1-1-2016

Michel Hockx, Internet Literature in China

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Recommended Citation

Gao, Xiaoping, "Michel Hockx, Internet Literature in China" (2016). *Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts - Papers*. 2521.
https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers/2521

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Keywords
china, internet, literature, hockx, michel

Disciplines
Arts and Humanities | Law

Publication Details

MICHEL HOCKX. *Internet Literature in China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. 251 pp. US$40.00, hardcover.

Online literature or web-based writing (including fiction, poetry, prose, and blog posts) has proliferated in popularity with the advancements of internet technologies since the 1990s. According to *the 36th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China* (China Network Internet Information Centre, June, 2015), the number of Internet literature web users has reached 285 billion by June 2015, accounting for 42.6% of the total netizens. Michel Hock's *Internet Literature in China* is the first comprehensive survey in English of this phenomenon in China. Hockx clarifies the terminology and conventions in this field by adopting 'Internet literature' to highlight original literary work taking place online, distinguishing it from 'digital or web literature' which includes digital versions of academic publications. His pioneering work overviews the history of Internet literature in China, analyses examples of literary websites, and introduces well-known web writers and their representative works. This paints a vivid picture of Chinese Internet literature over one and a half decades until 2013. Moreover, Hockx describes how the selected literature websites operate and deal with censorship and discusses how online publications transgress the boundaries of the state-regulated publishing system, especially the moral boundaries of what is ideologically considered to be 'healthy' literature.

The book consists of four chapters in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. Chapter 1 provides a descriptive overview of the early history of Chinese Internet literature before zooming in on China's first successful literary space, Rongshu Xia (Under the Banyan Tree), and Lu Youqing's online diary which made the site famous. Chapter 2 looks at online chronicles by three very different authors: Chen Cun (who is good at long, meandering, never-ending online writings), Wen Hujian (the author of China's first microblog novel), and Han Han (a young celebrity blogger). Chapter 3 focuses on online fiction and Qidian, one of the most visited websites in the world. After analysing a variety of Internet literature genres, Hockx pays special attention to the proliferation of erotic fiction, the shifting interpretation of PRC laws aimed at banning the distribution of obscene publications, and the regulatory context of online fiction publishing. He also reports on how authors respond to censorship requests. The chapter ends with a case study of a website, Heilan (Black and Blue), home to a fiercely autonomous group of highly serious creative writers. Chapter 4 deals with online poetry, including experimental work done by non-Chinese authors and published both inside and outside China. Hockx looks in detail at the work of the female avant-garde poet Datui (Thigh) which is deemed obscene and subjected to moral censorship and the online visual poetry of Dajuin Yao which features either movement or interaction, or both, crossing the boundaries between online publishing and print publishing. As Hockx puts it, the combination of the case studies highlights 'the social, political, moral, and aesthetic aspects of online Chinese writing' (p. 23). The book has made a great contribution to 'the preservation and understanding of a tiny sample of a huge display of creativity' (p.194).

Literature and politics are constantly intertwined with each other in Chinese history. To reveal the characteristics of this contemporary phenomenon, Hockx unavoidably refers to its political

environment. Through looking at a wide variety of genres, ranging from avant-garde experimentalism to mass-produced semi-pornographic fiction, the book provides a comprehensive review of the political, cultural and technological conditions in China from which Internet literature emerge and develop. The detailed analysis of key web writers and their chronicles, fictions, blog posts, and poems not only serves as evidence of literary criticism but also enhances the book's readability. The study is also empirically enriched by including down-to-earth interview data and hands-on experience on how to access the websites and approach the web writers and on how the websites deal with moral censorship in order to satisfy the political, aesthetic, social and cultural requirements of the government and readers' tastes. Finally, Hockx not only provides insightful comments on the reasons for the success and failure of websites and avant-garde works, but also identifies gaps in the research and points to future topics in need of study, such as martial arts and fantasy fiction, one of the highly popular genres by netizens.

Internet Literature in China is elegantly written. This tour de force constitutes fascinating and illuminating documentation, stories and critique of Chinese online literature. The monograph is enriched by screenshots of websites and photos of web figures. It also contains a comprehensive index and glossary. It is a must-have for Chinese literature researchers and postgraduate students who wish to know more about Chinese Internet literature and relevant social ritual and political censorship that have transformed Chinese culture and society.

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