An Analysis of the Overseas Dissemination Phenomenon and Strategy of Chinese Internet Literature

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Abstract

Recently, Chinese online literature works have been included in the Chinese collection catalog of the British Library, one of the world's largest academic libraries. A total of 16 online literature works are included, such as The Road to Revival, Heavy Industry of a Great Nation, The Son-in-Law, The Great Doctor Ling Ran, Painting the Spring Light, and others. This reflects the growing international influence of Chinese online literature. More and more foreign readers are becoming fans of Chinese web novels, with their enthusiasm rivaling that of domestic fans. Some even go so far as to pay high prices for translations in order to better read and appreciate these works. Some readers even refer to Chinese online literature alongside Hollywood films, Korean TV dramas, and Japanese anime as the "four global cultural wonders." This phenomenon clearly demonstrates the potential and appeal of Chinese online literature in overseas markets. This paper analyzes the current status of Chinese online literature, explores the reasons for its "outreach," and, based on this, offers suggestions for the international dissemination of other Chinese cultures.

Keywords: Online Literature; Overseas Dissemination; Web Novels Going Global

Full Text Article

Introduction

With the world becoming increasingly globalized, cultural exchanges between countries are growing closer. With the advancement of economic and technological progress, countries around the world are paying more attention to the inheritance and protection of their traditional cultures. Recently, the spread of Chinese online literature overseas has garnered widespread attention. Within just a few years, it has attracted nearly ten million readers, gained countless fans, and become one of the most popular forms of online literature today, thus becoming a key channel for cross-cultural communication. Some even refer to Chinese web literature alongside Hollywood films, Korean dramas, and Japanese anime as the "four global cultural wonders." Many writers and online creators are also promoting their literary works overseas, leading to significant economic and social benefits.

This is not merely the presentation of literary creations, but also reflects the transmission and interaction of culture. Studying the methods of overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature is of great significance. By deeply studying and analyzing the spread of Chinese online literature abroad, we can better understand the driving forces behind it, its impacts, and the strategies of cultural dissemination, providing valuable references for the global spread of Chinese culture. Therefore, this paper will deeply analyze the phenomenon of Chinese online literature spreading overseas, explore its underlying reasons, challenges, and issues, and propose effective methods to promote the international dissemination of other Chinese cultures. Based on these research findings, we hope to better spread Chinese culture and foster interaction and learning between Chinese and foreign cultures.

Current Status of Chinese Online Literature's Overseas Dissemination

Today, Chinese online literature has become a global cultural phenomenon, attracting readers from around the world. With the arrival of the digital age, more and more countries are focusing on the inheritance and protection of their traditional cultures. Within internet culture, there are many excellent literary works worthy of our attention and appreciation. The following is an analysis of the history of Chinese online literature's overseas dissemination and a summary of its key characteristics in the global context.

1. The History of Chinese Online Literature's Overseas Dissemination

The history of Chinese online literature's overseas dissemination dates back to 2001 when the predecessor of Qidian Chinese Network, the China Fantasy Literature Association (CMFU), began spreading novels to overseas Chinese communities. Overall, the overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature has gone through three major phases:

The First Stage: During this phase, the overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature was mainly focused on digital copyrights and the publication of physical books. The dissemination was largely confined to Chinese-speaking regions, where excellent online novels were translated into other languages to introduce Chinese web literature to a wider audience.

The Second Stage: In this stage, Chinese online literature began to establish overseas portals and scale up the translation and output of web novels. The reach of dissemination expanded further, covering a broader overseas reader base. Major online literature platforms launched overseas portals, offering more diverse reading experiences to meet the demands of readers from different countries and regions. At the same time, the number and quality of translation teams were improved, accelerating the globalization of Chinese online literature.

The Third Stage: In the final stage, the focus shifted towards protecting the originality of Chinese web literature. Interaction and collaboration with overseas writers gained more attention, encouraging the creation of works with a global perspective and multicultural characteristics. This model not only brought Chinese online literature's original works to the international stage but also successfully attracted more overseas writers to participate in Chinese online literature creation.

Overall, the overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature has evolved from initial efforts aimed at overseas Chinese communities, to large-scale translation and global promotion, and finally to an emphasis on fostering original creations. As Zhang Fuli mentions in From Works Going Global to Ecosystem Going Global: The International Dissemination of Chinese Online Literature, "After over 20 years of development, Chinese online literature has exported over 10,000 works, reaching nearly 145 million overseas readers, with the overseas market size surpassing 3 billion yuan. From 2004, when online literature began to sell copyrights to overseas publishing institutions and translate into other languages, to the explosive growth of major translation platforms after 2012, and the recent maturity of the online literature overseas dissemination industry chain, Chinese web literature has undergone changes from translation and reading to imitation, realizing the full IP dissemination of online novels."This history has not only introduced Chinese online literature to a broader audience but also built a wider and deeper bridge for cultural exchange between China and the rest of the world.

2.Characteristics of the Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Online Literature

The current overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature presents the following characteristics:

2.1 Continuous Expansion of Overseas Market Scale

As the overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature strengthens, the size of the overseas market continues to grow. According to the 2022 China Online Literature Blue Book released by China Writers Network in April 2023, online literature has become a prominent cultural ambassador for China's global outreach. The overseas market scale of Chinese online literature has steadily expanded, with 150 million overseas users and more than 16,000 works of web literature exported. Revenue has grown from less than 100 million yuan to over 3 billion yuan. Subscription and reading app users exceed 100 million, covering most countries and regions worldwide.

2.2 Increasingly Diverse Overseas Reader Base

The overseas readership of Chinese online literature is becoming more diverse, encompassing readers of different genders, ages, professions, and cultural backgrounds. According to relevant data, Southeast Asia is the primary overseas market for Chinese online literature, though markets in Europe and America are also gradually expanding. Wang Lin, in Research on the "Going Global" of Chinese Web Literature under the "Belt and Road" Initiative, mentions, "According to an iResearch report, Chinese online literature already has nearly 10 million readers abroad, with over 150 million in Southeast Asia, over 300 million in Europe, and over 400 million in the Americas, with even more potential fans waiting to be tapped." This indicates a strong demand for Chinese web literature in the overseas market and suggests significant room for further growth.

2.3 Continuous Improvement in Translation Quality and Quantity

To better meet the reading needs of overseas audiences, the quality and quantity of translations of Chinese online literature have been consistently improving. Major online literature platforms are actively promoting translation efforts, collaborating with overseas publishers and translation teams to ensure that the translated works are accurate and authentic. At the same time, many translation websites dedicated to Chinese online novels have emerged abroad. These websites even offer explanations of specialized Chinese web novel terminology, accurately translating terms ranging from colloquial phrases like "single dog" and "working class" to more complex concepts like "Taoist philosophy" and "Buddhist terminology."

Opportunities and Challenges in the Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Online Literature

With the continuous development of globalization and information technology, the overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature has gained a broader platform and more diversified channels. Moreover, the phenomenon of Chinese online literature "going global" has garnered support and attention from both the government and various sectors of society, providing more resources and momentum for its overseas promotion. Most importantly, online literature has become a crucial carrier for the export of Chinese culture. Chinese elements and culture, such as Chinese kung fu, literature, calligraphy, cuisine, and traditional medicine, have become some of the most popular themes. Works such as The Daoist Library, which reflects traditional Chinese values, The Shaman's Chronicle, based on Eastern mythologies, and The Gourmet in Another World, which promotes Chinese culinary culture, have all received positive feedback abroad. Over time, 15 major categories and more than 100 subcategories of original overseas online literature have emerged, with Eastern fantasy themes, which promote Chinese traditional culture, being particularly popular among international creators.

Overall, while the overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature is showing positive development, there are still several challenges and issues to address.

1.Cultural Differences and Translation Barriers

Due to significant differences in cultural backgrounds and language expression, readers may have limited understanding and acceptance of Chinese online literature. Currently, the export of Chinese online literature mainly relies on translation. From a user's perspective, the quality of translations directly affects the reading experience. Especially since Chinese online literature tends to be lengthy and contains a lot of culturally unique terms, translators must not only have a high level of linguistic skill but also a deep understanding of Chinese culture and context. For example, the protagonist of The King's Avatar, Ye Xiu, uses the game name "Jun Mo Xiao" (君莫笑), which reflects a bold, melancholic, and fearless emotion. However, in the translation, the name is split into "Jun" (君) and "Mo Xiao" (莫笑), translated as "Lord Grim." This translation creates the impression that the character is a serious and proud person, leading to a misunderstanding of the protagonist's character.

Improving translation quality is key to the overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature. To this end, it is essential to invest in the training of professional translators and enhance their skills. Additionally, translation companies should raise the entrance requirements for translators and certify their qualifications. We can also collaborate with overseas translation institutions to cultivate translators who understand both Chinese and local cultures, thus improving translation quality and bridging language and cultural gaps. With the advancements in information technology, AI translation can also be used to assist with the process, followed by human revision to improve efficiency.

2.Copyright Protection and Piracy Issues

As Chinese online literature spreads widely overseas, copyright protection and piracy have become increasingly prominent issues. From an international perspective, given the cross-border nature of the creation and dissemination of online literature, copyright protection faces greater challenges. In particular, some individuals illegally translate and distribute works without authorization, infringing upon authors' rights and interests and disrupting the order of online literature dissemination abroad.

Therefore, establishing international copyright protection measures and cracking down on piracy and infringement have become urgent issues. On one hand, governments need to implement stricter laws and regulations to create a robust copyright registration and protection system, intensify efforts to combat infringement and piracy, and safeguard the rights of original authors. Additionally, there should be stricter regulation of online platforms to monitor and promptly remove pirated works. Collaboration with overseas institutions to combat cross-border piracy and infringement, with dual supervision from both domestic and international bodies, is essential to create a healthy and orderly online literature platform. On the other hand, authors' awareness of copyright protection should be strengthened to ensure that their rights are effectively safeguarded. Only with the concerted efforts of both the state and the authors can infringement be effectively curbed, fostering the healthy and orderly development of China's cultural industry.

3.Superficial Dissemination of Chinese Traditional Culture

Li Chen, in his analysis in Research on Chinese Online Literature's "Going Global" from the Audience Perspective, points out that while Chinese online literature with historical themes, rich in Chinese elements, plays a role in disseminating Chinese culture abroad, it largely caters to foreign readers' curiosity about Chinese culture. At its core, it tends to use Chinese stories to convey Western values without fully transmitting the spiritual essence of Chinese traditional culture. For instance, novels such as Panlong, The Immortal World, and Battle Through the Heavens often revolve around "an ordinary person achieving their aspirations through hard work" and emphasize the protagonist's individual power, which aligns with the Western value of "individual heroism." This resonates with Western readers, but the deeper cultural essence of China is not effectively conveyed.

While Chinese online literature has become a popular vehicle for cultural dissemination abroad, it still often only scratches the surface of transmitting Chinese cultural values, without delving deeply into the spiritual connotations of traditional Chinese culture.

Reasons for the "Outreach" of Chinese Online Literature

1.Government Support

China has long emphasized the importance of international discourse and encourages various sectors to tell Chinese stories in a way that is easy to understand. The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasized, "Enhance the global influence of Chinese civilization. Uphold the cultural stance of China, highlight the spiritual identity and cultural essence of Chinese civilization, and speed up the construction of Chinese discourse and narrative systems to tell China's stories well, spread China's voices, and present a trustworthy, lovable, and respectable image of China." The popularity of Chinese online literature abroad and its potential for spreading "Chinese stories" make it an important medium for promoting China's cultural outreach.

To support this, the government has provided strong backing for the creation and publication of online literature. The establishment of various literary creation and publishing funds has encouraged authors to engage in creation and publication. Moreover, the government has introduced policies emphasizing that online literature should shoulder the responsibility of inheriting and promoting excellent traditional Chinese culture. The focus on improving the quality and societal impact of works has significantly enhanced the quality and healthy development of Chinese online literature.

2.Rich Content and Innovative Approaches

Chinese online literature covers a wide range of genres, including palace drama, fantasy, romance, and more, offering readers a rich selection. Additionally, it continually innovates by integrating traditional cultural values with contemporary elements, attracting a large number of young readers both domestically and abroad. The advancement of internet technology has also facilitated the widespread dissemination of Chinese online literature. The channels for its distribution have expanded from physical books to online translation websites, social media platforms, apps, and mini-programs, making access to Chinese online literature easier and more widespread, which creates more opportunities for international exposure.

3.Technological Support and Translation Promotion

With the continuous improvement of internet technology, the dissemination of Chinese online literature has become increasingly convenient. Online reading platforms and social media enable works to be rapidly spread worldwide, giving more people the chance to encounter Chinese culture. Digital media, which is rising rapidly, also plays a significant role in facilitating the overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature. It combines traditional print media with emerging online media, creating a new digital media form with broad reach and rapid transmission.
Additionally, the successful "outreach" of Chinese online literature owes much to the efforts of translators. Translators with bilingual or multilingual backgrounds have played a key role in

bridging the cultural gap between China and other countries by making Chinese online literature accessible to international readers.

Lessons from the Successful Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Online Literature for Cultural Promotion

1.Government Support at the National Level

The overseas dissemination of Chinese culture cannot succeed without government support. The government should play a central role in policy guidance, market regulation, and public service. For example, the government should establish funds dedicated to cultural exchange, translation, publishing, and media dissemination, and encourage enterprises and individuals to actively participate in cultural exchange activities. Additionally, efforts should be made to enhance China's image and soft power, boosting cultural confidence. By strengthening cross-cultural communication, China can more effectively promote its culture on the international stage.

2.Importance of Cultural Translation

The success of Chinese online literature's "going global" highlights the crucial role of high-quality translation in cultural outreach. When promoting Chinese culture, it is important to ensure that translations are accurate and culturally authentic, overcoming language and cultural barriers so that international readers can truly understand and appreciate Chinese culture. Professional translation teams should be cultivated, and translators should have expertise in both Chinese culture and foreign languages. This will enhance the overall quality of translations and the effectiveness of cultural dissemination.

3.The Role of Digital Media

The success of Chinese online literature's overseas dissemination is inseparable from the support of digital media. With its fast dissemination and broad coverage, digital media enables Chinese culture to reach the world rapidly. Traditional and new media forms should be integrated to create innovative ways to present Chinese culture, such as through films, television shows, documentaries, and social media platforms.

4.Other Dissemination Strategies

Tourism and international events, such as the Olympics and World Expos, also serve as platforms for showcasing Chinese culture globally. For example, the 2022 Winter Olympics opening ceremony highlighted China's traditional culture, such as the 24 solar terms countdown, which showcased the wisdom and charm of Chinese classical culture. Through such global platforms, China's culture can be better understood and appreciated worldwide.

Conclusion

The overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature is not merely the export of literary works; it is also a form of cultural exchange, allowing readers around the world to appreciate the profound richness of Chinese culture. This paper analyzes the phenomenon of Chinese online literature's global expansion and finds that its success is driven not only by government support and technological advancements but also by the active innovation of its people in spreading these works. The "outreach" of Chinese online literature provides valuable insights and experiences for the international spread of other Chinese cultural elements. The global dissemination of Chinese culture requires not only government support in terms of policy, funding, and talent but also the continuous innovation of dissemination methods through the use of internet technology. This can improve the translation quality of literary works, which serve as carriers of culture. Additionally, leveraging industries such as tourism and international events can further promote the overseas spread of Chinese culture. Through this research, we aim to better showcase the appeal of Chinese online literature and, as a cultural vehicle, more effectively spread Chinese culture, fostering cultural exchange and mutual learning between China and other countries, thereby enhancing China's cultural soft power.

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