

Research Project Proposal

Title of the project

The phenomenon of cross-dressing in Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai story in Chinese literature, theatre and film: origin and modern versions

Author

Karolína Křištofová

Supervisor

Roman Shapiro, PhD

Abstract (1,800-2,000 characters)

A clear and concise abstract of the project's aim and the means of achieving it.

The aim of this project is to follow the phenomenon of cross-dressing in the Chinese folktale of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai with focus on modern adaptations of the story. This tragic love story of a pair of lovers can be traced back to the late Tang dynasty. The story in China remains popular up till today and throughout the history emerged in divers versions in different genres. During its popularity peak in 20th century the tale had an influence on Chinese society.

The author will analyse five adaptations of the story: three movies and two books, from the second half of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century, focusing on the role of cross-dressing in the story. In addition, the author will use secondary literature regarding cross-dressing in the adaptations of the story in literature, film and theatre, to find out how was the cross-dressing portrayed in terms of story level and discourse level. The story persevere popular during the history because of its various themes that speaks to the audience and cross-dressing is one of them.

The cross-dressing theme is one of the aspects that makes the story interesting and in the eyes of the audience and society can be understood and read differently during the time. Also, because there is no canonical version of the story the cross-dressing theme may vary from adaptation to adaptation. With the development of gender studies the phenomenon of cross-dressing in the

story can be viewed from different angle and it became more complex issue. Today, the cross-dressing in the story can be viewed as a challenge to gender identity and even sexual orientation. Multiple cross-dressing in Chinese theatre versions of the story which also occurs in the most famous representation of the story, the musical opera movie *The Love Eterne*, raised interest by modern literature scholars, and it also provides a link to the broader issue of gender. The author will try to introduce new readings and connotations of the cross-dressing in modern adaptations.

Key words

Key terms (words and/or short phrases) defining the substance of the project (normally 3 - 10).

Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, cross-dressing, literature, film, theatre, gender

Progress beyond the current state of research (1,800–3,600 characters)

A summary of the current state of research in the chosen field of study and a description of how the project will expand knowledge in this field.

The story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai or Butterfly lovers is one of China's Four Great Folktales¹ and is often compared to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet (Tso, 2014) and even called "Romeo and Juliet of the East" (Liu and Yu, 2020, p. 383). A recent study by Liu and Yu (2020) analyses the differences and similarities between these two stories and shows us that both have much in common, and both have a great influence on culture they were created in. The connotation with Romeo and Juliet highlight romantic and tragic aspect of the story, I will try to show that it is linked to the cross-dressing theme.

Because of the occurrence of cross-dressing, the story can be compared to. The differences that are found in cross-dressing between Mulan and Zhu Yingtai are, for example, the reasons behind the cross-dressing and the execution of portraying the opposite gender Mulan (Keqiao, 1996; Tso 2014). It can be found that, in contrast with Mulan, cross-dressing in the story is the cause of the tragic ending (Altenburger, 2005) and is one of the reasons for emotional trauma (Sookja,

¹ China's Four Great Folktales: Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, Tale of the White Snake, Lady Meng Jiang, and The Cowherd and the Weaving Girl

2018, p. 68). Following Altenburger's (2005) argument that the story is mainly about Zhu Yingtai's cross-dressing, I will try to prove that cross-dressing added to the story a wider emotional dimension as Sookja (2018) presents.

The cross-dressing is common in Chinese theatre, mainly in opera. Cross-dressing in Chinese Opera is studied by Li (2003). In chapter 5, the author associate the tale of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai with queer reading of the story in the late 20th century. For example, he analyzes the 1998 musical where the author made the main character intentionally queer. I believe, this queer reading of the story is quite current and relevant.

The Butterfly Lover's story became popular in 20th century thanks to *yueju* theatre. Because *yueju* is all-female theatre, both main characters are portrayed by woman. This added another layer of cross-dressing to the story. Xu (2016) is following the rising popularity of *yueju* theatre and the Butterfly lover's story which was made into China's first color movie in the early PRC. Another movie adaptation inspired by *yueju* performance of the story is *The Love Eterne* (dir. Li Han Hsiang) from 1963. Multiple cross-dressing in *The Love Eterne* associated with gender identity and gender performance became an interest of study for Zheng (2012) who focus on both main characters, and for Wang (2012) who focus mainly on character of Zhu Yingtai and the actress who portrayed the role. I will analyze *The Love Eterne* focusing on cross-dressing and I expect to find similar conclusions and arguments as researchers mentioned above.

How the project aims will be achieved (1,800-3,600 characters)

A detailed description of how the aims of the project will be achieved, including:

1. specific research questions (including their rationale, which will be detailed enough to show the relationship between these questions and particular research aims, and between these questions and the partial research steps indicated below);
2. the nature of relevant data and the means of assimilating such data in order to make the analysis feasible in the given time (2 semesters for a B.A. thesis, 4 semesters for an M.A. thesis, 8 semesters for a Ph.D. thesis, 1 year for a state exam research proposal);
3. the method(s) of data acquisition and their relevance to the research questions;
4. possible ethical or legal obstacles to data acquisition or their interpretation;

5. the method(s) of data analysis and their relevance to the research questions, research aims, and theoretical foundations of the project;

6. the preliminary time frame.

Please write in complete sentences, not in points.

In this project, focusing on the phenomenon of cross-dressing in Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai story in Chinese literature, theatre and film, I aim to answer the following questions: *How was cross-dressing treated in Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai story adaptations in China from second half of 20th century?* and by secondary question helping me answer the main question: *What is the connection between popularity of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai story in modern China and the phenomenon of cross-dressing in the story?*

To answer the main question, I will follow the changes and different readings, execution and significance of cross-dressing in the story. To answer the secondary question, I will try to show that cross-dressing is one of the main theme, if not the main, and is connected with popularity of the story in modern China.

I will use content analysis to analyze five adaptations of the story, which are my primary sources. The first English publication in fiction form of the story: *Butterfly lovers: a tale of Chinese Romeo and Juliet* from 2000, Chinese version by popular Chinese novelist: *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai* 梁山伯与祝英台 from 1954, movie *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai* 梁山伯与祝英台 from 2004, movie *The Lovers* 梁祝 from 1994 and the movie *The Love Eterne* from 1963.

To learn about the cross-dressing in the story in theatre I will use secondary literature. The movie *The Love Eterne* is classed as musical opera film, therefore overlaps the genres of movie and theatre. *The Love Eterne* is widely analyzed and I will take into account the works regarding the movie as secondary literature. The secondary literature is also relevant to my work because of its recent date of publishing. The publishing date of the secondary literature will also provide me a modern perspective by scholars, which will navigate and influence my way of thinking about the topic.

Context analysis will be used to see how the new readings of cross-dressing in the story evolved during time and how are viewed in modern times. When talking about „queer reading“ of the story as proposed by Li (2003, p. 119) I will apply Judith Butler’s (1990) theory of gender

performativity. This also correspond with Altenburger's (2005) argument that by wearing male's cloths and behaving like opposite gender, Zhu Yingtai can successfully impersonate a man.

By analyzing primary sources with the help of secondary sources, mainly providing information in portraying cross-dressing in the story in Chinese theatre, I intend to provide coherent work discussing the phenomenon of cross-dressing in Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai story in adaptations from second half of 20th century in literature, film and theatre, and show that the story's cross-dressing theme affected the popularity of the story.

References

Please use bibliographical references in the text of the proposal and list the references here (in any of the variants of the Harvard, "parenthesis" style). If applicable, please divide the list into two parts: Primary sources and Literature (as indicated below).

ALTENBURGER, Roland. Is it clothes that make the man? Cross-dressing, gender, and sex in pre-twentieth-century Zhu Yingtai Lore. *Asian Folklore Studies* [online]. Vol 64, n. 2 [cit. 2020-12-08], 164-205. Nagoya : Nanzan University, 2005 . Available WWW: <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30030419>>.

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Project bibliography

A bibliography of the main sources, as well as the relevant scholarly works on the topic you plan to use in the project. Please divide the list into two parts: Primary sources and Literature.

Primary sources

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