

The Overseas Dissemination Model of Chinese Online Literature: A Case Study of Webnovel

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Abstract. This paper examines the circulation of the Chinese online literature abroad using Webnovel (Qidian International) as a case study, which will illustrate that the dissemination of Chinese online literature is mediated by the platform instead of diffusing spontaneously as a cultural phenomenon. It is shown that translation systems, participatory fan communities, and monetization architectures are three infrastructural processes that have collaborated to achieve the international success of Webnovel. Translation is introduced as an efficiency-based infrastructure that standardizes genre fiction to be read worldwide; fan communities develop to be cultural intermediaries whose interpretative work and advertising efforts continue to keep the spread going; and access is organized into the process of monetization, simultaneously producing economic classification into reading habits. Combined, these work to make Webnovel an exporter of a whole culture of production. It has been concluded in the paper that overseas dissemination can be seen as a platformized process, which is defined by information management, labor extraction, and ecosystem design, and not as an enactment of cultural soft power.

Keywords: Online literature, Webnovel, overseas dissemination, fan translation, monetization model.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of Chinese Online Literature

Chinese online literature has not been created only thanks to technological innovation but also as a result of the structural conflicts within Chinese cultural industries since the late 1990s. The BBS forums, personal websites, and proto-platforms that allowed the development of the serialised writing were the most prominent early digital literary ecosystems that created new distribution channels [1]. Through instant publication, open feedback, and unrestricted interaction between the author and the reader, these digital spaces challenged traditional gatekeeping. This decentralization was, however, never total; since the beginning, commercialization and platform management influenced the definition of what was seen as a successful online writing.

The emergence of large services like Qidian and Jinjiang in the early 2000s is an illustration of this ambivalent dynamic [2]. Although traditionally regarded as the centers of grassroots creativity, these platforms had soon acquired algorithmic and managerial regimes disciplining user-created content into marketable genres, xianxia, danmei, and urban fantasy, thereby turning the emergent community practices into homogenized commercial segments [3]. Early ethos of experimentation continued, but platform logics were becoming more and more determinants of visibility, serial pacing, and thematic conventions. Participatory creativity and the possibility to update the chapter after chapter, the graded payment plans, and comment-driven changes served as strengths that were also the sources of precipitation of writers and market addiction.

The industrialization of the Chinese online literature had become a complete cultural product by the 2010s [4]. Large technology giants incorporated the literature platforms within the larger entertainment pipelines that included animation, games, television shows, and products. This movement brings about a larger restructuring of cultural production in China: creativity is no longer a spontaneous grassroots event but a contribution to vertically organized content systems [3]. Consequently, the rhetorical image of the grassroots of online literature continues to exist, but does

not reflect the extent to which the field has been made to be governed by platforms, IP practices, and investment logic.

1.2. Problem Statement and Research Gaps

Available literature separates entities like translation practices, fan involvement, or commercialization and provides no unified system that can be used to describe the interaction of these constituents in platform-based ecosystems. Consequently, studies tend to replicate an enumerative record of the phenomena instead of questioning the analytical processes that facilitate the circulation of Chinese online literature across national borders.

The current literature on Chinese online literature usually considers translation practices, fan practices, and commercialization as distinct practices without providing a unified framework that can be used to describe how these practices interact in platform-based ecosystems. This trend leads to enumerative explanations of phenomena instead of analytical frameworks of cross-border circulation. The area has generally given little consideration to how translation, fandom, and monetization are constitutive and influence each other through platform governance. Indicatively, translation has often been studied as a linguistic practice, as opposed to a strategic process that is part of revenue models and management of communities. Equally, the fan communities are most often talked about in the context of cultural passion, whereas the economic and promotion aspects of them as free work are under-researched. These gaps in the lack of studies that frame these aspects in a singular dissemination ecology remain a challenge to the study of the active ways platforms organize transnational cultural flows.

Additionally, despite the fact that platforms such as Webnovel have turned into the main drivers of foreign distribution, platform-focused case studies remain notably limited. A large portion of the literature is devoted to fan-translation groups or early grassroots distribution, which unintentionally solidifies an archaic discourse that underestimates the emergence of corporate platform capitalism in the mediation of cultural exchange across borders. The field, therefore, does not have an analytical implication that would explain the infrastructural, economic, and participatory logic behind the global activities of Webnovel. It is critical to fill these gaps to comprehend that Chinese online literature can be circulated internationally, and platforms play a constructive role and are not mediatory to facilitate cultural mobility.

1.3. Study Aim and Scope

Based on the above discussion, the research paper will examine the overseas dissemination model of Webnovel through the consideration of the interaction of translation systems, fan communities, and monetization forms. It tries to explain how all these mechanisms make Webnovel unique among previous models of fan-translations and how it influences its presence in the international culture circulation.

2. Case Study: Webnovel as a Dissemination Platform

2.1. Platform Overview and Global Reach

The introduction of Webnovel in 2017 as an internationalization of the Chinese literature under the capital and infrastructural umbrella of Tencent is a strategic change in the way Chinese online literature is positioned in the world. Instead of exporting translated stories, Webnovel exports a platform logic: a data-driven, vertically integrated system to facilitate content production, circulation, and monetization [5]. Such association with Tencent is not a minor company factoid; it explains why Webnovel can go big, to capitalize on cross-platform traffic, and to establish systems of governance that can mold the global audience as well as transnational authorship. Therefore, the global presence of the platform should be perceived as a result of the power of technology and capital concentration instead of natural users.

One of the distinctive aspects of the Webnovel strategy is the dual-content model introduced by the company that contrasts translated Chinese webnovels with Webnovel Originals written by foreign authors [6]. Although it is sometimes presented as a multicultural, open-minded expansion, this paradigm serves in a more critical role as a mechanism of introducing world authors into the IP ecosystem of Chinese literature. Motivating English-/Indonesian-language authors to serialise on the site through its gamified reward system, Webnovel turns foreign creative work to serialisation into its IP pipeline.

Webnovel has a tendency to emphasize growth rates of tens of millions of registered users, steep daily active readership, and expansive geographic reach, but these figures mask selective distributions of platform impact [7]. It has the largest user base in Southeast Asia, India, North America, and some parts of Latin America. These spaces are, however, not mere markets but spaces that are variedly configured by the infrastructural asymmetries [8]. An example is that the micro-transaction models are more appropriate in Indonesia and the Philippines because their heavy mobile use is a strong factor in consumption, as opposed to Europe, where consumption norms of subscriptions are still practiced.

2.2. Translation System and Workflow

Webnovel has created an extensive system of translation, making it one of its main strengths in international distribution. Instead of acting as a mere language conveyor belt, translation has been placed as a strategic infrastructure that can accumulate platform power and enable Chinese online literature to be standardized and internationalized to the international audience in a short period of time [9]. It is a neural machine translation with human editing, not a technological convenience, but a kind of economic calculus, where efficiency and quality control are weighed against each other. First-pass drafts run automatically, save on labor expenses, and enhance release cycles, maintaining the serialization pace that is the backbone of the revenue model of the platform. Human editors, in their turn, are not cultural interpreters but rather quality controllers; they make sure that the content is adapted to the platform requirements, but not that the style is stylistically complex.

Research observes that these systems get translated into the literary style, although the translations are influenced by the platform priorities: readability, genre homogeneity, and ease of access [10]. The devices are conditioned to even out stylistic deviations and minimise culturally unique forms of expression into global, narratively acceptable patterns. This is how a standardized aesthetic is created that reduces the thinking barrier in a new reader and creates genre literacy within a short time. Practically, the translation system of Webnovel works to convert linguistic work into a normalized tool of scalability that allows the platform to provide large volumes of accessible content to the entire world, as well as infrastructural hegemony.

2.3. Fan Community and Participatory Culture

The fan community of Weblogis is often presented as evidence of lively world participation, but the participation culture of Weblogis is highly organized due to platform incentives and management. The really high level of commenting on the site, of up to 150,000 comments per day, is not just a measure of reader interest; it is a form of engagement architecture that transforms the emotional investment into platform stickiness [11]. Power stones, review scores, and discussion threads are some of the features that gamify the experience, motivating users to engage in continuous micro-interactions that drive Webnovel visibility systems that are algorithmic in nature. These types of participation have to be considered critically as labor-like practices that perpetuate the data economy of the platform.

Fan involvement in Webnovel is not an instance of democratic cultural interaction but a systematized mechanism of supporting platform value. Although reviews, votes, in-line comments, and speculation threads seem to give the reader a sense of power, they remain in the ultimate service of the metric logic of the platform [6]. The presence of active comment sections leads to more recognition of a novel, its ranking, and the emergence of additional monetization options. Through

this, the creative performances of fans act as free promotional work, which perpetuates a feedback-based economy, in which the platform in question gains unequally.

Cross-cultural conversation takes place on-platform and in extraterritorial locations like Reddit, Discord, and Wattpad, where fans confer on meanings, criticize translation decisions, and argue about genre tropes [12]. They are commonly hailed as sites of intercultural learning, but also expose the conflicts between the platform discourse and social realities. Under consistent quality of translation, exploitative billing schemes, and cultural flattening represent a counter-public that questions the self-branding of Webnovel. Although these communities do not directly control the platform, they are still there as a part of the ecosystem, creating buzz and keeping interest even when it is critical.

3. Discussion

3.1. Translation as Cultural Infrastructure

The system of translation of Webnovel shows how linguistic mediation transforms into infrastructural governance. The linguistic service of translation is not merely a neutral service but a codified service that is structured in platform logics. The platform removes control from decentralized fan groups by professionalizing translation by using workflow, training, and management control, and thus reducing unpredictability and limiting the interpretive latitude [13]. This change is notable since it demonstrates that the spread of Chinese fiction in the world cannot be discussed outside of platform capitalism: translation does not simply mean making texts comprehensible, but, instead, it creates a harmonized aesthetic that supports factory triggers of serialization [14].

The strategic trade-off is present. The drafts generated with the help of the machines and then with human editing improve the speed of throughput and allow the daily updates that can be compared with the expectations of the international readers [15]. This rapidity has the cost of diversity of interpretation. Glossaries and controlled vocabularies of cultivation systems, martial worlds, and Daoist metaphysics not only ease the cognitive barriers and accelerate the genre literacy, but also normalize a normative model of Chinese cosmology to be consumed by foreign audiences. Translation, then, is a gatekeeping process: it reduces the entry barriers of a new reader, and it directs the meaning into patterns of platform-approved narratives. The hidden logic here is that translation is an infrastructural power, the tool of governance that makes cultural flows be standardized, scalable, and monetisable [16].

3.2. Participatory Fandom as Dissemination Engine

Fandom in Webnovel is a phenomenon of spontaneous community, but rather structured labour. Gamified feedback loops on the platform: votes, comments, rankings, etc., apply emotional investment to the value of the algorithm, which shows how participation is exploited as a means of dissemination [10]. Fans are active, but unconscious advertisers, authenticators, and cultural intermediaries. Their operations create publicity, maintain rotation, and indirectly increase the chances of monetization [12].

The paradox of empowerment and exploitation is pointed out by the co-creation practices. Readers can frequently resolve gaps in translation by writing notes on chapters explaining how to play the cultivation mechanics, metaphors, or references to the dynasties [16]. These amateur comments serve as grassroots media mediation, defying the standardisation of the platform at the top. Even these democratising practices, however, are consumed by the visibility economy: comment boxes increase the ranking, which subsequently reinforces the logic of monetization [17]. The contradiction is in the duality of fandom, where, although it allows cultural access to everyone and encourages intercultural learning, it also creates unpaid labour that consolidates dependence on platforms [5].

This relationship unveils a stronger rationale: fandom perpetuates dissemination by, on the one hand, overcoming cultural disjunction and, on the other, strengthening platform controls. Cultural barriers are not negotiated only with the help of translation, but with the help of the mass discussion of fans, the analogies and reinterpretations reproduce the ideas that are not familiar to the foreign

audience and do it in a way comprehensible to them [12]. There is a danger of such democratisation. Localised meanings can be replaced by hybrid ones that will suit an international audience, and they yield cultural systems more responsive to the needs of a global audience than to the original intentions of the authors [17]. Fandom, therefore, is a transmission machine and a place of cultural accommodation.

3.3. Monetization as Platform Sustainability Model

The monetization design of Webnovel not only serves as a source of revenue, but also a logic of organization of access, participation, and circulation of narratives, at the global level. The platform does not commodify the cultural material as an extrinsic input on the cultural material, but rather discovers commercial design as an inherent element of reading practices, social conventions, and transnational literary streams of Chinese online writing [9]. Monetization through this strategy enhances a sense of sustainability: a regulatory framework that stipulates who can read, how, and where stories can flow.

The two-tier access control VIP micro-payments and the ad-based unlocking are typically sold as a model that is inclusive since it provides for the divergent economic abilities. The ad-unlock option that is egalitarian restores the status quo of prioritizing attention over money by returning the poor readers to the position of laborers whose time-reading, which has been algorithmically calculated, will now be monetized by publishers. In the meantime, micro-payment track remunerates the same readers who are qualified to transfer directly to such texts and read them [6]. What is being introduced as accessibility is actually a clear segmentation that monopolizes value in a dissimilar way among different populations, which signifies how digital literary globalization relies on an imbalanced monetization logic.

Revenue-sharing with authors and translators seems to make the platform, on the one hand, more democratic in its income distribution and creative work maintenance. Nevertheless, revenue sharing is also an incentive system that puts pressure on creators to work fast and conform to genres [6]. Deviant authors are structurally handicapped, and translators are pressurized to work faster and keep the narrative going, rather than attempt to mediate the cultural nuances of a story. The economic model consequently has an influence on the literary structure and translation practice, through which financial needs are imposed on the aesthetic and cultural aspect of the world web fiction [11]. The concept of monetization is a soft governance that dictates the type of stories that are being written, translated, and finally globalized.

4. Conclusion

Exportation of Chinese online literature to other countries is not directly a process of cultural diffusion and exportation of text, as the discussion on Webnovel has indicated. Unless it is fueled by the combinatory effect of three infrastructural processes: translation, participative culture, and monetization, this exportation will not take place. These three are harmonised in the sense that they follow and systematicise each other. Translation offers language and cultural scaffolds according to which the Chinese fictions of a serial form can be deciphered and digested in other languages and cultures. The participatory community brings into existence a relocation of power of presence, cultural sense, and transmedia circulation, and the monetization structures impact the manner in which narratives are created, conveyed, and absorbed in various sites. The findings show that it has significant theoretical implications for the understanding of cultural flows in the world. They challenge the traditional idea that Chinese online literature is viewed as a process of cultural export, which is based on the concept of a fixed product that is then exported to the environments of a foreign country. Webnovel is a more advanced release of platform-mediated culture circulation, in which content, labour, and user activity are reconfigured via travelling. The case of the Webnovel is an important reminder that the global circulation of Chinese online writing cannot be considered outside of the platform architectures through which it is translated and monetized, and even brought back to

life socially. This study reveals the necessity of addressing platforms not as neutral intermediaries but as cultural, economic, and technological actors that proactively create the circumstances of transnational cultural exchange by predetermining them.

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