

# A Study on Youth Led Translation of Online Chinese Literature in English

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The emergence of internet as a means of connection over the years after it was made open for public use on sixth Aug. 1991 has been enormous; and while literature has been around the mankind since the inception of language, this new field of online literature is relatively new. The coming forth of this new means of expression that has opened the doors of literature to masses larger than ever before has not only created a niche for itself but also changed the ways of traditional literature as we knew. The traditional and online literature are fundamentally different in a way that traditional literature depends upon a publishing house or self-publishing mediums to be able to reach to its audience, it is more prone to restrictions on speech and expression due to its nature; online literature on the other hand does not depend on a publishing house or such, in fact, one can express most freely on the line. The reasons being such, has led to a rise in the online literature.

The Chinese online literature has gotten consecutively more popular among the international audiences in a translated form. In a news article written on 12 Dec, 2016 published by *Global Times* reported that although the readers of Traditional Chinese literature do not seem to be much fond of the new online literature it has been steadily increasing in its popularity in the western world. In the march of 2016, Wuxiaworld had over fifty million visitors from more than a hundred countries. The nations US, Philippines, Canada, Indonesia, and UK ranked the top 5 among the viewers. The readership of these has been on a steady rise ever since. These self-funding websites that translate online Chinese literature to English have been generating good revenue and name for themselves, Wuxiaworld worked at around \$75 a chapter in the year 2016.

The reason for an increase in popularity of these translations of online Chinese novels can be quite a few but the main reasons can be pinned down to a cultural integration and migration of Chinese into the west and the new and unexplored themes of literature that haven't yet been integrated into the western writings. While the Chinese online literature was suggested by the Chinese overseas to other readers, and as the community grew readers gradually took to translate the popular novels for those who could not read Chinese. In 2014 online communities emerged around the world that were interested in and dedicated to translate Chinese online literature in English. While this was the emergence of the translated Chinese online literature in English, it was popularised and has stayed that way due to its features that are not largely found in English literature by itself. Themes of spiritual cultivation: Wuxia or martial heroes, Xianxia

or immortal heroes and Xuanhuan or mysterious fantasy; Transmigration or metempsychosis, Rebirth etcetera.

The translation of online Chinese Literature in English is championed by youth led forums. These translation forums have a general form of working that most of them follow. An online Chinese novel would be suggested by a member that they think should be chosen for translation. The member would provide the link or text to the *Raws* of the suggested novel. Raws are the unchanged Chinese text of the original novel that can be found on the internet. A synopsis or a brief of the novel would be added for the other readers to look into. The member would also add the *tags* that are relevant for the novel. Tags are hyperlinks that are generated to facilitate the storage of similar novels. Once that is done the member puts forth the arguments in the favour of the novel. When this is seen by other members of the forum they vote upon the novel and any novel which succeeds in finding itself enough votes ends up getting picked up for translation. These translators are most often members of the forum who speak Chinese and decide to share their fondness for their liked online novel with the readers of English. Once a novel is picked for translation, the translator uploads new chapters every few days according to a schedule that they have decided for themselves and it goes on till the novel has been translated in its entirety. Forums that do not provide for the upload of translated material on the same website are generally linked to websites that do provide platform for uploading translated work. Most often this work is done by students of language or amateurs. Translation groups have also come into form after popularisation of these discussion forums. Translation groups are more professional in nature and tend to be more precise with their language. What keeps this practice of translation going is the loop of response between the reader and the translator. The forums provide for a platform of discussion for the readers of an online novel that can be seen by the translator, positive feedback provides incentive to the translators to keep translating the literature, while criticism might help them better their skills or if a novel is widely disliked by the audience it is dropped!

While online translation of Chinese novels in English is relatively new it is not devoid of its benefits. Engaging with literature of any kind is like feeding the mind with good food. The benefits of translation of Chinese literature into English however is more than that for the individuals engaging in it. The benefits can be concise down to three broad points: economic benefits, benefits to the youth and benefits as a soft power. Translation websites that are run by translation groups run on a self-funding system such that they majorly rely on the readership to fund their working. While they do not get much inducement from patrons or sponsors other than their readers they do run ads. This system generally encourages the readers to tip till their goal for the next chapter is met after which they upload the next translated chapter. This form for waiting till the next issue or chapter of your favourite story is released and paying for it, while also discussing about the possible turns of events in the forum is almost reminiscent of the coffee houses when periodicals were popular. These translation websites occasionally provide the readers with an occasional 'up spree' that includes uploading a large number of chapters that is sometimes thrice or even larger than the number of chapters generally uploaded in order to keep the readership engaged. These forums or translation groups are led by young adults.

Translation of these online Chinese novels provides them with an opportunity to engage more with literature not only in their native language, but also in English which is a global language. Translation for them not only serves as a tool to gain online popularity and earn a change for themselves but it encourages them to read more novels. When the youth of China engages with its local literature it not only serves for them in terms of learning more about their language, it helps them put their local settings, philosophy (personal and as a member of a culture) and identity into perspective, “One hears the hopes, fears, and angst of ordinary people – the pulse and soul of a nation – as the stories mirror the society around us. These local works across the languages enhance our national fabric and identity as a people.” (Subramaniam.)

The online literature of Chinese language is entirely based in China, which is a matter of fact for most local literatures. While online Chinese literature has some fascinating themes to offer the English reader such as the stories of martial warriors; stories of spiritual cultivation (with the aim of reaching immortality) through various forms of martial arts; stories of spiritual cultivation through spells, spiritual stones and spiritual beasts; stories of a soul travelling through space time to infuse in another body; stories of people travelling back in time after their death to avenge themselves and other interesting premises; the main common element in them is that in order to be able to truly understand them one must have a grasp of the cultural nuances that they revolve around. There are various cultural elements in these translated novels that are integral in the plot and working of the story. Many of which are not present on the English culture or even in English language such that there is in fact no direct translation of many of these concepts or words in English. Some of which are: *Jiangshi*, Cultivation Base, Meridians, *Qi*, Killing Intent, *Tao/Dao*, Paths of Reincarnation, *Yin Yang* etcetera. The international reader is largely fascinated by this almost otherworldly setting. The readers of these translated novels tend to learn a lot about Chinese philosophies and traditions through the reading of these translated works, this knowledge of culture and society works almost as a soft power.

The success of these online Chinese novels stays in the fact that it is run in a model that is self-driven. The forums are liked by the international readers and praised tremendously. These translations work well due to the youth actively partaking in the activities of literature. The biggest teaching that I can see for myself is the motivation of the youth to not only read online in their local language but to go so far as to set up platforms where they can share the aspects of their local language and culture with an international audience. The translation of Chinese online literature is a form of cultural preservation that is knowingly or unknowingly done by the youth of China which can be learnt from. The sprouts of which can be seen, as reported by *Global Times* on 17 May 2017, in an article by Yin Lu titled ‘Inspired by Chinese online literature, foreign authors add Eastern elements to their stories’, “Lynge said her writings are inspired by Chinese Web novels to a great extent. She includes figures and gods from Chinese legends, and things from Chinese culture, such as the Four Symbols of China (the four mythological creatures in Chinese constellations). Among them, the Vermillion Bird of the South plays a special and important role in her story”.

The rise of youth led forums for translation of online Chinese literature to English, have been a form of learning for youth and preservation for the culture. The forums work on a self-funding method that allows them to generate proceeds for themselves to keep working on translations. These reader funded forums chose the online novels they want to translate by themselves and work on them in a periodical fashion. It promotes engagement of translation group in Chinese as well as English language as it positively affects the fluency and literacy of the translators in both. The readers on the other hand experience many themes of exploration in literature that have not yet been much discovered in English. The fantastical element of these stories brings forth the interest of the reader. The traditional Chinese elements that are an integral feature of almost all of these translations. These forums act as a means to spread local online literature to the international reader, while also sending pieces of the local cultures.

## REFERENCES

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