terms of character classification, characters in the FYW&MC genre of contemporary Chinese romantic fiction can be classified as Female Young Werther, Male Charlotte and Albert. These terms refer respectively to the heroine, the hero and the hindrance in their relationship. Additionally, since the parent-child relationship is also one of the themes of this genre, parental figures are widely represented in the FYW&MC genre. In the novels, these parents represent allusions to the intimate relationships of their children. Meanwhile, because they were born and raised in a unique period of Chinese history, it is difficult to reconcile the conflict in values between them and their children. In addition, the audience generally do not hold a positive attitude towards the characters in the FYW&MC genre of contemporary Chinese romantic fiction. Taking the image of the heroine as an example, the points that the Douban audience criticize mainly focus on the fact that character image is too dramatic or unrealistic. There are two main reasons for this phenomenon: 1) The authors lack professional literary background and the character developments are insufficient; 2) The change of the audiences' aesthetic preference for cultural products in Chinese mainland.

In terms of narrative, compared to other genres of contemporary Chinese romantic fictions, the main story line of the FYW&MC genre is not clear. The narrative structure of these novels is fragmentary, using many tableaux and anecdotes to piece together the heroine's school life. While this narrative mode complicates the structure of the novel and makes it less linear, it is similar to the way in which human beings look back on past events. Therefore, these novels can set off readers' memories of their school life and teenage years. This feature is obviously reflected in the Douban short comments on stories of subtype C; a large number of readers commented that the novel triggered memories of their school days, and even reminded them of their first love as teenagers. In addition to stimulating memories, contemporary Chinese romantic fiction in the FYW&MC genre mainly reflects the confusion of Chinese teenagers about their lives and futures. These struggles often stem from their dissatisfaction with their families and the school system.

To sum up, in this paper, I classify and analyze the characters in contemporary Chinese romantic fictions of the FYW&MC genre, and analyze the narrative of and audience attitude to the novels through case studies and word frequency statistics. Similar to earlier research in this field, this paper also focuses on the narrative and character analysis of the novel. [8] However, differing from other studies, in terms of audience research, this study attempts to use data collection and analysis of online comments to conduct audience research. Compared with traditional research methods, such as interviews or questionnaires, the data collection and analysis of online comments are not influenced by subjective factors. In other words, this study is more objective in the analysis of audience sentiment and provides a new perspective for research in this field.

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