Analysis of Web Novel Popularity By Country

By: Cameron Morrow

Problem Statement

Determine which country is the most popular for translated web novels according to the popular novel aggregation site novelupdates.com.

Background

A Web Novel is a serialized method of publicizing a novel, typically being written in different asian countries. This publication method allows for authors to be economically supported throughout the writing process. The main three countries that publish novels in this format are China, Japan, and Korea. Novels written in these countries are often translated and hosted on websites for English readers to subscribe to as well.

An investigation of the popularity of different countries' written works on these aggregation sites can allow for an interesting insight into what English readers think about different cultures. When taking into account the required censorship in Chinese literature, the thoughts of English readers on Chinese culture will be especially interesting.

Initial Hypothesis

I initially hypothesized that the most popular novels would be from Korea, followed by Japan, and then China. This was due to the recent surge in Manhwa popularity and personal experiences reading these novels. My personal experience showed more anti-American sentiment in Chinese novels and pro-American sentiment in Korean novels. Since many English speakers and readers of webnovels on a translation site are American, I assumed this would cause higher reviews for Korean novels.

Results

I began my investigation by creating a web scraper to go through the list of the top 25000 web novels on novelupdates.com to create a usable CSV file. After the file was created, I filtered out countries outside of the three I was investigating and cleaned up the data to create a table I could sort by country.

I determined three sources of truth to derive the most popular novels from. The highest average rating of novels by country, highest readers per title, and the number of titles in the top 100 rankings. The only caveat to these metrics was the existence of novels with few reviews which were heavily opinionated. Since this could artificially inflate a country's scores, I created an aggregation of total stars divided by total reviewers in order to address this issue.

I found that in nearly every metric the Chinese novels were by far the most popular. There were approximately 14,000 Chinese novels in comparison to the 7,000 Korean and

Japanese novels. On top of the overwhelming majority of Chinese novels, the average review of Chinese novels was 4.05 stars in comparison to Korea's 3.96 stars and Japan's 3.82 stars. China also had the most titles in the top 100 novels, representing 41 novels, while Japan had 36 and Korea had 22. The only area China did not win in was average readers per title, with Japan taking the lead with 1305 readers per title on average.

Hypothesis of Why This Occurred

The results were opposite of my hypothesis, which left me to investigate what China had that the other novels did not. My investigations in the table mainly consisted of investigating the popularity of different genres and finding the correlations between popular genres and each country. I parsed each genre and calculated the most popular genres in general and per country. I found that the most popular genres were Romance, Fantasy, Slice of Life, Drama, and Comedy.

In China, there was a perfect overlap with these genres where the top five were Romance, Fantasy, Drama, Slice of Life, and Comedy. There was heavy overlap with Japan and Korea, where the only difference from the aforementioned five was replacing Slice of Life with Action in Korea and Drama with Action in Japan. Since both Slice of Life (4.07) and Drama (4.05) are higher rated in comparison to Action (3.94), it made sense that China would gain ratings due to these. This makes sense as both Slice of Life and Drama lead themselves to a serialized format, where action becomes limited by plot progression. Since action usually has an end goal for a character causing the action, stalling would lead to readers complaining later on about drawn out stories or filler content.

From here, I investigated online to look for reader's experiences with Chinese, Korean, and Japanese novels to see if these trends held true. Here the opinions typically followed the same trend I found with Chinese being the best, followed by Korean which was followed by Japanese as is shown in the below figure.

1. Chinese– It can be gold with aewsome ideas, or toilet paper cultivation novels.
2. Korean– Pretty cool MCs
3. English– I have not found any web series that can hold my interest.
4. Japanese– Trash

Figure 1.

Conclusions and Potential Failure Points

In conclusion, Chinese Web Novels are the most popular and highest rated novels according to this data set. This is not certain for expansion beyond this data set, as many rows had inaccurate inputs, such as zero chapters with thousands of reviews, and the fact many novels could not be found on this list, so it is not a complete data set. I found this investigation quite interesting as my hypothesis was against my biases, but also with my personal experience with many Chinese web novels.

Bibliography

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