Pride and Prejudice and the Chinese Dream

This project examines the ways in which Austen's most famous novel Pride and Prejudice has been adapted in China for purposes unique to its national context. We argue that the source material is used to develop an aspirational ideal masculinity, femininity, and romantic partnership that serves the purposes of the Chinese Dream. We examined two films Mr. Pride vs Miss Prejudice and This is Not What I Expected, both released in 2017. The two films each feature a classic enemies-to-lovers plotline, where a wealthy man is initially put off by a bold, wild relatively lower status woman. By the end of the films, the two couples have each fallen in love. Given the prominent role played by the Chinese government in approving Chinese films, we viewed both films as an example of zhuliupian or party-line films and as such we examined them through the lens of The Chinese Dream, a national campaign for China's ascendency launched by President Xi Jinping in 2012. The Chinese Dream presents itself up as an alternative to the ideals put forth both by Europe and the United States, and each of these films engage in conscious comparison-making between China and the West. As Austen's Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet were received as representing the best of British ideals, aristocracy and democratic sentiment, both couples are presented as aspirational men and women along many dimensions. The men are wealthy, entrepreneurial, and assertive while the women are both artists and yet are demure, ultimately conforming to the male lead's perspective. Finally, our research examines several prominent tensions and problems in the ideals put forth by these films.