Notice of the Final Oral Examination for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

LINDA YANG

BA (University of Victoria, 2018)

“Ode to Joy: Pop Cultural Representation of White-Collar Migrant Women in a Chinese Megacity”

Department of Pacific and Asian Studies

Tuesday, August 25, 2020
10:00 A.M.
Conducted Remotely

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Andrew Marton, Department of Pacific and Asian Studies, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Angie Chau, Department of Pacific and Asian Studies, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Feng Xu, Department of Political Science, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Jordan Stanger-Ross, Department of History, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

This thesis examines the pop cultural representation of white-collar migrant women (WCMW) through the popular Chinese TV series *Ode to Joy*. Focusing on various aspects of their lives, this TV series raises many issues about the experiences of WCMW, including perceptions of them as “outsiders” in the megacity, gender inequality, and the tensions between female migrant identity and urban status. Over the past four decades, most popular culture producers and academic work on migrant women in China have focused on the experiences of *dagongmei* (working sisters) of the 1980s and 1990s, and few have adequately represented well-educated migrant women of the post-2000s. Accompanying China’s economic reforms from central planning to a socialist market economy since 1978, China’s rural migrant women have changed largely in values, educational levels, ways of life and work, as well as personal aspirations. This thesis argues that the realistic representation of *Ode to Joy* is crucial to its popularity and the TV series has raised issues that impact the wellbeing of WCMW in large cities. This study analyzes those issues by drawing on intersectional theories which examine structural inequalities from the perspective of the interactions of multiple axes of social categories. This thesis asks three major questions: In what way does *Ode to Joy* represent the experiences of WCMW?; To what extent do issues raised in *Ode to Joy* impact the wellbeing of WCMW in large cities?, and; What are the “joys” in *Ode to Joy* for WCMW? In addition to collecting data from the TV series, this study interviews WCMW informants to provide first-hand accounts of their experiences in an urban culture. The major findings of this research include: contrasting representations of the urban landscapes of cosmopolitan Shanghai versus the cramped living spaces of WCMW which reinforce their status as “outsiders” in the megacity; gender inequalities resulting from the interplay of multiple factors, such as class, ethnicity, and gender norms; and, structural differentiations of region and social identity which place WCMW in a subordinate position.Examining gender issues pertinent to WCMW from cultural and social perspectives helps to raise awareness of this cohort and contribute to the harmony and stability of an increasingly urbanized society in China. In particular, this study explores the reasons behind the popularity of this TV series and its significance for portraying and understanding the wellbeing of WCMW. By critically analyzing the representation of WCMW characters’ experiences in *Ode to Joy*, this thesis provides insights on understanding the status of those women in a contemporary Chinese urban setting, thereby filling a gap in academic literature on the pop cultural representation of China’s white-collar migrant women in a Chinese megacity.