

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**  
**Faculty of Social Sciences**  
**Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism**

**MA THESIS REVIEW**

**NOTE: Only the grey fields should be filled out!**

**Review type** (choose one):

Review by thesis supervisor       Review by opponent

**Thesis author:**

Surname and given name: Cai Qingyun

**Thesis title:** Sang culture: a pessimistic subculture in the Chinese Cyberspace

**Reviewer:**

Surname and given name: Hroch Miloš

Affiliation: KMS IKSŽ FSV UK

**1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND THESIS** (mark one box for each row)

		Conforms to approved research proposal	Changes are well explained and appropriate	Changes are explained but are inappropriate	Changes are not explained and are inappropriate	Does not conform to approved research proposal
1.1	Research objective(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2	Methodology	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.3	Thesis structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**COMMENTARY** (description of the relationship between the research proposal and the thesis. If there are problems, please be specific):

The thesis generally follows the approved research proposal.

**2. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS CONTENT**

Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
2.1	Quality and appropriateness of the theoretical framework	C
2.2	Ability to critically evaluate and apply the literature	B
2.3	Quality and soundness of the empirical research	D
2.4	Ability to select the appropriate methods and to use them correctly	D
2.5	Quality of the conclusion	D
2.6	Thesis originality and its contribution to academic knowledge production	A

**COMMENTARY** (description of thesis content and the main problems):

The thesis studies the online Sang subculture, characterized by pessimism and resignation to the Chinese working ethics, the culture of success and the positive ideology of the official Chinese Communist party. Sang subculture has, in my opinion, similar features to what the (pre-digital) slacker culture meant for neoliberal America in the early 1990s. The research questions of the thesis are formulated and applied to the research sample (Chinese newspaper People's Daily and online Q&A forum Zhihu).

The thesis introduces relevant literature from subculture studies and post-subculture studies. Although these concepts (developed in the specific sociopolitical and cultural context of post-war Britain) cannot be applied uncritically when used in different cultural and socio-political contexts – I would appreciate a broader discussion of these concepts from the Chinese perspective. This connects to my other comment: the conceptualization of Sang culture, manifested online, as a post subculture (which seems to be crucial) is not developed adequately (or worse, not developed at all).

Minor comments: I found the definition of culture on p. 9 a bit too vague (for instance, it would make sense to employ Raymond Williams' elaboration on culture, the author cited elsewhere in the text). The text contains

several inaccuracies, like on p. 15 (mass culture is defined as one-directional and non-participatory, Jenkins, instead – as his mentor Fiske – writes about the participatory potential of popular culture).

Then the thesis offers an exhaustive and well-researched literature review on Sang Culture from many theoretical angles and perspectives, but it is not clear which perspective will be used in the thesis. This connects to one of my major comments: The thesis uses five (!) theories in the framework (Panopticon and surveillance, Carnival theory, labelling and stigma theory, mythology) without theorizing the differences between them. It is not feasible to reasonably operationalize all these theories in the analytical toolkit. One would be enough. Also, it would make sense to use any concepts related to subculture studies, for instance, Hall's otherness or Cohen's folk devils and moral panics.

Regarding methodology, the thesis employs a combination of critical discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis without being clear about what the author aims to achieve by such a combination (given the fact, both methods are centred on content and qualitative content analysis has quite general nature). For instance, if the author chose to combine CDA and digital ethnography (see Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method) of online forums or any platforms used by Sang subculture, it could lead to more diversified data and results.

### 3. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS FORM

Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
3.1	Quality of the structure	D
3.2	Quality of the argumentation	B
3.3	Appropriate use of academic terminology	C
3.4	Quality, quantity and appropriateness of the citations (both in the theory part and in the empirical part)	D
3.5	Conformity to quotation standards (*)	D
3.6	Use of an academic writing style, and correct use of language (both grammar and spelling)	B
3.6	Quality of the textual lay-outing and appendices	A

(\*) in case the text contains quotations without references, the grade is F; in case the text contains plagiarised parts, do not recommend the thesis for defence and suggest disciplinary action against the author instead.

COMMENTARY (description of thesis form and the main problems):

The structure of the thesis could be improved, and this comment connects to the problematic choice to include five different theoretical perspectives in the framework (which, again, cannot be sufficiently operationalised in the analytical toolkit).

Otherwise, the text applies to formal academic standards. The thesis is written in a stylistically and grammatically conforming style.

What I find the most problematic aspect is the system of in-text references: it is not clear when the author is paraphrasing other authors' ideas. It makes it even more suspicious that the author only rarely uses direct quotations from other authors. Also, references lack pagination (information about the exact location in the referenced texts).

### 4. OVERALL EVALUATION (provide a summarizing list of the thesis's strengths and weaknesses):

The thesis builds on relevant theoretical concepts and focuses on a phenomenon that has not been studied extensively (as the author mentions, only several studies focused on Sang subculture in China). The student proved the ability to write academic text and to evaluate the literature critically.

I have three major comments: 1) The theoretical framework is overburdened, and it makes the empirical part less credible, 2) The logic of methodology is not clear (combination of CDA and QCA – why?), 3) The system of in-text references (as described above).

### 5. QUESTIONS OR TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED DURING THE THESIS DEFENSE:

5.1	What is the purpose of using Carnival theory for Sang subculture? And Mythology?
5.2	Could you briefly explain the concept of folk devils and evaluate if it could apply to Sang subculture?
5.3	

5.4	
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**6. ANTIPLAGIARISM CHECK**

The reviewer is familiar with the thesis' URKUND score.

If the score is above 5%, please evaluate and indicate problems:

6.1	The parts highlighted by the software usually have references, although the author should have done a better job with paraphrasing.
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**6. SUGGESTED GRADE OF THE THESIS AS A WHOLE** (choose one or two)

- A**  excellent
- B**  very good (above average but with some weaknesses)
- C**  good (average with some important weaknesses)
- D**  satisfactory (below average with significant weaknesses)
- E**  marginal pass (meeting minimal requirements)
- F**  not recommended for defence

**If the mark is an "F", please provide your reasons for not recommending the thesis for defence:**

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Date: September 11. 2022

Signature: .....

<i>A finalised review should be printed, signed and submitted in two copies to the secretary of the Department of Media Studies. The electronic version of the review should be converted into a PDF and uploaded to SIS, or sent to the Department of Media Studies secretary who will upload it to SIS on the reviewer's behalf.</i>
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<i>Do not upload PDFs with a scanned signature, the review uploaded to SIS must be without signature.</i>
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