Desire and Fantasy On-line: a Sociological and Psychoanalytical Approach to the Prosumption of Chinese Internet Fiction

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# Table of Contents

abstract ................................................................................................................................. 7  
declaration ............................................................................................................................. 8  
copyright statement ............................................................................................................ 8  
acknowledgement ................................................................................................................. 9  
chapter one: introduction ................................................................................................... 10  
  1.1: internet literature – definition and development ......................................................... 10  
  1.2: research motivation and questions ............................................................................. 18  
  1.3: literature review ......................................................................................................... 19  
    1.3.1: modern chinese literature and popular fiction ...................................................... 19  
    1.3.2: fan culture in the popular media ......................................................................... 20  
    1.3.3: literature and the internet ................................................................................... 21  
    1.3.4: popular fiction and internet in china ................................................................... 23  
  1.4: theoretical frameworks .............................................................................................. 28  
  1.5: data and methodology ............................................................................................... 30  
    1.5.1: the primary sources of literary commodities – four nets and one channel on qidian ................................................................. 30  
    1.5.2: empirical data for the production rate ................................................................. 34  
    1.5.3: empirical data for the consumption rate .............................................................. 34  
    1.5.4: the interval of empirical data collection .............................................................. 43  
    1.5.5: the comparison between production rate and consumption rate ...................... 46  
  1.6: structure ..................................................................................................................... 49  
chapter two: mapping internet fiction .................................................................................. 52  
  2.1: introduction ................................................................................................................ 52  
  2.2: a genealogy of chinese popular fiction ....................................................................... 53  
    2.2.1: vernacular fiction – from ming fiction to tongsu xiaoshuo ..................................... 53  
    2.2.2: the texts of tongsu xiaoshuo – bridging the gap between an old traditional time and a new era ................................................................. 55  
    2.2.3: the re-institutionalisation of tongsu xiaoshuo – the expansion from printing to cinema ................................................................. 57  
    2.2.4: the similarities of texts between tongsu xiaoshuo and internet fiction .................... 59  
    2.2.5: the similarities of re-institutionalisation between tongsu xiaoshuo and internet fiction ......................................................................................... 61  
  2.3: the new feature of internet fiction from a spatial perspective – a reconfiguration of institution for massive participation ................................................................. 63  
    2.3.1: promoting popular reception of fiction – from newspaper to the internet ................ 63  
    2.3.2: mass/social media fandom, participatory culture, and prosumerism in post-mao china ......................................................................................... 65  
  2.4: prosumerism and individualisation in china – from subjugation to
Accentuation?.................................................................72
2.4.1: Toward an Individualised Chinese Society...............72
2.4.2: State ‘Strategies’ versus Individualised ‘Tactics’ in Contemporary China.........................................................78
2.4.3: Resolving to Inward Goodness as a Safe Way to Co-exist with Social Harmony?....................................................80
2.5: Conclusion.........................................................................82

Chapter Three: The Macrostructure of Internet Fiction in China – Re-institutionalising a Digital Literary Field ..........................................................84

3.1: Introduction.......................................................................84
3.2: From Commercial Printing to Commercial Websites – A Brief History of Commercial Publishing in China...............................84
3.3: Attention Economy and Prosumerism – A New Model of Desire Production and Consumption.........................................................88
  3.3.1: Prosumerism, Attention and Profit..................................88
  3.3.2: Prosumerism – Towards Desire Generating?....................90
3.4: Qidian – A New Chinese Model of Production and Consumption........92
  3.4.1: Agents and Institutions Re-positioned in a Digital Literary Field –
        Centralised Prosumers and De-centralised Mediators.............93
    3.4.1.1: Readership in Prosumers........................................93
    3.4.1.2: Authorship in Prosumers.........................................98
  3.4.2: The De-centralisation of Mediators of Agents/Institutions – Publishers (Publishing Companies), Printers (Printing Houses), Editors, and Booksellers (Bookstores)..................................................102
    3.4.2.1: Publishers.........................................................103
    3.4.2.2: Editors, Printers (Printing Houses) and Booksellers
             (Bookstores)....................................................109
3.5: Conclusion.........................................................................111

Chapter Four: Male Fantasy of Feeling Good – The Pattern of the Golden Triangle underneath Fiction Genres on Qidian Chinese Net...........113

4.1: Introduction......................................................................113
4.2: Tier One – Most Popular Produced/Consumed Fiction Genres on Qidian Chinese Net ..........................................................114
  4.2.1: Xuanhuan 玄幻 (Eastern Fantasy).................................114
    4.2.1.1: The Chinese Counterpart of Western Fantasy Fiction......114
  4.2.2: Dushi 都市 (Urban)..................................................118
    4.2.2.1: Traditional Urban Narratives – A Path to Literary Realism..118
    4.2.2.2: Cyber Urban Narratives – Transforming Literary Realism to
             Literary Fantasy.....................................................121
    4.2.2.3: The Strategies of Urban Fantasy – Its Characters and
             Patterns......................................................................123
    4.2.2.4: Urban Fantasy – A Pseudo Realism to Justify Fantasy....126
  4.2.3: Xianxia 仙侠 (Chinese Immortal Swordsman)..................127
4.2.3.1: Beyond an Earthly Boundary........................................128
4.2.4: Wangyou 網遊 (On-line Game)...................................133
  4.2.4.1: Between a Physical World and a Virtual Secondary World..133
  4.2.4.2: From On-line Game to On-line Game Fiction.................135
  4.2.4.3: The Golden Triangle in On-line Game Narratives..............136
4.3: Tier Two – The More Consumed but Relatively Less Produced Genre.....139
  4.3.1: Lishi 歷史 (History)................................................139
    4.3.1.1: Historical Fiction – A Pending Controversy...................139
    4.3.1.2: The Popular Tendency of Fictionalising History – Factual
             Fabrication versus Unfactual Fabrication........................140
    4.3.1.3: Personal Fabrication as the Key to History Fiction...........141
    4.3.1.4: Fabrication, Time-slip and Individualisation..................144
4.4: Tier Three – The Less Produced/Consumed Genres........................145
  4.4.1: Qihuan 奇幻 (Western Fantasy)..................................145
    4.4.1.1: Warcraft in Neverland........................................145
  4.4.2: Kehuan 科幻 (Science Fiction)....................................148
    4.4.2.1: From Saving the Nation to Fantasising Chinese
             Individualisation..................................................148
4.5: Tier Four – The Least Produced/Consumed Genres........................150
4.6: Conclusion.........................................................................153

Chapter Five: Female Fantasy – The Golden Triangle in Romance on Qidian
Female Net .............................................................................155
5.1: Introduction.........................................................................155
5.2: The Mass-production of Popular Romance Narratives in the West.....155
5.3: A Romance Tradition in Chinese Popular Literature................157
    5.3.1: From Caizi Jiaren 才子佳人 (the Genius and the Beauty) to the
           Modern-day Cyber Romance..........................................157
    5.3.2: The Popularity of Romance in China since the Economic Reforms.159
5.4: Romance – The Female Version of the Golden Triangle................160
    5.4.1: From ‘Unconditional Love’ to ‘Conditional Love’..............160
    5.4.2: One Genre, Two Politics of Sex and Love.......................162
5.5: Cunai Danmei 純愛耽美 (Pure Love and Absolute Aesthetic) – Towards
     Female Voyeurism through Homoerotic Romance to Project Physical
     Desire.................................................................................164
    5.5.1: Homoerotic Romance – A Brief History in the US and Japan....164
    5.5.2: Homoeroticism in Chinese Cyberspace............................166
    5.5.3: Homoerotic Romance and its Sex Politics – Grotesque Eroticism....168
    5.5.4: Homoerotic Romance and the Golden Triangle....................171
    5.5.5: Between Patriarchy and Female Voyeurism – A Confirmation of the
           Golden Triangle .........................................................172
5.6: Yanqing Xiaoshuo 言情小說 (Heterosexual Romance) – The Cinderella
     Complex.............................................................................175
    5.6.1: ‘Conformance’ and ‘Resistance’ – One Sub-genre, Two
           Approaches.......................................................................175
5.6.2: The Heterosexual Romance and its Sex Politics – A Return to Patriarchy..........................................................................................................................178
5.6.3: Heterosexual Romance and the Golden Triangle.............................................180
5.7: Conclusion........................................................................................................181

Chapter Six: Desire, Fantasy, and Internet Fiction in China..............................183
6.1: Introduction........................................................................................................183
6.2: Genre – A Recurrent Social Implication..............................................................184
6.3: The Diversification of Fiction Genres, Sub-genres and the Intertextual Internet Literary Mélange.................................................................................................................185
6.5: Desire, Fantasy, and the Real – A Psychoanalytical Approach......................189
  6.5.1: The Notion of Desire – Lack, Loss and Hollowness........................................189
  6.5.2: Fantasy – Its Multiple Roles in Realising Desire.............................................191
  6.5.3: Postponement and Repetition – Reaching Desire’s Satisfaction...............194
  6.5.4: Che Voglio? Che Vuoi! – Whose Desire is it?.............................................196
6.6: From Fantasy to Literary Fantasy – The Chinese Literary Fantastic Mode on Qidian.........................................................................................................................197
  6.6.1: Fantasy Fiction in Western Europe after 1800............................................198
  6.6.2: What is Literary Fantastic?.............................................................................199
  6.6.3: The Literary Fantastic from a Western European Perspective.................202
  6.6.4: The Literary Fantastic from a Contemporary Chinese Perspective...204
6.7: Desire, Fantasy and the Real in Internet Fiction in China – An Intertextual Fantasy.....................................................................................................................206
6.8: The Constitution and Realisation of Desire in Internet Fiction –
  Production/Consumption on the Element of Literary Fantastic..........................207
  6.8.1: The Postponement and Reproduction of Desire in Internet Fiction..209
  6.8.2: The Golden Triangle – The Desire of ‘Others’...........................................211
6.9: Conclusion........................................................................................................213

Chapter Seven: Conclusion.....................................................................................214
7.2: The Microstructure – Internet Fiction as a Digital Literary Product of Digital Capitalism..............................................................................................................219
7.3: Suggestions for Future Research.....................................................................229

Bibliography............................................................................................................232
Appendixes...............................................................................................................262

(Word Count: 80,000)
Table of Figures:

Figure 1: The Basic Structure of Qidian……………………………………….32
Figure 2: Qidian Chinese Net Homepage…………………………………………....33
Figure 3: ‘Cover’ of a Work of Internet Fiction on Qidian Chinese Net…………….38
Figure 4: List of Rankings with Different Reader Groups…………………………..41
Figure 5: Top Ten Works of Cumulative Hits, Cumulative Recommendation, and Cumulative Collection (up to 31 March 2011)……………………………..42-43
Figure 6: Production Rate from 3 March 2010 to 3 March 2011 (Based on the Statistics from Appendix 3)……………………………………………………………..44
Figure 7: Consumption Rate from 3 March 2010 to 3 March 2011 (Based on the Statistics from Appendix 4)………………………………………………………………45
Figure 8: The Designated Private Space with a Qidian Account…………………...96

Appendix:

Appendix 1: List of Fiction Genres and Their Subgenres on Qidian Chinese Net…………………………………………………………………………………………………262
Appendix 2: List of the Subgenres of Romance on Qidian Female Net………270
Appendix 3: Production Rate……………………………………………………………273
Appendix 4: Consumption Rate………………………………………………………..277
Desire and Fantasy On-line: A Sociological and Psychoanalytical Approach to the Prosumption of Chinese Internet Fiction

Abstract (November 2012)

This thesis deals with two topics: macro-structurally speaking, the evolving and dynamic new patterns of commercial publishing over the internet where agents and institutions of commercial publishing have been repositioned in the digital Chinese literary field; micro-structurally speaking, the textual analysis of internet fiction prosumed by authors and readers to realise the collective desire of Chinese prosumers (producers and consumers). Together the two topics contribute to the study of the socio-cultural phenomenon of internet fiction in the transnational Chinese on-line literary sphere, especially in China. The internet promotes prosumption behaviour because prosumers are offered more autonomy. This autonomy helps to generate desire in prosumers by incessantly prosuming highly similar texts to reflect a growing Chinese individualisation.

A textual analysis of the prosumed literary commodities will be conducted in order to comprehend the collective desire of general prosumers on the internet resulting from the prosumers’ literary autonomy. The approach to analysing the texts – prosumed commodities as the consequence of literary autonomy – is through psychoanalysis, which I believe is best suited to illuminate desire dwelling in the depths of the human mind. The production rates and consumption rates of various fiction genres from long-term statistics which I have collected from Qidian, the largest internet literary portal website based in China, provide the thesis with a standard by which to determine what types of works of fiction are popularly prosumed. The psychoanalytical approach will be applied for a deeper interpretation of these works to establish the reason for their popularity. Whilst internet fiction is being popularly prosumed and prosumers communicate with each other on an individual basis to spell out their desire, they use internet fiction as a channel to reflect their socio-cultural context through various fiction genres. Hence, by analysing the prosumers’ desire, this thesis also strives by means of textual analysis to go beyond interpreting individual desire to examine a symbiosis between prosumers and their socio-cultural environment.

The discussion of the new business model of prosumption and the textual analysis of prosumed fiction are like the two sides of the same coin, where the new pattern of commercial publishing provides a mode in which Chinese prosumers are offered autonomy of production and consumption of literary commodities, whilst the prosumed literary commodities sustain the new pattern. Because of this reciprocal relationship, to research one without the other is likely to miss the whole picture of the socio-cultural phenomenon.
Declaration

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Chapter One: Introduction

In this chapter, I shall present: (1) a brief introduction to internet literature and internet fiction; (2) my research motivation and questions; (3) a literature review; (4) the theoretical framework for the study; (5) data and methodology; and (6) the overall structure of the thesis.

1.1: Internet Literature – Definition and Development

Arguably, wherever there is the internet, there is internet literature produced and consumed by internet users. In North America, the creation and the study of hypertext literature was initiated in the United States. The first generation of hypertext literature (epitomised by Afternoon, a Story by Michael Joyce [1945-] and Victory Garden by Stuart Moulthrop [1957-]) and the second generation of network literature (exemplified by The Jew’s Daughter by Judd Morrissey [?]) have been recognised as the initiators of literature composed by computer programs and by networking. They have also provoked academic discussion on the dynamics between computer/internet and literature. Meanwhile, numerous websites collecting the literary works produced by the general population have been set up. Fanfiction, claiming to be the largest on-line archive of fan fiction in English, is based in North America. In Latin America, literary works created and published on the internet through different digital practices, such as e-magazines and blogs, are gradually infiltrating the everyday

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1 Up to now, there is no unified phrase. ‘Cyber literature,’ ‘on-line literature’ and ‘internet literature’ have all been used to refer to this new form of literature. Liu Kung, one of the first scholars in Western academia who has discussed the phenomenon of producing/consuming literature on the internet in the greater Chinese areas, uses the phrase ‘Internet Literature’ in his work. Liu, Globalization and Cultural Trends in China, 20. In this thesis, I shall use ‘internet literature’ because this term best describes the venue in which the literary phenomenon is promoted and retrieved, whereas ‘on-line literature’ stresses the status, rather than the venue and ‘cyber literature’ refers not only to literary works composed on-line, but also to hypertext literature operated on a CD-ROM.

2 Ciccoricco, Introduction, Reading Network Fiction.

3 See the section of literature review for the European and North American scholarship on this topic.

4 The homepage is <www.fanfiction.net>.
life of Latin Americans. In Japan and Korea, many popular works of fiction were initially released on the internet, afterwards being franchised in other media formats to generate amazing profits. Some works have been trans-nationally consumed in other parts of Asia. The popular Korean movie Yeopgijeogin Geunyeo 엽기적인그녀 (My Sassy Girl) in 2001 and the Japanese TV drama Densha Otako 電車男 (Train Man) in 2005 were adapted from literary works previously popular over the internet. The fiction, Densha Otako, exemplifies the collective writing from internet users happening nowadays.

In Chinese-speaking areas such as China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, a transnational on-line literary sphere has emerged in which internet literature has been booming. In this arena, China is the major promoter of the internet literary trend, given the fact that China has the largest internet literature population.

In 1994, the advent of private internet access sparked a dramatic and rapid change in modern Chinese society. According to Zhongguo Hulianwang Zhongxin 中國戶聯網信息中心 (the China Internet Network Information Centre; hereafter CNNIC), the number of Chinese netizens reached 457,000,000 in 2010. More than one-third of China’s netizen population is engaged with internet literature. Internet literature, both in 2009 and 2010, was ranked the tenth most popular on-line activity, with a penetration rate rising slightly from 42.3% among

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5 Taylor and Pitman, eds., *Latin American Cybertulture and Cyberliterature*. 6 Ma Ji 马季, “Haiwai Ji Taiwan Wanglu Wenxue” 海外及台灣網絡文學 (Internet Literature in Foreign Lands and in Taiwan), 120-29. 7 Densha Otako initially came to the publisher’s attention when a series of postings on a message board on the website of Nichanneru にちゃねる (2 Channels) were published from March 2004 to May 2004. The postings were initiated by a user nicknamed Train Man asking other users how he should react when a girl nicknamed Miss Hermes became friendly to show her appreciation towards him after he had saved her from being sexually harassed by a drunken man on a subway journey. Being a nerd, the Train Man was not sure how to interact with the opposite sex so he called for opinions on-line. The postings came from other internet users, providing their suggestions. See Ashby, “Hey! Mr. Trainman.” The story finally was turned into a book based on those postings. This work demonstrates the notion of collective writing in the digital age today. 8 Internet literature is a transnational phenomenon. Theoretically, anyone who understands the Chinese language can visit internet literature websites to read and to create their own works. However, this thesis will concentrate on internet literature in China for two reasons: one is that China clearly serves as the major promoter of this phenomenon; the second is that the topic of a transnational Chinese on-line literary sphere is too huge to deal with in one single thesis. 9 CNNIC, “The 27th CNNIC Report,” 5-6.
Chinese netizens in 2009\textsuperscript{10} to 42.6\% in 2010, and the number of users going up from 162,610,000 to 194,810,000.\textsuperscript{11} Even though being generally criticised or held in contempt,\textsuperscript{12} internet literature has generated much enthusiasm and attention in China.

What exactly is internet literature? Broadly speaking, internet literature consists of any literary works which can be accessed over the internet. Following this definition, what sprawls out under the umbrella term of ‘internet literature’ is actually a kaleidoscopic world of literary texts of various genres from ancient times to the modern period, flowing throughout a trans-border on-line literary sphere, and a growing number of virtual literary communities where literary works are shared at the internet users’ fingertips.

There are two fundamental issues, not evident from this definition, which must be clarified. The first is the difference between linear narration and non-linear narration. The second is whether or not a literary work is released on the internet prior to other print formats. Non-linear narration is created originally by computer programs. Dynamic, interactive, pictorial, multi-layered literary texts are presented on computer monitors for readers to approach freely without necessarily following a linear order. This non-linear reading experience is similar to exploring a maze. Despite its innovation, this new literary genre – commonly recognised as hypertext writing – is still in its incipient stage, and only accounts for a small percentage of total internet literature. Linear narration, on the other hand, takes the lead in on-line literary spheres and can be subdivided into two types. One type consists of literary texts which, after having been released in traditional book format, are subsequently digitalised and circulated on-line. This type includes copyright-free materials created prior to 1911, such as \textit{Tangshi Sanbai Shou} 唐詩三百首 (300 Tang poems) or \textit{Hongloumeng} 紅樓夢 (Dream of the Red Chamber); and also materials still protected by copyright law but

\textsuperscript{10} CNNIC, “The 25\textsuperscript{th} CNNIC Report,” 31.
\textsuperscript{11} CNNIC, “The 27\textsuperscript{th} CNNIC Report,” 31. This statistic shows that China is the main promoter of internet literature in the transnational Chinese on-line literary sphere. Currently, Hong Kong has a population of seven million, Taiwan has 23 million. The total population of both Hong Kong and Taiwan is much smaller than the internet literature population in China.
\textsuperscript{12} The controversy instigated by internet literature will be elucidated on pages 17-18.
‘illegally’ digitalised on-line, such as literary works by Zhang Ailing 張愛玲 (1920-95) and Wang Anyi 王安憶 (1954- ). I describe these as ‘unoriginal internet linear narration’. The other type refers to literary texts first produced (by using WordPad or other word-processing software) and then released on the internet. I call these ‘original internet linear narration’. In other words, whether or not the original literary products are initially publicised and come in contact with their readership via the internet draws the line between the two.

As the notion of publishing one's own literary creation on-line was introduced in China, ‘original internet linear narration’ has gradually become synonymous with ‘internet literature’ over the years, making the other kind of linear literary works alternative in this trend. A closer look into the brief history of ‘internet literature’ in the transnational Chinese on-line literary sphere reveals how this came to be.

Chinese internet literature originated in two digital magazines based in the US: Huaxia Wenzhai 華夏文摘 (China News Digest – Chinese Magazine) and Xinyusi 新語絲 (New Threads). Whereas the former mainly provides news from China for overseas Chinese, the latter not only provides newsfeeds, but also offers overseas Chinese a virtual community where they can share their literary creations. The first internet fiction (a short story) was allegedly composed by Shao Jun 少軍 (the alias of Qian Jianjun 錢建軍 [1960-]), a Chinese professional writer residing in North America. He published his first work Fendou yu Pingdeng 奮鬥與平等 (Struggle and Equality) in April 1991 on China News Digest, depicting his efforts to have a successful life in a foreign land as an alien.

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13 The ‘unoriginal internet linear narration’ involves a complicated copyright issue. Once discovered, the webmaster can be potentially prosecuted for violating copyright laws. Arguably, this might be one reason why original internet linear narration is more popular. Baidu has been alleged to have incurred copyright infringement by offering a space named Baidu Wenku 百度文庫 (Baidu Library), where Baidu users can share published works without the author’s permission. In March 2011, high-profile writers such as Murong Xuecun 慕容雪村 (1974- ) and Han Han 韓寒 (1982- ) openly accused Baidu of intentional negligence of the copyright infringement behaviour of its users and demanded that Baidu should stop this sharing function immediately. Anonymous, “Baidu Accused of Copyright Infringement.”; Lee, “Chinese Writers Slam Baidu for Copyright Infringement.”

14 This short story was published on 26 April 1991, under Qian’s other pen name Ma Qi (馬奇).
Interestingly, the theme of the Chinese diaspora is still largely reflected in the most popular fiction genre in the on-line Chinese literary sphere today (which will be discussed in Chapter 4).\textsuperscript{15}

Even so, composing literature on-line, which started in North America, did not create a trend in the on-line literary sphere until the late 1990s. In 1998, Pizi Cai 痞子蔡 (the alias of Cai Zhiheng 蔡智恆 [1969-]), a Taiwanese amateur fiction writer, initially posted his creation over a local BBS (Bulletin Board System) in serial form, and unexpectedly received enormously positive feedback from his readers. The popularity and the high number of hits on-line eventually led to his work being released in conventional book form entitled *Diyi Qinmi Jiechu* 第一次親密接觸 (*The First Intimate Contact*). This book features a boy’s romantic encounter with a perfect girl who dies at the end. It became an immediately commercial success both in Taiwan and China.\textsuperscript{16} A chain of enfranchised reactions was ignited following the success of the fiction, including a TV drama, a movie, an on-line game and a stage play.\textsuperscript{17}

Cai’s success attracted a long list of successors who have consistently helped to imprint the term ‘internet literature’ into the awareness of the population through their substantial production and massive consumption. Once awareness was raised, a higher demand for original internet literary works was ignited. Rather than letting producers and consumers wander around in virtual space, an American Chinese, Will Zhu, introduced the concept of literary portal websites to give them a common space for sharing and communicating. The first Chinese literary portal website Rongshuxia 榕樹下 (*Under the Banyan Tree*) was established in 1997, based in Shanghai.

\textsuperscript{17} Sun Zhiping 孫治本, “Wanglu Wenxue de Texing ji Taiwan Wanglu Wenxue xiang Zhongguo Dalu de Liudong” 網路文學的特性及台灣網路文學向中國大陸的流動 (*The Characteristics of Internet Literature and the Taiwanese Internet Literature Flow to Chinese Mainland*), 12-13.
Zhu’s notion of a literary portal website inspired more entrepreneurs to follow suit. Within only a few years, numerous literary portal websites were set up in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Most works published over the portal websites were fiction (hereafter ‘internet fiction’). On portal websites of this kind, users only need to register an account to start producing and consuming. Since these portal sites are equipped with a fast search engine, a handier interface, and many other convenient functions, users can search for new works, provide instant feedback to existing writing, and submit their own works to assume their roles both as producers and consumers. An easy switch between the simplified and the traditional Chinese language system by one click on the language menu of the homepage allows users to choose the written script they prefer (which implies that the users are potentially from all around the world, as long as they have adequate knowledge of the Chinese language). With the convenience of the internet, internet literature flared up across Newsgroups, BBS, Weblogs and mainly portal websites. Recently, the trend has expanded its linkage to mobile phones. Anyone can subscribe to a downloading service from their preferred literary portal website to consume literary works on mobile phone monitors. Literary products are also extended over various technological platforms to be approached by users, leading to a technological convergence of a popular literature revival.

Owing to its fast booming development and its enormous market potential, entrepreneurs who set up literary portal websites also introduced the concept of a cultural industry, including profits and enfranchisement, into this internet literature phenomenon. A rapid evolution of literary portal websites can be observed today. The websites have grown from merely an assembly ground for amateur authors where a high number of hits and positive feedback from readers would have satisfied them in the past, to being a large-scale manufacturing

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18 This is known as Shouji Xiaoshuo 手機小說 (Mobile Phone Fiction). There are phone users who create literary works and publish them on-line via text message; however this is not the mainstream. Due to the research focus of the thesis, literature published on web-blogs, newsgroups or mobile phones is excluded. 
19 The latest technology is electronic readers. See Chapter 3 for more detail. 
20 The notion of cultural industry is a complicated one. Here I use the term in its simplest notion of profit and enfranchisement, which is commonly observed in many budding cultural industries in China. 

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industry in which profit plays a central role. Popular works on those portal websites are likely to be enfranchised later into conventional book form, movies or other entertainment formats for even more profit.  

There are still amateur internet writers who believe in the independence of literary works from commercialisation and release their works on personal weblogs, rather than on commercialised portal websites. However, ongoing amateur writers’ successful stories have encouraged a fashion for amateur writers submitting literary works to portal websites. Qidian Shanda Wenxue 起點盛大文學 (Qidian Shanda Literature, hereafter Qidian), the largest and most famous portal website of its kind, boasts a cumulative 600,000 internet literary works (the number is still expanding daily), its status marching into the top 100 most frequently visited websites universally in 2004 and its visitors surpassing 100,000,000 by 2006. By 2009, Shanda, the company that currently runs and manages Qidian, had gained such a commercial success that it took over several other similar and popular portal websites, with stock options offered at NASDAQ. Some of the merged websites include Under the Banyan Tree, as well as two female reader-oriented websites: Jinjiang Wenxue Cheng 晉江文學城 (Jinjiang Literary City) and Hongxiu Tianxiang 紅袖添香 (Perfumed Red Sleeves). What Qidian has achieved so far is not an isolated incident, it is a reflection of a literary transnational phenomenon. This phenomenon, initiated by overseas

21 Take Pizi Cai: his The First Intimate Contact has been adapted into a stage drama, with its premiere in Beijing in 2004, and a movie in 2006.
22 Qidian’s homepage is at <www.qidian.com>. It is only one business segment under Shanda, whose full name is Shanda Online. It consists of two business sectors: internet literature and online games. However, when visiting Qidian’s homepage, visitors see Qidian Zhongwen Wang 起點中文網 (Qidian Chinese Net) as the logo, instead of Shanda Qidian 盛大起點 (Shengda Starting Point), even after Qidian Chinese Net had been taken over by Shanda and renamed Shanda Wenxue 盛大文學 (Shengda Literature). For the sake of differentiation, I use Shanda Qidian to refer to the business model and structure of Shanda Online’s literature sector (and the affiliated websites in some cases), whereas I used Qidian to indicate Qidian Chinese Net itself.
23 Qidian states that its current market share of internet literature has reached eighty percent.
24 Anonymous, “Qidian Memorabilia.”
25 The list of the affiliated literary portal websites under Shanda can be found at <www.sdo.com>. Nevertheless, the alliance seems to change from time to time. For instance, on 3 December 2011 Jinjiang Literary City was not included as a partner anymore. This could be explained by the more intense censorship of pornography. The reason for this will be elucidated in Chapter 6 on romance.
Chinese in the US, stimulated by commercial success from Taiwan, with the first literary portal website established in Shanghai by an American Chinese, indicates a growing tendency of intense production and consumption of Chinese literary works on the internet.

As a socio-cultural phenomenon saturating this transnational Chinese online literary sphere, internet fiction is not always favoured by educators, literary critics and elites. The Chinese scholar Tao Dongfeng 陶東風 (1959- ) has denounced internet fantasy fiction for severely damaging the aesthetics and values of Chinese literature, and argued that internet literature edges out literary elites, providing too much room for amateurship. Xiao Ying 肖鷹 (1962- ) sharply reprimanded current internet literature for being far from qualified as real literature, calling it instead a literary prototype, or Qian Wenxue 前文學 (pre-literature product). The Taiwanese professional writer Lin Qingxuan 林清玄 (1953- ) argued that internet literature lacks the literary aesthetics reflected in traditional Chinese literature, while Yuan Qiongqiong 袁瓊瓊 (1950- ) has stated that good works of fiction are unlikely to be produced on the internet.

Conversely, a number of public figures regard internet literature in a positive light. The Chinese fiction writer Mo Yan 莫言 (1955- [now a Nobel Laureate]) has expressed his support for internet literature. Chen Cun 陳村 (1954- ), the forerunner of internet writing and a literary critic formally based in Under the Banyan Tree, has boldly claimed that all the literary works produced in

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26 Tao Dongfeng 陶東風, “Zhongguo Wenxue yi Jinru Zhuangshen Nonqui de Shidai” 中國文學已進入裝神弄鬼的時代 (Chinese Literature Has Entered a Phase Where Cheap Fantasy and Horror are Dominant), 8-11.
27 ---, “Wenxue Huodong de Qujingyinghua” 文學活動的去精英化 (The De-elitism of the Contemporary Literary Trend), 42-66.
28 Xiao Ying 肖鷹, “Wo Weishenme Fouding Wangluo Wenxue” 我為什麼否定網絡文學 (Why I Deny that Internet Literature is Real Literature).
29 Lin Qingxuan 林清玄, “Wangluo Wenxue Duobanshi Meiyou Yingyang de Dongxi” 網絡文學多半是沒有營養的東西 (Most Internet Literary Works are Textually Barren).
31 Mo Yan 莫言, “Wangluo Wenxue Shige Haoxiangxian” 網絡文學是個好現象 (Internet Literature is a Good Phenomenon).
the future will be from the internet. At Central South University based in Changsha, Hunan, a graduate institute affiliated to the Chinese literature department has been established to focus especially on internet literature and culture. The socio-cultural phenomenon and the controversies it has brought forth are what aroused my curiosity towards internet literature.

1.2: Research Motivation and Questions

Internet fiction differs from traditional fiction in several ways. I aim to contemplate a broader picture of the whole literary production process on the internet – authors (producers), readers (consumers), media (distributors) – the essential elements that complete the process of the production of a work of fiction, to realise the ways in which the agents of a literary production have been re-configured to welcome a new literary production and consumption model.

Furthermore, internet fiction has become a contemporary cultural product to be collectively produced and consumed by the general public. There must be particular textual trends to illuminate what the general public are attracted to and why they are so attached to internet fiction. In addition, by discerning the attachment of a mass authorship and readership to internet fiction, it would also be significant to analyse the way in which the massive engagement of the new cultural phenomenon can be associated with a larger socio-political discourse.

Incorporating all the considerations I have raised, after observing the business model of internet fiction which operates exclusively in China and examining internet fiction as literary products mass-produced by the model, my specific research questions are: in today's China, in what ways is the literary production and consumption field re-configured where agents have been re-positioned? With the re-configuration of the literary field, what are the textual traits collectively produced and consumed by Chinese netizens? How can the textual traits help us understand the desires of Chinese netizens, many of whom

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32 Chen Cun 陳村, “Yihou Yiqie Wenxue Doushi Wangluo Wenxue”以後一切文學都是網絡文學 (All Future Literary Works will be Derived from Internet Literature).
33 Their website is Wangluo Wenhua Yanjiu Wang 網絡文化研究網 (Web Culture Studies) <http://webculstudies.csu.edu.cn>. 
are prosumers,\textsuperscript{34} collectively fantasised through producing/consuming internet literature?

1.3: Literature Review

In the following subsections, I shall introduce important academic works relevant to the focus of this thesis. These can be divided into four fields. The first consists of academic publications on the development of popular fiction in China in the twentieth century. The second area is comprised of research on the relationship between popular culture and mass media. The third area is constituted by research on engaging literature and the internet in general. The fourth field of publications is composed of research on popular Chinese fiction published on the internet.

1.3.1: Modern Chinese Literature and Popular Fiction

The transformation period from the Late Qing period to the early Republican era is where this research begins its path mapping internet fiction. Whilst the view of Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) of the use of fiction as an instrument to ‘save the nation’ has dominated the historical memory of the transition of modern Chinese fiction, David Der-wei Wang’s pioneering work \textit{Fin-de-siècle Splendor} (1997) proffered an in-depth insight into previously academically ignored genres (such as science fiction) to reconfigure the landscape of Chinese fiction in the Late Qing period. The rediscovery of these ignored genres helped to establish an historical heritage of contemporary Chinese popular fiction today. Another pioneering work, Perry E. Link’s \textit{Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies} (1980), was significant in its shift of focus from the elite-dominated ‘New Literature’ of the May Fourth Movement to formerly neglected forms of popular fiction. Link’s work explored the function of Tongsu Xiaoshuo within the socio-historical framework of Chinese urban modernity. His work is important in associating modern Chinese fiction with the element of entertainment,

\textsuperscript{34} ‘Prosumer’ is a compound term of producers and consumers. This term is crucial to this thesis and will be used constantly to refer to general netizens who not only consume, but also produce, media/cultural substances on the internet. This notion will be further elucidated in Chapter 2.
commercialisation and the psychological needs of a growing urban population. Michel Hockx’s edited work *The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China* (1999) touched upon both elite and popular literature. Moreover, it went beyond the scope of texts to examine the role of different agents in the production of literature by using Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical framework of the literary field. Among Chinese language publications, *Wanqing Xiaoshuo Shi* 晚清小說史 (A History of Late Qing Fiction, [1937]) by Ah Ying 阿英 (1900-77), *Minguo Tongsu Xiaoshuo Yuanyang Hudie Pai* 民國通俗小說鴛鴦蝴蝶派 (Popular Fiction in the Republican Era: The Tongsu Xiaoshuo, [1990]) by Fan Boqun 范伯群 (1931- ), and *Zhongguo Xiandai Xiaoshuo de Qidian* 中國現代小說的起點 (The Beginning of Modern Chinese Fiction, [2005]) by Chen Pingyuan 陳平原 (1954-) provide valuable data regarding various kinds of fiction prevalent during the transformation period of Chinese fiction. Whereas I benefited from the Chinese scholars’ valuable data, I am indebted to Wang for his rediscovery of the genres previously ignored by academics, also to Link’s and Hockx’s works combining social aspects with fiction texts for a broader picture of understanding popular fiction.

**1.3.2: Fan Culture in the Popular Media**

Any popular product needs mass participation to make it popular. The mass media act as an agent in engaging popular culture and mass participation. In recent years, many academic works have shifted their focus from merely analysing popular literary texts to also integrating the notion of mass participation and reception through the mass media – the various agents in a literary field and the relation of authors/readers to literary products. Henry Jenkins’s *Textual Poacher* (1992) examined the notion of active readers as a participatory force to promote fan culture, while Camille Bacon-Smith’s *Enterprising Women* (1992) analysed fans as ‘media fans’ to create and circulate fiction or poetry within their own community. Even though the focus of both works is on fan culture, a subculture pertaining to popular culture, their insights into popular culture being
engaged with the mass media to allow more space for mass participation inspired me in this thesis. Jenkins’ other works *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers* (2006) and *Convergence Culture* (2006) go beyond the scope of mass media of television to explore the fan culture over the social media – the internet. The idea of a permeated participatory culture is significantly relevant to this thesis in understanding the association between mass participation, fan culture and media in China.

Lisa A. Lewis’s edited work *Adoring Audience* (1992), another pioneering work exploring fan culture comprehensively in all areas of institutions and agents pertaining to fan culture, elaborated the intimacy between fan culture and popular media. This thesis was inspired by that book in the aspect of examining internet fiction from an overall perspective, with the institutions and agents involved, instead of only concentrating on literary products. Lee Leo Ou-fan’s *Shanghai Modern* (1999) depicts the making of cosmopolitan culture in which the mass media played a crucial role. Movie theatres, posters, newspapers and magazines served as the vehicles of cosmopolitan and popular culture. Although his work was confined to analysing modernity in Shanghai during the Republican era, the significance of the mass media lent a helping hand to develop my thesis linking the mass media and popular literature. My thesis, based on the notion raised by the aforementioned works, seeks to comprehensively investigate institutions, agents and literary products relevant to internet fiction.

1.3.3: Literature and the Internet

The relation between literature and the internet has come under academic scrutiny over the past decade, mainly in European and North American scholarship. Howard Becker’s articles ‘The Art World of Hypertext Fiction’, and ‘A New Art Form’ explored the way in which hypertext language produces a new form of art to be distributed and consumed on computers. Both works set out to probe into how hypertext fiction is non-traditional, as well as the new features associated with hypertext fiction so that readers/customers can interact with non-lineal texts, theorised as ‘play’. George Langlow’s *Hypertext 3.0* (2006) covered
a wide range of topics in regards to the production, the consumption and the
distribution of literature on different multimedia platforms. Langlow also
incorporated important literary theories into his discussion of hypertext literature.
Although I do not directly engage these works in this research, I have benefited
from them due to the new horizon of hypertext fiction and digital literature
discussed in the works. Espen Aarseth’s Cybertext (1997) also presented a wide
variety of perspectives into cybertext. A crucial point made by Aarseth was to
examine digital literature as participatory fiction for participants to have access to
in a game-playing fashion. The notion of participatory fiction is further engaged
in my thesis with participatory culture, which actualises the notion of prosumption
on Qidian.

Whilst the previous four works attenuate the significance of the non-linear,
non-traditional hypertext literature with which readers can interact and play on the
computer, David Ciccoricco’s Reading Network Fiction (2007) broadened the
range of hypertext literature to network literature. Not only did he examine the
hypertext canonical works which run on Storyspace software, but he also included
the established works initially published on-line. Through close reading of the
important texts, Ciccoricco analysed network fiction from a narrative and
somewhat philosophical perspective. Going beyond his work, I contemplate the
extent to which I can move beyond close reading to associate the phenomenon
socio-politically in the everyday life of Chinese netizens, many of whom are
prosumers.

Last but not least, Manuel Castells' Trilogy on the information age (The
Rise of the Network Society [1996]; The Power of Identity [1997]; End of
Millennium [1998]) is undeniably a cornerstone on which the current study of
information age and the network society is built upon. His trilogy covers a wide
range of crucial issues, such as economy, politics, workplace and employment,
society, culture, identity, state, to present his main arguments that the human
experience and the everyday life of human subjects have been transformed by the
rise of the network society to face new challenges. Though Castells does not
examine the field of literature produced and consumed on the internet, his
analysis of the dynamic changes in the various fields instigated by the notion of networking embodied in the form of the internet proves to be valuable in terms of dissecting the internet culture.

1.3.4: Popular Fiction and Internet in China

The dramatic evolution of the mass media and the social media in China has attracted much attention from European and North American scholarship, but the relevant studies are confined to three areas: politics, economy and technology. Recent research efforts provide various valuable insights into the role the internet plays socio-politically, or technologically, in shaping and reshaping contemporary Chinese society. However hardly any of them spare space to revealing the prospering phenomenon of internet fiction.

This is not to say that studies on internet fiction are completely absent. Yet existing studies are either relatively limited by their focus on the mass media as a whole, instead of focusing mainly on the notion of the internet and fiction, or not presented with in-depth academic analysis even though some of them set out to include literature and the internet under one scope. Liu Kang, in *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China* (2004), discussed the impact of globalisation on the cultural transformation in contemporary China, the internet being one of the vehicles of globalisation. The chapter on the internet in China briskly mentions internet literature when Liu depicts literature in cyberspace as “the urban youth’s search for aesthetic expression”, a way for Xinxin Renlei 新新人類 (Newer New Humanity) to express their distinctive cultural identity from that of their parent generation. Liu’s brisk statement does not fully unearth the reciprocal relationship between the internet and popular literature.

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Michel Hockx offered a preliminary yet comprehensive analytical comparison between Chinese literary journals at the turn of the last century and the well-known literary website Under the Banyan Tree from the early twenty-first century to examine the changes in the literary communities in China in his article ‘Links with the Past’ (2004). Another article by Hockx, ‘Virtual Chinese Literature’ (2005), narrowed its research focus further onto how Chinese poetry is produced, distributed and consumed on-line through a case study. Both of Hockx’s works are weighted on examining institutions in the literary field and the notion of communities in producing poetry. The analysis of popular fiction produced, consumed and distributed on the internet is relatively absent from his works. In The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature (2010), Hockx especially devoted a section to internet literature to introduce this phenomenon to others. Since this section serves a purely introductory function, however, it only provides the basics.

Kong Shuyu’s Consuming Literature (2005) engaged the notions of commercialisation, mass media and literary production together. She presented an aerial view of the landscape of popular literary production and consumption in contemporary China, examining the prosperity of popular literature on the book market since the 1980s. Internet literature is mentioned in passing at the end, but it is not the main focus. Tang Zhesheng 湯哲聲 (1956- ), on the other hand, intended to set up an historical narratology between popular literature and the mass media tracing the route from the advent of newspapers to the nascence of the internet in his Zhongguo Dangdai Tongsu Xiaoshuo Shilun 中國當代通俗小說史論 (History of Chinese Contemporary Popular Fiction, [2007]). Internet fiction being one chapter in the book, Tang indeed indicated the growing significance of internet fiction but was limited by the length of the chapter to merely scratching the surface, failing to provide an aerial view of the socio-cultural phenomenon. This is where my thesis will make a contribution to discerning the internet fiction phenomenon both in aerial view and in-depth scale.

38 Hockx, “Recent Changes in Print Culture and the Advent of New Media.”
As a contrast to the seemingly lukewarm attitude towards internet fiction in China among North American and European scholarship, Chinese scholarship is more enthusiastic. There is much research which has concentrated on fiction, rather than on the less prominent genres such as poetry and drama. Nonetheless, most of these studies failed to produce an in-depth analysis in their research, offering mostly surface analysis. Some scholars have set out to analyse the phenomenon on a fuller scale, such as Ouyang Youquan (1954-), who has published several books on this topic. In *Wangluo Wenxue Bentilun* (An Ontology Research of Network Literature, [2004]), the very existence of internet literature, along with its peripheral issues, are the major research focus in this book. Ouyang began his book with the issue of ‘how’ internet literature comes into being. The second issue Ouyang discussed turns to ‘what’ internet literature is. The implication behind the new trend, Ouyang argued, echoes the cultural wave of post-modernism. In *Wangluo Wenxue Gailun* (General Introduction to Internet Literature, [2008]), Ouyang addressed the issue in a more introductory way, targeting general readers. In two further works, *Shuzihua Yujingzhong de Wenyixue* (The Literature and Art in a Digitalized Environment, [2005]) and *Wangluo Chuanbo yu Shehui Wenhua* (Internet, Media and Social Culture, [2005]), where internet literature occupies only one section, Ouyang placed internet literature in a large paradigm to observe the impact of the internet on China aesthetically and sociologically. In spite of covering a range of the multifariousness of internet literature, Ouyang rarely concentrates specifically on internet fiction. His intention was to examine literature as a whole. In this process, the distinctive literary features of different literary genres (such as fiction) are overlooked. Suffice it to say that the way in which and the extent to which

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Note: The latest outcome of academic search by using *Wangluo Wenxue* (Internet Literature) as keyword in China Academic Journal Online: China East View generates nearly 1,200 works. Most papers are 3-4 pages long, addressing the issue of internet literature in a narrative fashion.
fiction as the major genre in Chinese cyberspace has been transformed is rarely analysed. This is where my thesis plays a contributory role.

There are some other Chinese researchers in this area. Ma Ji (1964-) acquainted readers with the history of internet literature in Chinese, chronicling the development and familiarising his readers with the internet fiction phenomenon from neighbouring countries, including Japan and South Korea in *Duping Shidai de Xiezuo: Wangluo Wenxue Shinian Shi* (Network Literature, [2008]). This is one of the few books that concentrate on internet fiction. Nevertheless, since it serves as a guide book to the phenomenon, the analysis which it gives of the phenomenon of internet fiction is not adequate.

Apart from the more established scholars who have addressed the issue of internet literature, a number of academic theses are also aware of the phenomenon, but most of them only present one aspect of it or one selective internet fiction genre. My thesis, on the other hand, covers major aspects from the transformation of the production/consumption model and the transformation of the agents and institutions in the literary field, to the underlying structure of each

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40 *See* for example: Li Chang (李暢), “Wangluo Wenxue de Houxiandai Qingjie” (The Postmodernism of the Web Literature); Li Yu (李彧), “Xinshiji Zhongguo Xiaoshuo Leixing Chuban Xingsi” (New-century China Novel Type Publication Reflection); Wang Haijun (王海軍), “Jieshou Meixue Shijiaoxia de Wangluo Xuanhuan Xiaoshuo de Fazhan Yanjiu” (The Study of Internet Fantasy Fiction Development from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics); Wang Li (王黎), “Nuxing Wangluo Wenxue de Zuoza Qingxiang” (The Creation Tendency of Network Literature of Female Writers).

41 *See* for instance: Cao Zhenzhong (曹振中), “Chuanxue Xiaoshuo Chuban Rechao Fenxi” (The Analysis of Cross-history Novel’s Publishing Hot); Gao Bingfeng (高冰峰), “Wangluo Xuanhuan Xiaoshuo Chutan” (The Studying of Network Fantasy Fiction); Liu Pan (劉攀), “Wangluo Wenxue Chanyehua Fazhang Moshi Yanjiu” (Research on the Industrial Pattern of Internet Literature); Sun Xiaoqi (孫小淇), “Lun Wangluo Xuanhuan Xiaoshuo” (The Principle of Net Abstruse and Illusory Novel); Wang Xiangying (王祥穎), “Wangluo Meiti de Quanbanquan Yingyun Yanjiu” (A Study of Copyright and Business over the Internet); Wei Ningyu (韋寧鈺), “Wangluo Xiaoshuo” (Cyber-fiction); Wei Ting (魏婷), “Wangluo Chuangmeizhong de Zhongguo Xuanhuan Wuxia Wenhua” (Chinese Fancy Kungfu Literature in Internet Media).
fiction genre on Qidian, to arrive at an overarching picture of internet fiction in Chinese cyberspace.

As for the theses which address internet literature in-depth, they put internet fiction under the umbrella term of internet literature. Tse Kaho 謝家浩, in “Wangluo Wenxue Yanjiu” 網絡文學研究 (A Study on Cyber-literature, [2002]), divided internet literature into poetry and fiction, exploring how the two genres incorporate seamlessly into the new media to interact effectively with readers, even involving readers in the process of creation. His work emphasised the readers’ responses to and interactivity with the texts, whereas my thesis not only examines this section, but goes beyond the patterns of production and consumption to engage in analysis of the literary products. Jiang Ying 姜英 defended the value of internet literature from the three standpoints of “innovation on literature”, “freedom of spirit” and “the depravity of discursive hegemony from elites” when the public voice is returned to the mass in “Wangluo Wenxue de Jiazhi” 網絡文學的價值 (A Study of Web Literature Value, [2003]). Tan Huafu 譚華孚 argued that popular culture resonates with the evolution of media, substantiating his argument by tracing back the history of Chinese literature and its change of characteristics evoked by the advent of new media. In his dissertation, Tang laid out the characteristics of internet literature to present internet literature’s predominant feature of “rebellious writing”, challenging the established authority of traditional Chinese literature in every respect, and the use of language and the writing style in “Meijie Shanbianzhong de Wenxue Xinshengtai” 媒介嬗變中的文學新生態 (The Nascent State of Literature in Media Evolution, [2007]). Both of these works argued for the dissolution of the distinction between elites and commoners to show the transformation of the power of discourse resulting from the internet. But they did not conduct any textual analysis of the literary products in a systematic and comprehensive fashion, which is presented in my thesis to attempt to engage the message reflected collectively in the texts to the transformation of power. Meng Xingyu 蒙星宇 laid his research groundwork on building insights to internet literature produced

Judging from the academic works which I have evaluated so far, my work sheds new light on understanding internet fiction, the literary genre which is mostly prosumed but least comprehensively explored, in order to detect the common underlying message of the major fiction genres. The underlying message would help to illuminate what it is that Chinese netizens are eager to receive from the prosumption, ultimately revealing the socio-political significance of internet fiction in China.

1.4: Theoretical Frameworks

This thesis applies three theoretical frameworks to different sections of the writing. The framework of fan culture, participatory culture and media convergence studies is applied in Chapter 2 to assist with the positioning of internet fiction in China. Prosumption – production and consumption in one – is greatly promoted by fan-oriented behaviour, participatory cultures and media convergences over various media platforms, which are accelerated into one due to the evolution of the internet. Both Michel de Certeau’s argument of tactics of dominated consumers as a source of individual production against strategies of dominant institutional power as a source of mass production from his The Practice of Everyday Life, and Henry Jenkins’s argument of fan cultures (which largely draws on de Certeau’s notion of tactics versus strategies) lay the groundwork for the positioning of internet fiction.

In Chapter 3, where the new model of commercial publishing is analysed, Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the literary field plays a significant role. Bourdieu’s academic observation of the dynamic relationship and relative positions of agents
and institutions in a literary field helps to establish the framework in which Chapter 3 sets out to examine the repositioning of agents and institutions after the advent of the internet, the impact of which has reconfigured the model of the commercial publishing business in the transnational on-line Chinese literary sphere. The waning power of mediatory agents who conventionally have come between authors and readers, such as publishers, editors, printers and booksellers, forms a stark contrast against the increasing autonomy of prosumers, as the role of authors and readers are easily exchanged in virtual space. The reconfiguration towards a digital literary field points to Certeau’s notion of the resistance of ‘individualised tactics’ against ‘dominant strategies’, which has been implemented on the internet to evolve into prosumerism. The literary commodities prosumed by authors/readers are the outcome of the prosumers’ autonomy, which is translated into collective desire(s) through the popular literary texts in which Chinese netizens engage.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I shall shift my focus to the literary commodities themselves to examine what desire(s) generated from the commodities appeal to Chinese netizens. Examples elicited from popular works of internet fiction will be used to substantiate my argument that desire(s) are collectively reflected through literary products produce/consumed on the internet to be a way to demonstrate the individualised notion of pursuing a golden triangle (wealth, high socio-political status and sex) for oneself in China. Analysis of the produced/consumed collective desire(s) in the fiction will shed light on the shared desire(s) of Chinese netizens, many of whom are prosumers.

To further dissect desire(s), in chapter 6 I adopt the psychoanalytical approach borrowed from Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek to interpret the popular fiction texts for a deeper discernment of internet fiction used as a way to fantasise the general netizens’ desire(s) in contemporary Chinese society. Having extracted various examples from the close analysis of the popular fiction texts on both Qidian Chinese Net and Qidian Female Net, the element of desire(s), which takes the form of letting producers/consumers ‘feel good’ about themselves, I apply the Lacanian notion of desire and Žižek’s notion of fantasy to
substantiate my argument that the fantaisisation of the ‘Golden Triangle’ is exercised as a mechanism for Chinese netizens to ‘feel good’.

1.5: Data and Methodology

1.5.1: The Primary Sources of Literary Commodities – Four Nets and One Channel on Qidian

The methodology of this thesis comprised observation (for prosumption behaviour in a new digital literary field), analysis of data collected from Qidian, and empirical studies (for the textual analysis) of examples from Qidian. It would be impossible to include all the popular literary portal websites in Chinese cyberspace, given their vast number. Consequently, I focus on Qidian, which best illustrates the current development of literary portal websites in China as my case study since Qidian is now arguably the most popular and the largest internet literary portal website in the transnational Chinese on-line literary sphere.42

There are four main Wang 網 (Nets) and one Pindao 頻道 (Channel) on the Qidian homepage (see Figure 1): (1) Qidian Zhongwen Wang 起點中文網 (hereafter Qidian Chinese Net), (2) Qidian Nüsheng Wang 起點女生網 (hereafter Qidian Female Net), (3) Qidian Wenxue Wang 起點文學網 (hereafter Qidian Literary Net), (4) Qidian Shouji Wang 起點手機網 (hereafter Qidian Mobile Net) and (5) Qidian Tushu Pindao 起點圖書頻道 (hereafter Qidian Book Channel). In this thesis, the Qidian Mobile Net and the Qidian Book Channel will be excluded given the fact that both are only concerned with consumption, not production. The Qidian Mobile Net provides its users with a mobile way to consume original linear literary works, and the Qidian book channel offers its users a service to download books which have been available in printed book format.43 Both nets would be suitable for future research to examine a new mode of consuming literary products and its potential impact on the publishing industry.

42 See footnote 23 for its current market penetration rate.
43 For more information, see <http://tushu.qidian.com/publish/index.aspx>.
Both Qidian Chinese Net and Qidian Female Net are comprised of four literary genres, namely fiction, Manga, prose and drama scripts. Among them, fiction occupies at least ninety percent of the literary products output. The distinctive difference between these two nets is their targeted-group orientation: whereas the Qidian Chinese Net aims at general netizens (arguably at male readers), the Qidian Female Net obviously targets female netizens with the accentuated theme of romance.

Qidian Literary Net is a brand new addition to Qidian introduced in November 2010. So far, it does not yet have a clear orientation. The name suggests that the net is oriented towards ‘highbrow’ literary products. Notwithstanding the name, the works on Qidian Literary Net do not necessarily demonstrate a higher level of literary aesthetic/value. In fact, this net is still dominated by popular literature, with works overlapping with those on the Qidian Chinese Net and the Qidian Female Net.

In terms of the empirical data collection, therefore, it was decided to select examples from Qidian Chinese Net and Qidian Female Net while excluding Qidian Literary Net.

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44 The genres of prose and scripts are not demonstrated on the Qidian Chinese Net homepage (see Figure 2), but they are included in the guidelines of literary genres. 23 July 2009, 7 December 2011 <http://www.qidian.com/News/ShowNews.aspx?newsid=1007009>.

45 Qidian has been endeavouring to link the image of high literature to itself by hosting writing competitions, such as searching for the modern-day Lu Xun; or by inviting established authors such as Mo Yan to give lectures on literature.

46 It is worth noting that Qidian Literary Net has been developing rapidly. In December 2010, only one month after the net was launched, 40,000 works had been published. In January 2011, the number had risen to 85,000.
Figure 1: The Basic Structure of Qidian

Qidian Chinese Net <www.qidian.com>
(Literary Products for General Readers, Arguably for Males)

Qidian Female Net <www.qdmm.com>
(Romance for Female Readers)

Qidian Literary Net <www.qdwenxue.com>
(Works supposedly with a Heavier Stress on Literary Aesthetic/Value)

Qidian Mobile Net <www.qidian.cn>
(Literary [Pro]consumption on Mobile Phones)

Qidian Book Net
(Literary Products NOT Initially Published on Qidian)
Figure 2: Qidian Chinese Net Homepage

- Qidian Chinese Net at [www.qidian.com]
- Qidian Female Net at [www.qdmm.com]
- Qidian Literary Net at [www.qdwenxue.com]
- Qidian Mobile Phone Net

The 13 Fiction Genres on Qidian:

- Romance
- Fantasy
- Science Fiction
- Historical
- Military
- Mystery
- Thriller
- Drama
- Comedy
- Sports
- Horror
- Supernatural
- Other

Perform Book Search

Rankings

Qidian Mobile Phone Net

Qidian Book Channel

A Click on Romance will redirect readers to the homepage of Qidian Female Net.

Database, all literary works initially produced and submitted on Qidian can be searched from here.

More Professional Book Reviews (mostly by editors)

General Book Reviews (mostly by readers)

Perform Book Search

Rankings
1.5.2: Empirical Data for the Production Rate

The empirical data from Qidian Chinese Net is divided into two major sections: production rate and popularity ranking (which I call consumption rate). In terms of production rate, Qidian Chinese Net updates four general sets of numbers of literary works uploaded daily. They are (1) the total number of works of all literary genres together; (2) the number of works in accordance to various literary genres such as Manga or drama; (3) the number of works of each fiction genre; and (4) the number of each fiction subgenre. Fiction is divided into thirteen fiction genres (see Figure 2), and sixty-seven subgenres (see Appendix 1 for a thorough depiction of the fiction genres and their subgenres). In this thesis, number sets 1 and 3 will be primarily used on the grounds that the total number of works created and the cumulative number of fiction genres respectively can show a long-term production preference of producers and consumers. By converting two sets of numbers into a ratio between total production rate and fiction genre production rate, the ratio will manifest which fiction genre(s) are highly preferred from the perspective of literary production.

1.5.3: Empirical Data for the Consumption Rate

Qidian Chinese Net provides a number of complicated variables for popularity indexes to each work of fiction published on its homepage (which will be elucidated later). For this research, I concentrated on the top 1000 most

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47 The notion of genre and subgenre is also applied to other less popular literary genres, although fiction has the largest spectrum of its genres and subgenres because of its dominant status.
48 Yanqing 言情 (Romance) keeps a semi-detached relationship with Qidian Chinese Net. Readers who visit Qidian Chinese Net <http://www.qidian.com> will see all the fiction genres, including Romance, at the top menu for them to select from. However, a click on Romance will redirect readers to a different webpage at <http://www.qdmm.com>, the homepage of Qidian Female Net.

The popularity rankings on Qidian Chinese Net do not include works of Romance. Romance has its own popularity rankings published on Qidian female net. In this thesis, my attitude is to regard Romance as one fiction genre under Qidian Chinese Net but deal with Romance in a separate chapter from the other popular fiction genres due to different reader-orientation.
49 It is worth noticing that, although the genres and subgenres are fixed by Qidian, Qidian allows authors to choose under which one their works are categorised (and thus accessed). Once the categorisation has been determined, authors are not allowed to change the categorisation. The self-categorisation not only saves Qidian editorship manpower, but also offers more autonomy to authors. For more information, please consult <http://www.qidian.com/Help/zuoping.aspx#管理>.
popular works for two purposes. One was to detect which fiction genre(s) are more popular. The other was to provide a standard by which I might select the works. The various examples which I use to illustrate my argument in Chapters 4 and 5 were selected by this standard. All of them were from the top of the rankings. The term ‘consumption rate’ is used synonymously with the top 1000 popular works of fiction in the thesis.

There are five main categories under the popularity rankings: (1) Xiaoshuo Paihangbang 小說排行榜 (Works of Fiction Ranking); (2) Zuozhe Paihangbang 作者排行榜 (Author Ranking); (3) Shequ Bangdan 社區榜單 (Community Rankings; from various Qidian relevant activities, such as feedback ranking and tipping ranking); (4) Nüshengwang Xiaoshuo Paihangbang 女生網小說排行榜 (Qidian Female Net Ranking); and (5) Qita Xiaoshuo Paihangbang 其它小說排行榜 (Other Literary Genre Ranking). Under each category, more sub-categories are given. The ranking accounting for the popularity of literary works is divided into several segments based on three sets of variables: (1) voting

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50 I initially focused on the top 500 on 3 June 2010. However, due to the fast-growth of the total number of literary works, I extended the top 500 to the top 1000. The fiction genre ratio of the top 500 popularity ranking is very similar to that of the top 1000, which explains that the long-term reading preference stays relatively stable.

51 Popularity is not the usual criteria for selecting works for literary analysis in academia. However, I have decided to use popularity ranking as the criteria for this research project based on three reasons. First, internet literature is part of popular culture, which is “the culture of our everyday life” and as “[…] a mirror of societal dynamics […] has the power to shape and reflect cultural ideas, generate resistance and activism, and represent changing social realities.” Fedorak, *Pop Culture: the Culture of Everyday Life*, 1. Second, by focusing on what is most popular in a longer time frame (the factor of time will be discussed in the next section) in a popular cultural activity, we can understand more about how the general public is engaged in shaping that particular popular culture. Internet literature is different from printed literature given the fact that the general public who have access to the internet, theoretically speaking, can produce internet literature to break down the traditional power hierarchy practised in commercial printing today. To vie for the attention from the general netizens (the factor of attention will be examined in Chapter 3) to make their literary works popular, authors either imitate the ‘popularity formula’ of other popular works to be part of the popularity group, or resist/subvert the formula to differentiate their works from the works following ‘popularity formula’. In this regard, detecting the ‘popularity formula’ is essential. The ‘popularity formula’, I believe, can be better understood by analysing popular works from popularity rankings directly determined by the general netizens visiting Qidian Literary Net and Qidian Female Net. Third, internet literature is about massive production and consumption. Facing a new literary phenomenon, I believe that a new research methodology is needed.

52 Under this category are daily, weekly, and total rankings of two sets of works. One set is Manga, the other set is works of fiction only from Qidian Literary Net. Therefore, ranking 5 will not be used in this research.
methods – (Dianji 点击 [Hits], Tuijian 推荐 [Recommendation], and Shoucang 收藏 [Collection]); (2) targeted groups among users (Book Friends, Members and VIPs), and (3) time interval (Cumulatively, Monthly and Weekly). All the variables were combined and mixed with one another to generate more charts (for instance, monthly VIP ranking based on collection or cumulative member ranking based on recommendation).

Since this research concentrates only on fiction, ranking set 3 and set 5 will be ignored. Ranking set 2 will also be set aside because this ranking is only concerned with the popularity of authors. Ranking set 4 concentrates only on Romance, which will be discussed exclusively in one chapter in the thesis. There is therefore no need to include the Romance ranking at this point. Therefore, I set up my selection criteria by examining ranking set 1.

Regardless of how a piece of work is located by users (search engine, database search or ranking systems), they will be redirected to a ‘cover’ webpage once they click on a title of one specific work (see Figure 3). This is the starting point of different vote-calculating methods. This cover section works in a similar way to the notion of a dust-cover of a literary work, serving to inform readers more about the work. In the cover section, an illustration is placed at the top left corner. To the right side of the illustration appears the abstract. Immediately beneath the illustration is a set of voting options. From top to bottom, the menu is arranged as follows: Dianji Yuedu 点击阅读 (Click Here to Begin Reading; how many hits a piece of work receives is recorded), Jiaru Shujia 加入书架 (Add to My Bookshelf; how often a piece of work is collected or documented), Tou Tuijianpiao 投推荐票 (Vote to Recommend; how frequently a piece of work is recommended is calculated), Qu Shupingqu 去书评区 (Proceed to Book Review Section; readers are encouraged to publicise their book critique and review, which will be discussed in Chapter 2), Chuban Banshu 出版本書 (Learn the Franchisability of This Work; cultural industry readers such as a movie production studio, publisher or on-line game developer can express their interest.

53 The difference between the three groups of users will be elucidated on page 37.
The first three options are clearly designed to trace the reading activities in order to numerically determine the popularity of any work. Therefore, the three voting methods of variable set 1 – hits, recommendation, and collection – will be adopted in examining the popularity rate. The cross-examination between the three sets of voting outcome will illuminate which fiction genres are more popular than others.

The second variable set taken into consideration is the reader group. The first group is Shuyou 書友 (Book Friend). This includes common readers (who do not necessarily have an account with Qidian), preliminary membership holders (who already own a Qidian account but have either few or no credits in the account), or VIP members. The second group is Huiyuan 會員 (Members), who are Qidian consumers who hold an account. The third group is VIPs (see Figure 4).

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54 There are still two more options in the cover section in accordance to the popularity of the work. One option, right beneath the book critique/review section, is Dashang Zuopin 打賞作品 (Tip the Author; readers are encouraged to tip authors through a tipping system for a good job done). Only after one literary work has reached over 100,000 characters will the tipping option be provided in the cover section. The other one beneath the tipping option is Maimai Tishu 買賣體書 (Purchase the Book; readers can purchase the work published in book format if it is available). However, these two options will not be part of the thesis because not every single work of fiction is equipped with them.

55 Qidian has never specified who is included in the category ‘book friend.’ Based on my own experience with Qidian, I am allowed to read a portion of chapters without logging into my Qidian account, but I will be asked to login to my Qidian account when I intend to recommend or collect works. Consequently, I assume that Qidian, for the purpose of marketing, permits certain portions of one work to be consumed as a free sample. The hits generated both by Qidian account holders and those who without a Qidian account are counted towards the numerical outcome of one specific work. In this regard, ‘book friend’ simply refers to anyone who visits Qidian.

56 The notion of membership is also rather blurred. As a Qidian account holder (without any credits in the account), I could collect works into my virtual library, but could not recommend any works because recommendation requires credits. Theoretically, a member can be rewarded with credits by writing book reviews, offering feedback, and logging into his/her account on a regular basis without top-up. More detail concerning the credit system will be elucidated in Chapter 3.

57 To be upgraded from member to VIP, a minimal top-up amount of 50 RMB grants the account holder preliminary VIP membership. When the account holder spends cumulatively more than 3,650 RMB through various activities on Qidian during the following twelve months, advanced VIP status will be granted. The ratio between Qidian account holders and VIPs is 12 to 1, which is calculated based on the statistics published on Qidian. Qidian claims to have 30.58 million account holders, with 2.5 million of them having been upgraded to VIP status. 5 December 2010 <http://www.qidian.com/aboutus/ads/default.html>. Nevertheless, these statistics never designate whether the term ‘VIP’ only refers to advanced VIP, preliminary VIP, or both.
Figure 3: ‘Cover’ of a Work of Internet Fiction on Qidian Chinese Net
Qidian generates rankings aimed at the three different groups of readers. The three groups overlap with one another, with ‘book friend’ serving as the basis of the reader pyramid. Consequently, ‘book friend’ is selected in this research for a more complete picture concerning which fiction genres general readers enjoy.

The third variable to be taken into account is the time interval. The rankings are categorised as cumulative, monthly and weekly. Both monthly and weekly rankings would illuminate more short-term changes for researchers to detect which fiction genres have (or have not) become more popular as a way to interpret the reading habit of Chinese netizens, since a monthly popularity chart, or a weekly chart, is likely to show more fluctuation of the popularity rate of various fiction genres. The analysis of the fluctuation would indicate at which point the reading preference changes, and certainly a possible research topic would be why such a change occurs and what social significance it might represent. However, long-term production/consumption tendencies, not short-term change, are what this research is more concerned with. Therefore, the cumulative rankings will be used, instead of monthly and weekly rankings, as the popularity index to the interpretation of consumption rate.

The three sets of popular rankings which this thesis examines appear to be quite different due to their respective numerical outcomes, yet they can be interpreted as a sequence of readers’ responses. As any book friend clicks on one chapter of a work randomly for sample reading, the hit will be recorded on the Qidian server and be counted towards the cumulative numerical outcome. Once their interest has been aroused, the book friends who are attracted to the work would be likely to collect the work. Eventually, enthusiastic book friends would recommend it to others. Consequently, the sequential readers’ responses, arguably, help to explicate why the numerical outcomes of the three rankings are so different. Despite the wide difference, the ranking outcomes remain similar across the three rankings, judging from the top ten lists of popular works based on hits, on recommendation and on collection (see Figure 5).

On Qidian Chinese Net, one major category of ranking is Qidian Female rankings. Anyone who clicks on this category will be redirected to the ranking
section of Qidian Female Net, which has fewer ranking variables. On Qidian Female Net, only ‘Book Friend’ and ‘VIP’ are singled out as the targeted reader groups, without the group of ‘Member’. The variables of time interval (cumulative, monthly and weekly) and vote-calculating methods (hits, collection and recommendation) are identical to those of Qidian Chinese Net.

For the sake of this research, I have adopted the same standard applied to Qidian Chinese Net by which the consumption rate of romance narratives is elicited from Qidian Female Net. Only the three sets of cumulative rankings generated by the vote of ‘Book Friend’ will be counted in the research. However, since romance is the only fiction genre available on Qidian Female Net, the purpose of examining ranking outcome from Qidian Female Net is confined to understanding which specific works of romance are popular, rather than discerning which fiction genre is more popular than others.

One crucial point to make here is that even though romance is regarded as one fiction genre classified under Qidian Chinese Net, with the cumulative number of romance narratives produced being part of the cumulative number of works produced on Qidian Chinese Net, the rankings of Qidian Chinese Net and those of Qidian Female Net are independent from each other. For this reason, Chapter 5 of this thesis is devoted to a discussion of Romance only, whereas other fiction genres allocated on Qidian Chinese Net are analysed in Chapter 4. This arrangement proffers a general picture of each single fiction genre on Qidian, whilst recognising the differentiation of gender marketing respectively towards the two nets.
Figure 4: List of Rankings with Different Reader Groups

Monthly PK ranking (PK = Player Kill. It is a term from MMORPG [Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game] field. In this context, PK means to decide which Romance work is the most popular by fierce competition of monthly voting).
Figure 5: Top Ten Works of Cumulative Hits, Cumulative Recommendation, and Cumulative Collection (up to 31 March 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hits</th>
<th>Doupo Qiongcang 斗破穹苍 (Break through Sky)</th>
<th>106,373,624</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panlong 盤龍 (Coiled Dragon)</td>
<td></td>
<td>88,040,749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanren Xianxiu Zhuang 凡人仙修傳 (From Everyman to Demigods)</td>
<td></td>
<td>63,462,169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congling Kaishi 從零開始 (Scratch from Zero)</td>
<td></td>
<td>55,051,747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiu Ding Ji 九鼎記 (The Legend of Nine Tripods)</td>
<td></td>
<td>54,059,067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douluo Dalu 斗羅大陸 (The Douluo Continent)</td>
<td></td>
<td>52,916,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shenmu 神墓 (God Graves)</td>
<td></td>
<td>46,748,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xingchen Bian 星辰變 (Reversal of Stars)</td>
<td></td>
<td>44,843,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emo Faze 惡魔法則 (Principles of Demon)</td>
<td></td>
<td>35,253,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiushen 酒神 (God of Wine)</td>
<td></td>
<td>32,530,739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection</td>
<td>Doupo Qiongcang 斗破穹苍 (Break through Sky)</td>
<td>534,361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panlong 盤龍 (Coiled Dragon)</td>
<td></td>
<td>519,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xingchen Bian 星辰變 (Reversal of Stars)</td>
<td></td>
<td>438,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douluo Dalu 斗羅大陸 (The Douluo Continent)</td>
<td></td>
<td>365,691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shenmu 神墓 (God Graves)</td>
<td></td>
<td>320,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congling Kaishi 從零開始 (Scratch from Zero)</td>
<td></td>
<td>314,109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanren Xianxiu Zhuang 凡人仙修傳 (From Everyman to Demigod)</td>
<td></td>
<td>313,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wushen 武神 (Mars)</td>
<td></td>
<td>313,357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiu Ding Ji 九鼎記 (Legend of Nine Tripods)</td>
<td></td>
<td>301,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiushen 酒神 (God of Wine)</td>
<td></td>
<td>279,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>Congling Kaishi 從零開始 (Scratch from Zero)</td>
<td>12,497,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panlong 盤龍 (Coiled Dragon)</td>
<td></td>
<td>7,658,739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanren Xianxiu Zhuang 凡人仙修傳 (From Everyman to Demigod)</td>
<td></td>
<td>7,505,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jianshan Meiren Zhi 江山美人志 (The Records of Kingdom and Beauty)</td>
<td></td>
<td>7,283,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xingchen Bian 星辰變 (Reversal of Stars)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,670,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yongbing Tianxia 傭兵天下 (The Legend of Mercenaries)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,616,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.5.4: The Interval of Empirical Data Collection

The collection of empirical data began on 3 March 2010, with 3 June 2010 as the date when the data was initially collected. The interval of collection was every three months, with the subsequent collection points falling on 3 September 2010, 9 December 2010, and 3 March 2011. The total period of time over which data was collected was therefore twelve months. The production rate was calculated by the cumulative number of works submitted respectively under thirteen fiction genres against the total number of works of fictions on both Qidian Chinese Net and Qidian Female Net (see Figure 6). The reason why the thirteen fiction genres do not add up to one hundred percent is because roughly ten percent of the literary output on Qidian are from non-fiction genres such as Manga and prose, which are not part of the research (for other non-fiction genres and the percentage they take in production output, see Appendix 3). The consumption rate was initially calculated by examining the percentage of fiction genre against the top 500 popularity ranking of hits, collection and recommendation in June 2010. Starting from September 2010, the scope to generate the consumption rate expanded from the top 500 works of fiction to the top 1000 works for a more comprehensive outlook of the consumption rate in order to realise which fiction genres are more popular (the research outcome shows that the top 500 result is not much different from the top 1000 result; see Figure 7). In terms of the popularity of specific works of fiction, their rankings remained similar over the period of twelve months. This tendency indicates a long-term and steady production/consumption preference on Qidian. This steady

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58 Some personal issues prevented me from having access to the internet for several days beginning from 2 December 2010.
tendency helps to shed more light on which major fiction genres, and what specific works of fiction, authors and readers have gravitated towards.

**Figure 6: Production Rate from 3 March 2010 to 3 March 2011 (Based on Statistics from Appendix 3)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>03/06/2010</th>
<th>03/09/2010</th>
<th>09/12/2010</th>
<th>03/03/2011</th>
<th>Average Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Fantasy</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Fantasy</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Martial Arts</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Immortal Swordsman</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romance (absent from consumption rate)</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-line Games</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>&gt; 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Fiction</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan Fiction</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 7: Consumption Rate from 3 March 2010 to 3 March 2011 (Based on Statistics from Appendix 4) H: Hits, C: Collected, R: Recommended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>03/06/2010</th>
<th>03/09/2010</th>
<th>09/12/2010</th>
<th>03/03/2011</th>
<th>Average Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Fantasy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H: 20%</td>
<td>H: 18%</td>
<td>H: 19%</td>
<td>H: 19%</td>
<td>H: 19%</td>
<td>H: 19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: 19%</td>
<td>C: 19%</td>
<td>C: 18%</td>
<td>C: 19%</td>
<td>C: 18.75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: 18%</td>
<td>R: 17%</td>
<td>R: 17%</td>
<td>R: 17%</td>
<td>R: 17.25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Fantasy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H: 5%</td>
<td>H: 5%</td>
<td>H: 5%</td>
<td>H: 4%</td>
<td>H: 4.75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: 5%</td>
<td>C: 5%</td>
<td>C: 5%</td>
<td>C: 4%</td>
<td>C: 4.75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: 6%</td>
<td>R: 5%</td>
<td>R: 5%</td>
<td>R: 5%</td>
<td>R: 5.25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Martial Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H: 2%</td>
<td>H: 2%</td>
<td>H: 2%</td>
<td>H: 2%</td>
<td>H: 2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: 2%</td>
<td>C: 2%</td>
<td>C: 2%</td>
<td>C: 2%</td>
<td>C: 2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: 3%</td>
<td>R: 2%</td>
<td>R: 2%</td>
<td>R: 3%</td>
<td>R: 2.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Immortal Swordsman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H: 15%</td>
<td>H: 16%</td>
<td>H: 16%</td>
<td>H: 16%</td>
<td>H: 15.75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: 17%</td>
<td>C: 15%</td>
<td>C: 16%</td>
<td>C: 16%</td>
<td>C: 16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: 13%</td>
<td>R: 13%</td>
<td>R: 13%</td>
<td>R: 13%</td>
<td>R: 13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H: 25%</td>
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1.5.5: The Comparison between Production Rate and Consumption Rate

In this research, I set a threshold to the segmentation of tiers in view of the significance of the fiction genres by examining their prosumption rate (production rate first, consumption rate second). Fiction genres whose production rate remained at five percent or above and whose consumption rate was ten percent or above were put in tier one. Allocation of fiction genres to tier one suggests that both authors and readers prefer these genres. Fiction genres with lower than five percent production rate but higher than ten percent consumption rate (or the other way around) were put in tier two. Allocation to tier two implies that they were highly preferred by either authors or readers, but not necessarily equally popular among the other group (the aberrance deserves special analysis in the thesis). Fiction genres earning a relatively low rate which remained lower but closer to five percent were put in tier three, whereas fiction genres gaining an extremely low production/consumption rate were in tier four. All fiction genres will be analysed in accordance with their tier, but works in tier four will only be briefly discussed because they are under-representative compared with other more popular fiction genres.

The contrast between production and consumption rate indicates a proximity of taste and preference between producers and consumers, but at a specific point the proximity is diverted into separate paths.

On the production side, the production rate of each fiction, over the period of one year, remained steady (see Figure 6). On the consumption side, both the top 500 and the top 1000 popularity rankings indicated a similar outcome. The three sets of rankings, when converted into percentages, indicate the popularity of the fiction genres on Qidian Chinese Net (see Figure 7).

Comparison between production and consumption rate made it obvious that the fiction genres of Urban, Eastern Fantasy, Chinese Immortal Swordsman and On-line Games enjoyed a relatively higher production/consumption rate. Urban and Eastern Fantasy, regardless of which ranking orientation was used, consistently occupied the top two spots for their popularity rate. The next two genres – Chinese Immortal Swordsman and On-line Games – were in a slightly
different order; in some rankings the former took a higher popularity percentage than the latter, while at other times it was the other way around.

The History genre is fairly noteworthy given the fact that it had a relatively lower production rate but a higher consumption rate. This was the only fiction genre whose production and consumption rates were not in proportion. Consequently, this genre deserves special attention.\(^{59}\)

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\(^{59}\) The factor of time is essential in this research to detect which works are more popular than other works because the cumulative rankings indicate the extent of popularity since the first day when one specific work is released on Qidian Literary Net and Qidian Female Net. However on the other hand, the cumulative number shows that the length of time during which a piece of work stays on the rankings is not necessarily in proportion to its popularity. In other words, by using time, we can see that works which stay on Qidian longer are not necessarily more popular. By referring back to the top ten works of cumulative rankings I can make this point clear. For instance, *Doupo Qiongcang* 斗破穹蒼 (Break through Sky) is the top one both on cumulative hits ranking and cumulative collection ranking. It was initially released on Qidian Literary Net in on 14\(^{th}\) April 2009. 23 Sept. 2012 <http://www.qidian.com/BookReader/1209977,23183869.aspx>. The second popular work on both rankings, *Pang Long* 盤龍 (Coiled Dragon), was initially published on 21\(^{st}\) May 2008. 23 Sept. 2012 <http://www.qidian.com/BookReader/1017141,20361055.aspx>. Another example is the current 11\(^{th}\) most popular work in terms of the latest cumulative hits ranking, *Wudong Qiankun* 武動乾坤 (Martial Arts Practitioner of Heaven and Earth). It surpasses the popularity of *Emo Faz* 恶魔法則 (Principle sod Demon) and *Jiushen* 酒神 (God of Wine). However, this work was initially released on 20\(^{th}\) July 2011. The work of fiction is not discussed anywhere in this thesis because it was published after the designated research time frame of this thesis. The previous examples show that the factor of time is meaningful because it provides us a standard by which we can examine the rankings of various cumulative factors. However, the length of time during which a piece of work stays on Qidian does not have absolute connection with the popularity of works of fiction as such.

While examining the anomaly of the fiction genre of History, the length of time also does not have a direct impact on the popularity of the fiction genre. The current cumulative hits ranks *Jipin Jiading* 極品家丁 (The Unusual Story of a Chinese Housekeeper) 18, which is the highest ranking position for History on the cumulative ranking; *Suibo Zhuliu zhi Yidai Junshi* 隨波逐流之一代軍師 (Story of a Military Counsellor) is ranked 21, *Huidaobu Mingchao Dang Wangye* 回到明朝當王爺 (Reborn back to the Ming Dynasty to be a Prince) is ranked 26. 23 Sept. 2012 <http://top.qidian.com/Book/TopDetail.aspx?TopType=29&Time=3>. Their respective release dates are 18\(^{th}\) March 2007, 8\(^{th}\) May 2005, and 8\(^{th}\) November 2006. These three works of fiction were released earlier than extremely popular works such as *Break through Sky* (released on 14\(^{th}\) April 2009) and *Douluo Dalu* 斗羅大陸 (The Douluo Continent, released on 14\(^{th}\) December 2008) from the genre of Eastern Fantasy, or such as *Fanren Xianxiu Zuan* 凡人修真傳 (From Everyman to Demigod, released on 20\(^{th}\) February 2008) and *Xingchen Bian* 星辰變 (Reversal of Stars, released on 19\(^{th}\) May 2007) from the genre of Chinese Immortal Swordsman. Therefore, in this regard, the length of time does not seem to have a strong impact on the popularity of the works of fiction. I believe it really comes down to how attractive a piece of work is to the Chinese netizens, rather than how long a piece of work stays on Qidian. Consequently in my second part of the thesis, the analysis of the literary works in order to detect what message it carries to the Chinese netizens is essential to the research.
Generally speaking, it can be argued that, on the one hand, readers seem to be satisfied with what they have chosen to consume; the statistics in Figure 7 suggest that many readers choose to recommend the fiction genre they prefer to other readers since the penetration of the popularity rate across the three rankings does not reflect dramatic difference. On the other hand, when the production rate is put on a par with the consumption rate, we can see that the most produced genre is not always the most consumed one, and vice versa. For instance, Eastern Fantasy outnumbered Urban in the production but not in the consumption rate; History was relatively low in terms of its production rate but stayed popular among consumers in the top 1000 popularity chart. This difference can be debated in the light of the level of creative easiness: whereas Eastern Fantasy is purely based on imagination and fabrication, the autonomy bestowed on producers of this genre is arguably higher. Contrarily, Urban and History are likely to be anticipated to operate on the notion of ‘facts’, even if the facts turn out to still be part of the creative fabrication. Creating a long narrative on the basis of facts, especially historical facts, would be more challenging to producers.

In sum, Urban, Eastern Fantasy, Chinese Immortal Swordsman and Online Games were popularly prosumed, fitting into the scheme of more than five percent production rate and ten percent consumption rate. They belong firmly in tier one. The anomalous History, less produced but more consumed, is categorised as tier two. Western Fantasy and Science Fiction had their prosumption rate around five percent. They are in tier three. The least prosumed Chinese Martial Arts, Military, Sport, Horror and Fan Fiction belong to tier four with prosumption rates around two percent or below. Therefore, in the textual analysis, I shall discuss the four tiers in sequence. Since the four tiers will be examined in Chapter 4, that chapter will be relatively longer than others. As for Romance, as has already been stated, it will be independently discussed in Chapter 5.

Due to the limited length of this thesis, I can only bring in 33 examples from Qidian Chinese Net in Chapter 4, and twelve examples from Qidian Female Net in Chapter 5, to substantiate my statement in Chapter 6 about the Chinese
literary fantasy mode being translated into a golden triangle for prosumers to fantasise. Compared with the voluminous number of works of fiction publicised on Qidian Shanda, the examples used in this thesis are rather few. Nevertheless, I believe that the examples are sufficiently representative to serve as an index to the prosumption preferences, on the basis of the extreme popularity of the selected works.

1.6: Structure

This thesis deals with two topics: macro-structurally speaking, the evolving and dynamic new pattern of commercial publishing over the internet where the agents and institutions of commercial publishing have been repositioned in the digital Chinese literary field; and micro-structurally speaking, the textual analysis of internet fiction prosumed by authors and readers to realise the collective desire of Chinese netizens who are enthusiastic about internet fiction. Together the two topics contribute to the socio-cultural phenomenon of internet fiction in the transnational Chinese on-line literary sphere, especially in China. The internet promotes prosumption behaviour because Chinese netizens are offered more autonomy. This autonomy helps to generate the desire(s) of prosumers by incessantly prosuming highly similar texts to reflect a growing tendency of Chinese individualisation. Texts, the literary products, help us to understand the way in which the prosumers manoeuvre and express desire.

The discussion of the new business model of prosumption and the textual analysis of the works of fiction are like two sides of the same coin, in that the new pattern of commercial publishing provides a mode in which Chinese netizens are offered autonomy of production and consumption of literary commodities, whilst the massively prosumed literary commodities sustain the new pattern. Due to their reciprocal relationship, to research one without the other is likely to miss the whole picture of the socio-cultural phenomenon.

Thus, the thesis is comprised of seven chapters in two parts. Chapter 2 provides a mapping of internet fiction to determine its cultural position from both a vertical and a horizontal perspective. The vertical perspective examines the
historical linkage of internet fiction with the Tongsu Xiaoshuo, as the former is arguably the heir of earlier popular fiction in China. From a horizontal perspective, the evolution of media makes it possible for more producers and consumers to engage with popular fiction over the internet, during which process they gradually become what I have labelled as prosumers, to promote internet fiction extensively and rapidly. In Chapter 3, following the notion of prosumers, I closely analyse the new structure and features of commercial publishing on Qidian, revealing the transformed structure of a digital literary field constituted more by prosumers than by editors and publishers.

The second part of this thesis will move towards a textual analysis of the literary commodities in order to comprehend the collective desire(s) of general netizens owing to their literary autonomy. The approach to analysing the texts – prosumed commodities as the consequence of literary autonomy – is through psychoanalysis, which I believe is best suited to illuminate desire dwelling in the depth of the human mind. However before going to the psychoanalysis, I will demonstrate the collective desire(s) of general netizens by closely examining the repetitive patterns of the popular works of internet fiction to establish my argument that the texts, regardless of genre, aim at satiating the collective desire(s) of the general netizens based on their gender. As a result, in chapter 4, I shall examine the popular works on Qidian Chinese Net, which targets male netizens, and focus on interpreting twelve fiction genres in accordance with their produced/consumed penetration rate. In chapter 5, I shall analyse the popular works on Qidian Female Net, which targets female netizens, to observe the common textual tendency. The analysis will illuminate my argument that there is a repetitive pattern hidden underneath all the popular works echoing with the collective desire(s) of the general netizens who are enthusiastic about internet fiction in China. This pattern will substantiate my argument that it is used as what I described as ‘Chinese fantastic mode’ in the subsequent chapter. In Chapter 6, the psychoanalytical approach interprets desire commonly reflected through the texts from the previous two chapters to point to what the Chinese fantastic mode is, which helps the general netizens realise their desire(s) through fantasisation.
In Chapter 7, I shall draw together my findings and reach the conclusion to my research question.
Chapter Two: Mapping Internet Fiction

2.1: Introduction

In this chapter, I shall attempt first to examine internet fiction from two perspectives: chronological (vertical) and spatial (horizontal). From a chronological perspective, internet fiction and Tongsu Xiaoshuo 通俗小說 (popular fiction) in the late Qing and early Republican Era (thereafter Tongsu Xiaoshuo) share a number of commonalities to the point where internet fiction could, arguably, be regarded as a successor to Tongsu Xiaoshuo in the history of modern Chinese popular fiction since the late Qing period. From a spatial perspective, however, internet fiction can be seen as an outcome of the re-institutionalisation of popular fiction owing to recent re-definition in the mass media, in the sense that the mass media/social media in today's China has become much more commercialised whereas the pre-1976, socialist notion of mass media was hardly commercialisation-initiated but more propaganda-oriented. This re-institutionalisation has re-configured the dynamics between the agents – producers, editors, consumers – due to the interactive features bestowed to netizens on-line. The interactive features of the social media empowers netizens to write, to publish, to select, to browse personal works on-line, which leads to a growing on-line Chinese literary sphere where a brand new

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60 Xu argues that the group of writers who are now regarded as Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School “[…] never in fact formed any school at all…they were very different from on another in views…their fiction varied dramatically from on writer to the next.” Xu, “The Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School,” 76. This notion was further suggested by Prof. Hockx in my VIVA that the term Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School should be described as Tongsu Wenxue (popular literature). To emphasise the notion that it is the genre of fiction I analyse in this research, I used the term Tongsu Xiaoshuo (popular fiction) to refer to the works of popular fiction during the Republican Era.

61 I have borrowed Bourdieu’s notion of a literary field to fabricate this term ‘re-institutionalisation’. It refers to the re-configuration of a literary field in which agents and institutions are re-allocated to different positions, mostly incurred by factors such as the advanced technology of production and circulation, and the changed mode of consumption. This term is intended to be used as an umbrella term, indicating the changes in factors contributing to the production, circulation and consumption of literary products in a literary field on the internet today. This notion will be further elaborated in Chapter 3.
production/consumption model of Chinese popular fiction thrives. This model will further be elaborated and examined in Chapter 3.

Following the examination of internet fiction from these two perspectives, I shall lead the discussion towards participatory culture, which is supported by prosumerism, which in turn is a reflection of individualisation in Chinese society today. By making these connections, I shall attempt to argue that internet fiction, despite its ‘old’ (in the chronological, vertical sense) and ‘new’ (in the spatial, horizontal sense) features, is a culturally-specific product. This cultural product is derived from a fast-developing consumer society and market economy practised in contemporary China, in the same way that the notion of individualisation in China has become more accentuated.

2.2: A Genealogy of Chinese Popular Fiction

In this section, a vertical linkage between Tongsu Xiaoshuo and internet fiction will be made in order to show the ‘old’ features by examining the similarities between them in the light of background, texts and re-institutionalisation. The examination aims to demonstrate that internet fiction is not an entirely new cultural product; it can be seen as a continuity of the exercise of popular fiction consumption since the turn of the last century as China was modernised.

2.2.1: Vernacular Fiction – From Ming Fiction to Tongsu Xiaoshuo

Vernacularisation in literature is the process of “a gradual acclimazation of writing to speech”. Commencing during the Ming dynasty, vernacularisation in literature altered the literary landscape of China, whose literary foundation had been poetry. Vernacular literature, gaining “[…] much of its expressive power from not having been traditionally associated with the elites”, is able to “say things, particularly about the increasingly complicated social world, that poetry

62 Ge, Out of the Margins, 5.
63 Gao Xudong 高旭東, Wusi Wenxue yu Zhongguo Chuantong Wenxue 五四文學與中國傳統文學 (May Fourth Literature and Chinese Traditional Literature), 221.
64 Lu, “The Literary Culture of the Late Ming (1573-1644),” 104.
and classical prose […] simply could not”. In this regard, vernacular fiction, in regard, brought a new life force to Chinese literature.

But socio-politically speaking, vernacular fiction still “[…] was not deemed a form of verbal art worthy of respect until modern times” when it became a mechanism to ‘rescue China from Western imperialism’. Liang Qichao indicated that despite the fact that elites usually loathe the mere mention of fiction, the genre of fiction is almost impossible to ban because of its popularity with the general public. Therefore, Liang argues, the genre of fiction shall be promoted to re-use the genre as a political vehicle for the general public to be more aware of the political sphere and become more engaged with it, similar to countries such as America, England, Germany and Japan, where political novels had already been highly regarded “for being instrumental in the steady progress made in the political sphere […]” Liang’s enthusiasm in promoting the political novel, with which he came into initial contact in Japan (and the enthusiasm continued afterwards), indeed revitalised the genre. Thereafter, the value of fiction was reassessed from low to high “[…] after the appearance of the Hongloumeng in the eighteenth century, and especially after Liang Qichao’s call for a “revolution in xiaoshuo 小說革命” and other scholars’ vigorous promotion of this genre in the early years of the twentieth century”. The literary judgment to prioritise poetry and essays was gradually reversed during the mid-Qing dynasty, and eventually subverted by the time of the late Qing dynasty. As a result, the years spanning the period from the late Qing dynasty to the May Fourth Movement are commonly recognised as the crucial transitional time from tradition to modernity. It was the time when vernacular fiction (short stories included) was elevated to a higher position from its previous status of “an immoral, or at best frivolous, pastime”.

Nonetheless, this renewal did not occur peacefully. In the Republican era, New Literature and Tongsu Wenxue (popular literature) did not see eye to eye because the former denounced the latter as decadently entertainment-oriented, symbolising a regression into pre-modernity. Tongsu Xiaoshuo, being one major popular genre from Tongsu Wenxue, came under severe attack. By contrast, New Literature undertook to transform fiction into a socio-political tool to educate the general public, for the sake of ‘saving the nation’; Tongsu Xiaoshuo, in the eyes of the advocates of New Literature, voluntarily regressed to the previous pastime status from which Chinese literati had endeavoured to save fiction. Despite the seeming lack of literary merits and educational purpose, Tongsu Xiaoshuo played a crucial role in the birth of modern popular fiction.\(^{71}\) Moreover, it carried socio-cultural connotations which helped in “analys[ing] the kinds of daydream and fantasy to which a large section of the reading public yielded during the Republican period”.\(^{72}\) Tongsu Xiaoshuo reflects the collective daydream and fantasy of the general public who enjoyed reading it during a period marked by the rise of capitalism/industrialisation, urbanisation and mass production. This contributed to the ‘re-institutionalisation’ of the Tongsu Xiaoshuo, leading to the semi-traditional literary texts being popularly consumed by the general public in urban areas for, in Link’s analysis, the psychological and nostalgic comfort of general readers.\(^{73}\)

2.2.2: The Texts of Tongsu Xiaoshuo – Bridging the Gap between an OldTraditional Time and a New Era

Tongsu Xiaoshuo was originally nurtured in Shanghai, an urbanised but also globalised environment aggrandised with westernisation and burgeoning capitalism/industrialisation. Various genres of fiction categorised as the Tongsu

\(^{71}\) Tang has stated Tongsu Wenxue writers called themselves popular fiction writers. Tang Zhesheng 湯哲聲, Zhongguo Dangdai Tongsu Wenxue Shilun 中國當代通俗小說史論 (A History of Chinese Contemporary Popular Fiction), 1.
\(^{72}\) Hsia, A History of Modern Chinese Fiction, 25.
\(^{73}\) Link, Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies, 235.
Xiaoshuo flourished and intermingled; New Literature genres also appeared. The literary texts of the Tongsu Xiaoshuo re-iterated a two-dimensional linkage. Its vertical linkage is the vernacular fiction tradition stretching back to the Ming and the Qing periods. Several kinds of popular narrative frequently found under the label of the Tongsu Xiaoshuo were not new; they had been part of vernacular Chinese fiction tradition for centuries. Chinese martial arts fiction, for instance, has its tradition laid in *Shuihu Zhuan* (The Water Margin) in the Ming dynasty; love stories, forming much of the tradition of Caizhi Jiaren Xiaoshuo (Romance Fiction of Genius and Beauty) popularly composed in Ming dynasty, are the two most prominent genres in the Tongsu Xiaoshuo.

Conversely, its horizontal linkage is the Tongsu Xiaoshuo’s association with globalisation by bringing a Chinese touch to popular fiction genres from foreign lands. Detective fiction, of which Cheng Xiaoqing (1893-1976) was the pre-eminent figure, was well-consumed not only because of *Sherlock Holmes* but also his Chinese counterpart Huo Sang (霍桑) who featured in Cheng’s detective fiction. The works of Sun Liaohong (孫了紅) (1897-1958) feature a chivalric thief Lu Ping (魯平), who easily reminds readers of Maurice Leblanc’s *Arsene Lupin* series (Sun was one of the translators and editors of the Chinese translation of Leblanc’s works). The locally produced fiction narratives and the translated fiction narratives reciprocated one another, helping to increase the production output of fiction narratives of various kinds. The reciprocation also

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74 The genres categorised under the Tongsu Wenxue are many and varied. Perry Link has stated that the Mandarin fiction not only included “[…] the love stories but also ‘social’ novels, ‘knight-errant’ novels, ‘scandal novels’, ‘detective novels’, ‘ideal’ (fantasy) novels, ‘comic’ novels, and many other kinds”. Link, “Traditional-Style Urban Fiction in the Teens and Twenties,” 328.

75 It comes as no surprise to see that some new genres imitating foreign fiction were created to serve the reading needs of the general populace. Translated fiction outnumbered fiction created by Chinese writers, taking up two thirds of the total number of fictional works on the market in the late Qing period, which shows how influential translated fictions were to the literary landscape during that time. Ah Ying 阿英, *Wanqing Xiaoshuo Shi* (A History of Late Qing Fiction), 180-89. Amongst the translated fiction, detective fiction was the most popular genre. Conan Doyle’s works remained at the top of the most frequently translated fiction, because of his Sherlock Holmes series. Chen Pingyuan 陳平原, *Zhongguo Xiandai Xiaoshuo de Qiyuan* (The Origin of Chinese Modern Fiction), 24-65. That detective fiction was later regarded as part of the Tongsu Xiaoshuo suggests that more Chinese writers devoted themselves to the creation of detective fiction.
increased the diversities of genres, stimulated by the admixture of East and West, old and new, providing a wider assortment for fiction output.

The two-dimension linkage shows that the Tongsu Xiaoshuo, despite being considered a derogation by New Literature activists, bridged the gap between an old, traditional time, to a new, modern era while helping readers to feel better psychologically\(^{76}\) to offset the anxiety produced by the new era.

2.2.3: The Re-institutionalisation of Tongsu Xiaoshuo – The Expansion from Printing to Cinema

Tongsu Xiaoshuo greatly benefited from the re-institutionalisation brought into being by the advancement of technology. Initially published in literary supplements to magazines and newspapers, Tongsu Xiaoshuo soon swept its readership off their feet to cause a craze of popular narratives, like the New Literature.\(^{77}\) More advanced printing technology was introduced in the late Qing period to bring about the “Gutenberg revolution in China”,\(^{78}\) which eventually led to a renewal of print capitalism and cultural populism based in Shanghai. Print capitalism was initially proposed by Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* to theorise the formation of nationalism based on a shared sense of community through the capitalistic, entrepreneurial practice of the print press using a vernacular commonly understood by users of different dialects in one nation-state to maximise the circulation and consumption of the print press.

The easier access and availability of newspapers, literary magazines and books encouraged a growing reading population, incorporating reading into their everyday life practice. It is also through this practice that a print capitalism is exercised in the sense that a shared sense of community for more readers to identify themselves with grows, which helps to promote the popularity of Tongsu Xiaoshuo into the everyday life of the general public. In addition, Tongsu Xiaoshuo works, mostly in serial form of fiction, vibrated with the daily life of the

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\(^{76}\) Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, 235.


\(^{78}\) Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai*, 376.
urban population to further engage them in the new rise of popular culture. The serialisation of fiction, working much like the modern-day soap opera often halting at a climax or a crucial moment of the plot, aimed to stimulate the anticipation of the engaged readers for the next episode to come, and to instigate more circulation and publication.

Meanwhile, the new media form of films participated in the literary trends of Tongsu Xiaoshuo, promoting their popularity to a new zenith. The concept of franchise was accelerated with the fictional text metamorphosed into other art forms – movies, radio plays – on account of the evolution of the media to transform print culture into visual culture. A great number of films adapted from Tongsu Xiaoshuo proved to be blockbusters, making easier the path which had to be undertaken by printed fiction texts to travel onto the big silver screen. The school’s popularity and commercialisation led Chinese popular fiction into a new phase, where its creators not only embraced burgeoning capitalism, but also welcomed a globalisation (which found its reflection through the fiction texts and the different entertainment forms they had been adapted into). This literary trend of the Tongsu Xiaoshuo, in which literary populism and cultural capitalism thrived on reciprocal terms, eventually had to retreat under Mao Zedong’s politicised concept of literature and art for the New Communist China.

Gradually, Chinese popular fiction, along with the incipient capitalism, was

79 Zhang described the close connection between the unprecedented cinema craze in Shanghai in the 1920s and the adaptation of Tongsu Wenxue fiction. Zhang, “Teahouse, Shadowplay, Bricolage,” 27-50. Various popular Tongsu Wenxue fictions were also adapted into other art forms, such as comic strips, stage plays and radio serialisations. Hsieh, “The World Watches,” 139. Many writers pertaining to the Tongsu Wenxue either tried their hands at composing movie scripts or adapted their works into movie scripts. Zhang, “Cosmopolitan Projection,” 151-52.

80 Van de Ven indicates that modern globalisation in terms of China’s role in the history of globalisation refers to the time during the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century when the notion of modernity and that of globalisation were interwoven as “[...] European powers were the most active agent in pushing, even inflicting, modern globalisation.” Van de Ven, “The Onrush of Modern Globalization in China,” 168. I borrow the notion proposed by Van de Ven for globalisation in my context to refer to the transitional period from the late Qing to the early Republican era when the notion of Yang 外 (foreign) was enhanced in everyday life practice in the urban areas in China. This kind of practice was also reflected in the texts of popular Chinese fiction, which has been briefly discussed on page 56-57.

81 Mao’s ‘Yan’an Talk’ clarified that literature should serve politics. This statement was used by enthusiastic left-wing literary elites to force the Tongsu Wenxue gradually out of the literary mainstream. Hong, A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature, 3-8 and 12-20.
limited to diaspora communities in Taiwan, Hong Kong, South East Asia and the US.\(^{82}\) Putting aside the marginalisation forced by political interference in the early Communist Chinese era, Tongsu Xiaoshuo successfully aroused May Fourth critics’ and elites’

[...] fear of the powerful appeal of this urban popular fiction among the very audience they sought to influence with their own writings. The battle against popular fiction was an ideological battle waged by an elite intellectual class who wished to maintain its traditional function as spokesman for culture and morality, against those who held that literature need offer nothing more than escape and consolation [...]\(^{83}\)

Tongsu Xiaoshuo, as a literary populism springing out from industrialisation/capitalism, stood as a watershed to distinguish between elitism and populism in modern China. Tongsu Xiaoshuo disseminated the notion of popular fiction. But the notion of popular fiction never dies, so it just appeared to fade away due to the drastic political suppression during its subterranean period before popular fiction was resuscitated by the socio-economic change and the re-institutionalisation activated by the advent of newer technology.

2.2.4: The Similarities of Texts between Tongsu Xiaoshuo and Internet Fiction

At the turn of the twenty-first century, interestingly, a similar literary phenomenon to Tongsu Xiaoshuo occurred, when internet fiction made its way into the everyday life of the Chinese population, first in the US and Taiwan, and later in China.\(^{84}\) Less than two decades after China shifted from a pure socialistic

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\(^{82}\) In the late 1940s, when the Chinese Communist Party got the upper hand during the civil war, a number of left-wing progressive writers, echoing Mao Zedong’s concerns about literature and art, denounced Tongsu Xiaoshuo as being of low taste and severely attacked knight-errant fiction and detective fiction. The call for transition in literature by the progressive writers resulted in the suppression of popular fiction, which was to lead to its diaspora. Hong, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, 8-11.


\(^{84}\) See section 1.1 in Chapter 1.
state to a more capitalistic state, internet fiction landed in China in 1998 and has since become deeply ingrained in the fabric of Chinese society.\(^{85}\)

Internet fiction came in at a time of dramatic socio-economic change. The privatisation of business had begun to be implemented; urbanisation had commenced to be promoted. Chinese society, which had previously fixated on communism for decades, now re-embraced a more capitalistic notion oriented system known as the market economy.

Bred in a fast-forwarding capitalistic/industrialised environment, internet fiction exploded in numbers and diversity, resulting in a literary Big Bang.\(^{86}\) Fiction of various genres coexist, multiply and merge with one another, either imitating traditional Chinese genres or inspired by western-style fiction, in a two-dimensional linkage. Vertically speaking, some internet fiction genres have a strong fiction tradition going back to Tongsu Wenxue 言情小說 (Romance) whose basic plot pattern echoes love fiction from Tongsu Xiaoshuo romance and Romance Fiction of Genius and Beauty storylines; horizontally speaking, other internet fiction genres incorporate the essence of literary genres from foreign lands but blend them with a Chinese touch. Xuanhuan Xiaoshuo 玄幻小說 (Eastern Fantasy Fiction), the extremely popular internet fiction genre always featuring a Chinese protagonist undertaking amazing

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\(^{85}\) This is not to say that there was not any popular literature phenomenon prior to the advent of internet literature. Yingshi Wenxue 影視文學 (TV and Film Literature) dominated the Chinese popular literature market in the 1990s. Two examples of such writers are Qiong Yao 瓊瑤 (1938-) and Jin Yong 金庸 (1924-), whose works adapted into TV dramas appeal to a massive audience in Chinese-speaking areas. Although it is not part of the scope of this thesis, film and television literature has its unique position in the history of modern Chinese popular fiction. For a thorough discussion, see Cao Huaiming 曹懷明, “Dazhong Meiti yu Wenxue Chuanbo” 大眾媒體與文學傳播 (Media and Transportation of Literature), 78-84; Li Mingjun 李明軍, “Ershì Shìjì Jiǔ Shì Niándai Zhongguo Dazhong Wenyi Yanjiu” 20 世紀 90 年代中國大眾文藝研究 (A Study of Chinese Popular Literature in 1990s), 145-52; Kong, Consuming Literature, 171-76.

\(^{86}\) The notion of the Big Bang is used due to the immense volume of internet fiction. It is not possible to calculate either an accurate figure for the actual number of linear internet fiction works originally published on-line, or the precise number of internet fiction portal sites. Take Qidian: the number of works of fiction it has collected rose from 200,000 in 2007-08 to almost 600,000 in June 2011. The number is still growing. The following news item could provide an insight into the extreme popularity of internet fiction. It stated that in China, the number of works of internet fiction published in book format has roughly increased by twenty-five percent per year since 2000. Anonymous, “Wangluo Wenxue Fazhan: Shimin Sandai” 網絡文學發展: 十年三代 (The Development of Internet Literature: Three Generations in Ten Years).
adventures such as taming dragons and performing magic, resembles the Fantasy
narratives in the west. The binary opposition of East and West; locality and
globalisation; old and new, is present in internet fiction, much like Tongsu
Xiaoshuo.

2.2.5: The Similarities of Re-institutionalisation between Tongsu Xiaoshuo
and Internet Fiction

By assuming the form of serialisation on various portal websites, internet
fiction successfully resonates with the readers to keep them hooked on serialised
works. Nevertheless, internet fiction does not just stay confined to its own
written forms to be consumed; it is also closely connected to the media, as Tongsu
Xiaoshuo was, to be further distributed in diverse franchises from ‘digitalised’
print culture to visual culture. The on-line gaming industry is prospering, many
games are adapted from popular internet fiction; the number of movies, TV
dramas and Manga adapted from internet fiction has also been increasing. In
this regard, Chinese popular fiction, owing to its marriage with the internet, not
only embraced market economy after the introduction of the reformed economic

87 Internet fiction takes great advantage of the notion of serialisation. Authors post and publish
their works in serial form directly on-line for readers to consume. Cangling Kaishi 從零開始
(Scratch from Zero), one extremely popular internet fiction, for instance, has released 1719
chapters over almost seven years. The fiction is still being serialised, with its latest chapter
released on 30 June 2011. The author seems to keep to a pace of releasing one chapter a day. 30
88 The games market in China is expected to generate more than one billion RMB in revenue in
2007. Stang, Osterhold, Hoftun, and Kirkseater, The Book of Games, 29. Shanda, starting its on-
line games business with capital of RMB 500,000 in 1999, is now known as the on-line game
giant, taking the second largest on-line game market share in China. More statistics about the
success of Shanda and the boom in the on-line games industry in China can be consulted in Li,
Investing in China, 81-122 and 245-92; Latham, Pop Culture China!, 193-220. The relationship
between on-line games and internet fiction is rather close. Many of Qidian’s popular internet
fiction works have been adapted, or are planned to be adapted, into the on-line games sector of
Shanda. Shanda Qidian’s business model will be thoroughly examined in Chapter 3.
89 For example, Lan Yu 藍宇 (Lan Yu), which was adapted from an internet fiction Beijing Gushi
北京故事 (Beijing Story), won five Taiwanese Golden Horse Award in 2001. The movie
received both positive feedbacks and box office success. Berry, A History of Pain, 330. Gui Cui
Deng 鬼吹燈 (A Chinese Tomb Raider Story), an extremely popular thriller featuring a group of
Chinese tomb-raiders, will likely be made into a film trilogy. 30 August 2007, 17 October 2010
<http://paly.qidian.com/paly/20070830>. Zhu Xian 諸仙 (The Legend of Chinese Daoist Demi-
gods and Demi-goddesses), another fairly popular Chinese Immortal Swordsman fiction featuring
demi-gods who practice Daoism and Chinese martial arts, has been adapted into Manga, 17
policy in China, but also welcomed globalisation after China has been opened up to the world. The diversity of the fiction genres and the merchandise spinning off from internet fiction make internet fiction an indispensible part of the everyday life of a multitude of readers for its entertaining purpose, primarily the younger generation (the generation born during the 1980s and the 1990s). The prominent features of market economy and globalisation attached so strongly to Tongsu Xiaoshuo are precisely reflected in the internet fiction phenomenon.

By drawing this parallel analogy between Tongsu Xiaoshuo and internet fiction, I do not intend to go so far as to state that internet fiction is definitely a legitimate successor of the Tongsu Xiaoshuo phenomenon, given that the latter has only had a short history of thirteen years up to the point of writing. After all, to evaluate a literary trend from a purely historical perspective usually is risky before the literary trend has officially come to an end. Nevertheless, I do believe that it is worthwhile to draw attention to the similarities between Tongsu Xiaoshuo as the earliest populist literary trend in early modern capitalist China, and internet fiction as the currently popular literary trend in the transnational Chinese on-line literary sphere, especially in China. All of the similarities, coincidentally or not, deliver one message: literary populism and cultural capitalism, once more, are being revived on a large scale today in post-reform capitalist China.

Due to these homologies, internet fiction cannot be claimed as a brand new cultural product; rather, it is a literary product that has evolved through time due to the advance of technology and changes in the socio-political and socio-economic climate. Consuming popular fiction (which contributes to the necessity of producing popular fiction) has always been a leisure preference since the mid-Ming dynasty in China. The preference was interrupted, but has never perished.

Although bearing certain similarities to Tongsu Xiaoshuo, internet fiction is still an unprecedented socio-cultural phenomenon due to its prevalence and the massive engagement of producers and consumers. The extent to which it is prevalent and the way in which it engages producers and consumers make internet fiction ‘new’, as I shall demonstrate in Chapter 3. With the advance of
technology, a wider spectrum of producers/consumers can produce and simultaneously consume massive amounts of literary products, promoting the notion of ‘popular’. In the next section, the notion of the ‘space’ of popular fiction, from the perspective of the evolution of the mass media, will be examined commencing from television, the major form of mass medium which has promoted popular fiction since the economic reform, to the internet, the new form of mass medium also known as social media promoting popular fiction today.

2.3: The New Feature of Internet Fiction from a Spatial Perspective – A Reconfiguration of Institution for Massive Participation

2.3.1: Promoting Popular Reception of Fiction – From Newspaper to the Internet

Popular fiction is tightly associated with ‘popularity’. The higher the penetration rate among the general public, the more popular a work of fiction becomes. Therefore, it is no surprise to find that the fate of popular fiction has always been closely interwoven with innovation in the mass media. In China, the “Chinese best seller has been promoted by increasingly wide reception in all media sectors (radio, film, television, and Internet) and strongly influenced by the international trends”. 90 On account of the seamless connection between the different media platforms and popular fiction, some scholars have stated that popular fiction, to a large extent, is considered to be synonymous with mass media fiction. 91

Popular fiction’s immediate connection with the mass media during the Republican era provides the former with a metamorphosis through its representation – a conversion into other art or entertainment forms from written texts. Decades after the late Qing period when popular fiction was consumed through newspapers and magazines, cinemas were introduced into public life in semi-colonised Shanghai during the Republican era. Many films were adapted from popular fiction, providing a major alternative pastime for the general urban

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90 Anonymous, “Bestseller.”
The introduction of cinemas into Shanghai contributed to the fashion of popular reading, as has been discussed in the previous section on Tongsu Xiaoshuo. From the 1950s to the 1980s, Chinese popular fiction was mainly a diasporic phenomenon. Having been relatively marginalised during the Mao era in China, popular fiction recovered from its previous stage of repression and castigation to re-appear under the spotlight with the assistance of the television revolution in China, as China’s television set output reached a record high in the 1990s.\footnote{Not only did the television set output surge in the 1980s, but television programmes were fed with more diversity. Varieties of commercialised TV programmes from Hong Kong and Taiwan have had a deep impact on today’s Chinese Television. In addition to making the television industry more globalised and diversified, those commercialised TV programmes also constitute a transnational Chinese television community. For more detail on the changes in the Chinese Television industry, see Zhu and Berry, eds., TV China.} Television, since the 1980s, has dominated a space inside the ordinary household to generate a closer relationship with the household members. Even though television has been subject to severe censorship and has been used as a channel for political propaganda, it has also, unintentionally, promoted popular culture, which began with the influx of popular, commercialised culture from Hong Kong and Taiwan.\footnote{The impact of popular culture from Hong Kong and Taiwan was phenomenal for quite some time from the early 1980s. Teresa Deng Linjun 鄧麗君 (1953-1995) is a good example: by having her music smuggled into Guangdong on cassette tapes, Teresa’s songs became enormously popular among Chinese people despite open denouncement by the Chinese Central Government of her decadent, capitalistic style of music. Barne, “The Graying of Chinese Culture,” 125. For more information about the impact of Taiwanese and Hong Kong popular culture beginning in the late 1970s on China, see Baranovitch, China’s New Voices, 10-53; Gold, “Go with Your Feeling,” 907-25.} The popular, commercialised culture introduced and transported by the media was further associated with popular fiction, leading to a trend of Yingshi Wenxue 影視文學 (TV and Film Literature) in the 1990s.\footnote{See footnote 76 for more information on TV and film literature in the 1990s.}

Whilst TV, arguably, still occupies the top of the leisure activity list of the general public, the internet now dominates their reading habits. A reading survey conducted by Zhongguo Chuban Kexue Yanjiu Suo 中國出版科學研究所 (the Chinese Publishing Science Research Institute) in 2008 showed that 91.7 percent of the survey participants chose the internet to be ‘the most frequently accessed mass medium’, followed by newspaper (81.8%), magazines (69%), TV (64.5%), books (59%) and radio (23.4%). There were 71.4 percent of the participants who
gave on-line selective reading of news or fiction as the main reason for using the internet. This survey clearly indicated that reading on-line is now a major part of everyday life for the Chinese population under the age of fifty.\textsuperscript{95} The internet offers a digitalised interface with diverse features – permeation, ubiquity, convenience real-time – more advantageously than other mass media forms. Most importantly, the internet, which is described as the ‘new media’, synchronises the time and space difference among numerous media users to offer a highly interactive virtual space for users to be socially engaged.\textsuperscript{96} It is under this media innovation that Chinese popular fiction has found a new way to be produced, consumed and circulated across the Chinese on-line literary sphere. Whereas internet fiction might have its chronological implication of enacting the second Tongsu Xiaoshuo phenomenon, it definitely has its own spatial significance in bringing the Chinese speaking areas into one global literary sphere on the internet.

2.3.2: Mass/Social Media Fandom, Participatory Culture, and Prosumerism in Post-Mao China

Developing from various mass media sectors of newspapers, television and cinemas to the new/social media of the internet, media evolution has reformulated the way people engage in leisure activities in China, as in other parts of the world. What this universal phenomenon brings to light, in China, is a two-fold issue. One is the promotion of popular culture, as discussed above; the other is a deeper, full-scale participation from media fans – the devoted media content consumers (readers/audience/viewers). The extent to which media fans participate in the making of media content is still increasing, especially fans using social media. More media fans are not satisfied by just experiencing catharsis when they cry or laugh to relieve the pressure of daily life by consuming their preferred media content; their sense of participation is also built upon physical

\textsuperscript{95} Anonymous, “Shoujie Quanguo Wangmin Yuedu yu Goumai Chubanwu Zhuangkuang Diaocha Baogao” (The First Survey Report of Internet Users’ Online Reading and Publication Purchasing Behaviour).

\textsuperscript{96} Jan van Dijk gave a detailed analysis on the features of the ‘new media.’ Synchronising time and space among new media users is one of the major characteristics described. For more information, see Van Dijk, Introduction, The Network Society: Social Aspects of New Media.
action when they do things, in an attempt to make what they desire happen. In this regard, more media fans cross the border from being passive receivers to being active participants.

The notion of ‘fan’ is nothing new in modern China. During the Republican era, fans who went to the cinema and who consumed Tongsu Xiaoshuo in urban areas were numerous. Whereas during Mao’s era, fans and fandom was much politicised through the practice of the mass worship of Mao, in post-Mao China, a (re)surgence of popular culture fans, especially mass media fans, can be observed. For example, in 1991, the airing of *Kewang* 渴望 (Yearning), a fifty-episode low-budget soap opera depicting stories of the interaction between a city family and a village family brought forth a Yearning craze. Thousands of zealous viewers made phone calls or wrote letters to the television station demanding that the drama be shown on a nightly basis, and that the drama run for as many episodes as possible. This enthusiastic participation of drama fans marked “[…] the opening curtains of a dramatic shift in China’s cultural landscape”. In 2005, *Chaoji Nüsheng* 超級女聲 (Super Girl), a talent show to select the most gifted amateur singer principally decided by viewers via the mobile phone text-messaging voting system, crowned Li Yuchun 李宇春 (1984- ) as the champion, with 3.52 million votes. Li’s Cinderella-style story of a nobody becoming a pan-Asia star ignited a Super Girl craze, which was created by the active participation of the audience.

The rise of media fans in post-Mao China is the result of the (re)introduction of different media platforms with different features from the mass media of the cinema, TV and the new/social media of the internet. Among them, the internet, due to its highly interactive feature, is where active participation is most extensively practised. Numerous internet users compose, post, debate and chat on-line to have themselves read, heard and expressed. Youku.com and Tudou.com, the Chinese versions of Youtube.com, offer internet users

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97 Zha, *China Pop*, 27; Rofel, *Desiring China*, 31-64.
opportunities to make, edit and upload their personal footages for others to share; Hudong.com, the Chinese counterpart of Wikipedia, which claims to be the largest interactive on-line Chinese encyclopaedia, has already recruited nearly two million internet users to edit and publish the encyclopaedia entries.100

The idea of ‘active participation’ crosses the line between the role of consumers and that of producers dealing with media content. While some media fans feel reluctant to take in the produced content over the media, others are determined to ‘make the thing right’ by demanding, discussing, networking, creating, intervening, appropriating and involving themselves in various activities to fulfil what they firmly believe has been left out. The popularity of fan fiction in the West, a cultural by-product created and circulated by media fans, commences with the TV industry and exemplifies active participation.101 Whilst there might not have been an equivalent fan fiction phenomenon in China deriving from the TV industry, the idea of active participation is extensively exercised within cultural production and consumption – including internet fiction – for on-line users to enjoy autonomy. More importantly, the internet is what Jenkins described as the venue having “[…] made visible the hidden compromises that enable participatory culture and commercial culture to coexist throughout much of the twentieth century […]”. 102 The notion of active participation, leading to ‘participatory culture,’ offers media fans an alternative to commercial culture, which is often manipulated by large-scale business organisations.

Participatory culture is now recognised something as “anything but fringe and underground today”103 and is regarded as something that “contrasts with older

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100 The number of the entries was 1,908,946 from the homepage; 11 November 2009 <www.hudong.com>. In September 2010, the number of entries had risen to 4.84 million. 20 October 2010 <http://www.hudong.com/wiki/%E4%BA%92%E5%8A%A8%E7%99%BE%E7%A7%91>.
101 Fan fiction, a subculture formed in the 1960s, has its commencement closely associated with the American science fiction TV drama Star Trek. Fan fiction, simply put, is fans’ appropriation and reinterpretation of an original work based on their fantasy to work out new stories. For more detail, see Penley, Nasa/Trek, 97-148; Cova, Kozinets and Shankar, Consumer Tribe, 194-211.
102 Jenkins, Convergence Culture, 137.
103 ---, Fans, Bloggers and Gamers, 2
notions of passive media spectatorship”.\textsuperscript{104} According to Jenkins, participatory culture works as follows:

Patterns of media consumption have been profoundly altered by a succession of new media technologies which enable average citizens to participate in the archiving, annotation, appropriation, transformation, and recirculation of media content. Participatory culture refers to the new style of consumerism that emerges in this environment. If media convergence is to become a viable corporate strategy, it will be because consumers have learned new ways to interact with media content. Not surprisingly, participatory culture is running ahead of the technological development necessary to sustain industrial visions of media convergence and thus making demands on popular culture which the studios are not yet, and perhaps never will be, able to satisfy. The first and foremost demand consumers make is the right to participate in the creation and distribution of media narratives. Media consumers want to become media producers, while media producers want to maintain their traditional dominance over media content.\textsuperscript{105}

The moment media consumers engage themselves with media narrative production, the notion which I have labelled ‘prosumers’ is exercised. Prosumer is a term originally suggested by Alvin Toffler, who believed that western society has been undergoing a ‘Third Wave’ phase, a phase of post-industrialisation. One of the many features of post-industrialisation is the merging of producers and consumers.\textsuperscript{106} Now, in the digital age, this term can also manifest the re-defined

\textsuperscript{104} Jenkins, \textit{Convergence Culture}, 137.
\textsuperscript{105} ---, “Quentin Tarantino’s Star War?” 554.
\textsuperscript{106} Toffler, \textit{The Third Wave}. In another book \textit{Revolutionary Wealth}, Toffler further elaborated the growing tendency of America becoming a nation of prosumers. Chinese society in the early 1980s turned briefly to Toffler’s futurology for a replacement of lost Marxism but the replacement soon gave way to a revival of national character. It has been argued that the search for a replacement of ideology in China is still ongoing. Sun, Introduction, \textit{The National Character}, xv. Despite the short-term impact of futurology on high culture, some of its impacts remain in popular culture, such as prosumerism.
relationship between consumers and producers over different media platforms, especially over the internet, toward the media context under the trend of ‘media convergence’. The transition from consumers to ‘prosumers’ is empowered by the consumers who wholeheartedly share their enthusiasm to constitute communities over a variety of media platforms on which consumers become closely engaged in the amateur production process, with the state-of-the-art in the media and its convergence trend, to move towards ‘prosumerism’.

It is clear that the factors ascribed to the transition from consumers to prosumers return to the two phenomena previously described in post-Mao China: fans, who are enthusiastic, active participants, and the media, the platform which allows ‘prosumption’ to be exercised. A look into the history of participatory culture corroborates the notion that fandom motivates the rise of participatory culture, together with the revolution in the media. The relationship between fandom and participatory culture is illustrated by the fans’ “[…] ability to transform personal reaction into social reaction, spectatorial culture into participatory culture …”, [which] “is one of the central characteristics of fandom”. Fandom and participatory culture are reciprocal, reformulating the dynamics between the strategies of dominant hegemony and the tactics of dominated individuals.

Here, I would like to elucidate the essence of fandom using Michel de Certeau’s concept of ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’. The notion of ‘strategies’ originated from a stance aligned with mass culture, in which producers mass-

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107 Media convergence, a new socio-economic phenomenon, is defined as “[…] the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviours of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. […] In the world of media convergences, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets counted across multiple platforms […] Convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content […]” Jenkins, Convergence Culture, 2-3.

108 ---, Fans, Bloggers, Gamers, 41.

109 Participatory culture was regarded in the 1960s as a subculture of the TV industry and with the invention of the photocopying machine. Photocopying machines contributed to the production and circulation of fan writing within fan communities. ---, “Quentin Tarantino’s Star War?” 555.

110 Jenkins himself has been deeply influenced by de Certeau’s idea of ‘poaching’ when Jenkins wrote Textual Poacher, the consequential book on fandom and participatory culture. ---, Textual Poacher, 23-27.
produce cultural substances by using their dominant socio-economic and institutional power. The cultural products which they produce are imposed on individuals, who are traditionally considered dominated consumers taking in the content of various cultural products and ideas fed to them at the end of the production output line. Observing the practice of everyday life, de Certeau elaborated that the notion of consumption, under the dominant system of economic, institutional power and social order, is manipulatively implemented to meet the consumers’ own ends to endow the consumption process with a new significance of individual production at the grassroots level (although individual production is often marginalised by the hegemonic order). In other words, general consumers (the “dominated element”\(^\text{111}\) in de Certeau’s term), to a different extent (now with the assistance of media convergence), appropriate numerous cultural substances produced by ‘strategies’. The individual appropriation of diverse cultural substances for one’s own specific purpose is ‘tactics’, a seemingly ‘silent production’.\(^{112}\) Generating from tactics, individuals maintain their own space within the strategies to bestow an individualised interpretation to the cultural substances regulated by the hegemonic system. Construing the relationship between production and consumption with the two military terms ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’, de Certeau articulated the constant struggle between production and consumption in the multitude of cultural contexts permeated in today’s society.

Building upon de Certeau’s notion of institutional strategies and individualised tactics, fandom, on account of modern media, makes the seemingly ‘silent production’ audible and more visible through prosumption. Although still conforming to the hegemonic system and commercial strategy from time to time, fandom has been tactically operating at the grassroots level via enthusiastic participation to diminish the border between consumption and production,

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\(^{112}\) ---, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 221. ‘Silent production’ is referred to as the consumption by the dominated (consumers), during which process, consumers use their tactics to produce. The reason why I have used ‘seemingly’ prior to ‘silent production’ is because de Certeau himself also argued that the ‘silent production’ is not actually silent. Despite being a dominated element in society, consumers do not necessary “[…] mean that they are either passive or docile.” ---, Introduction, xii.
keeping one step ahead of the commercial industry to create a trend, even though in most cases fans commence their production by appropriating the commercialised cultural substance mass-produced by large-scale industry.

Finding a new way out of the institutional strategies to exercise ‘loud production’, prosumers, a fandom-based phenomenon, are closely attached to the object of the fandom, which “is intrinsically interwoven with [their] sense of self, with who [they] are, would like to be, and think [they] are”. In this regard, prosumers also exercise self-reflection and self-extension through their prosumptive behaviour to build an intimate relationship between themselves and the object which they fanatically pursue.

One example is Cosplay (costume play), a fandom activity affiliated to Manga and Anime, which originated in Japan and is now spreading transnationally to consolidate its popularity among young people. Dressing oneself as any character from one’s favourite cartoon/Anime, or comic/Manga, fans, through ‘poaching’ cultural substance, assume their selected role creating skits in which they thoroughly merge with the roles. By doing so, they gratify themselves by temporarily experiencing the simulacrum of an imagined world in which cosplayers extend themselves into the roles for a complete mergence between the object and the self; moreover, their appropriation inspires savvy businesses and industries to seek profit out of fandom activity of this kind. In Japan, cosplay conventions are held across the country all year around. In 2002 the biggest annual Comiket (Comic Market), incorporating cosplayers and amateur Manga artists in one major event, attracted 370,000 participants and pulled in 9.8 billion yen in sales in only two days. In China, Chinese local governments have been savvy enough to detect the huge market for comics and animation in China. Provincial-level campaigns to promote the comic and animation industries and their affiliated activities as part of a ‘Creative China’ are strongly encouraged, as

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113 Sandvoss, “Fandom as Extension of Self,” 96.
114 These sales even amounted to more than those of soccer tickets in Japan during the World Cup in 2002 when Japan co-hosted the world sport event with South Korea. Kuniko and Hill, “Innovative Tokyo.” In 2005, the number of participants attending Comiket reached 550,000. Comic Market Preparation Committee, “What Is the Comic Market?”
is cosplay nowadays.\footnote{See Tian, “Animation and Comics Evolve into a Serious China Industry.”; Song and Wang, Fashion China, 95-124. Cosplay has been fairly popular among many young people in China. Hewitt, “The ‘Me’ Generation,” 153-82.} This consumer-initiated trend detected by production-oriented industries propels and commercialises a new prosumption fashion via the media to keep more fans ‘in the know’ for future participation.

2.4: Prosumerism and Individualisation in China – From Subjugation to Accentuation?

2.4.1: Towards an Individualised Chinese Society

The prevalence of fan culture and the rise of prosumerism enabled by media convergence are, relatively speaking, more exercised in China now. The exercise is ascribed to the emergence of consumer society excited by market economy, which, on the one hand, is largely dominated by individual needs and desires through mass consumption, but on the other hand, promises more freedom to individuals.\footnote{Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom, 7-21. Friedman saw capitalism as a form of economic freedom, which serves as an end and a means to political freedom for individuals.} In this regard, the exercise of market economy, arguably, induces the rise of fan culture (in the form of media fandom) and prosumerism on the grounds that more freedom and autonomy is placed on individuals. Whilst using oneself as an agent in a self-chosen fandom to express personal interest, fandom behaviour raises awareness of the identity of ‘I,’ leading to an extension of one’s self into various cultural contexts in a society by heavily consuming and actively participating in the production of cultural commodities.

I would argue that this awareness of ‘I’ should be ascribed to the post-Mao, dramatic socio-economic change in China. In today’s China, the notion of the individual as a more self-promoted agent in both the public sphere and the private sphere\footnote{This notion was raised and thoroughly discussed by Yan. Yan, The Individualization of Chinese Society.} has been much accentuated, forming a stark contrast to the Mao era when the notion of the individual was more of a state-serving mediator between the state and various institutions in which the private sphere was frequently marginalised. For example, in 2007, the Chinese government promulgated a
property rights bill to legally protect individual property and assets for the first time since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. Even though this legislation causes controversies, it does recognise the fact that the introduction of market economy led to a tenser notion of individual possession of property and assets in a socialist state.¹¹⁸

The notion of a more self-driven individual is not unique to China, but it is relatively new in China. Even at the turn of the twentieth century, as China was moving from an imperial state to a republican state and when the notion of the individual was introduced, in the form of individualism¹¹⁹ translated as Geren Zhuyi 個人主義 (Individualism), from the west, the notion was served as a mechanism engineered by Chinese intellectuals to constitute the discourse of modernity for a Chinese nation-state. In a Chinese context, individualism is used as a means to achieve nationalism and collectivism, and not as an end in itself. The discourse of individualism, relatively speaking, has been collective-oriented on the basis that the discourse intends to direct Chinese people toward nationalism; liberating individuals from the bond of family tradition and a feudal social system yet subjugating them to nationalism was part of the discourse. Although some intellectuals, such as Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869-1936), endeavoured to “argue against sovereignty of the nation […]”,¹²⁰ attempting to construct a discourse “[…] concerning the individual’s priority over the group aimed at the idea of national sovereignty, which, in the formations of Zou Rong, Chen Tianhua, Sun Yat-sen, Liang Qichao and Yan Fu, accentuated the freedom of the totality above that of

¹¹⁹ I use the term individualism to refer to the notion of individuals while discussing the notion during the Republican era and Maoist China, the reason being that Geren Zhuyi 個人主義 (Individualism) is a translation of individualism, as the term was initially introduced into China through Japanese Kanji. Individualism was an ongoing topic among Chinese intellectuals during the Republican era. Nevertheless, with the new notion of ‘I’ as a self-promoted agent being raised, I do not see the notion as necessarily equivalent to individualism, especially as the term is usually understood politically in a Chinese context on the grounds that individualism is usually associated with the US. Consequently, when discussing the historical perspective, I follow the academic norm by using individualism; but while discussing the post-Mao era, I insist on using ‘individualisation’ or ‘the accentuation of individuals’. ¹²⁰ Wang, “Zhang Taiyan’s Concept of the Individual and Modern Chinese Identity,” 239.
the individual”.\textsuperscript{121} His discourse, nevertheless, remained relatively marginalised during his time when the discourse of modern nation-state prior individuals dominated.

Hence, during the Republican era, individualism “[…] stood in a rather ambivalent relation to the master narrative of the nation-state […]”,\textsuperscript{122} to lead to the situation in which “the discourse of individualism found itself in complicity with nationalism”.\textsuperscript{123} With new political power arising, individualism was further repressed. After the political collapse of the Nationalists, “[t]he founding of the People’s Republic in 1949 marked a major turning point in the deployment of the discourse of individualism […] because discursive authority was now placed squarely in the hands of the state”.\textsuperscript{124} The Chinese communist state “successfully transformed the idea of individualism into a synecdoche standing for a negative West”,\textsuperscript{125} diverting the notion of individualism away from its Republican path of rescuing China from the invasion of western imperialism, instead perceiving individualism as a product of contamination from the West. During the transformation, the Chinese communist regime “had a political stake in presenting the idea of individualism to its people as un-Chinese”.\textsuperscript{126} Furthermore, the values of Marxism and Mao Zedong’s thoughts were “[…] deeply hostile to individualistic impulses, which were denounced as contrary to the new socialist society”.\textsuperscript{127} In this regard, individualism, in China, always revolves around political collectivism – either nationalism or a state attack launched against the West to make it un-Chinese.

On the contrary, since the late 1970s, the economic reform meant that “the ‘socialist man’ ethos was abandoned in favor of notions of ‘economic man’”.\textsuperscript{128} The abandonment ignited the practice of individualisation in the everyday life in China (especially for the generation born in the 1980s and beyond, who constitute

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{121} Wang, “Zhang Taiyan’s Concept of the Individual and Modern Chinese Identity,” 239.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Liu, \textit{Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity}, 86.
\item \textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid.}, 91.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Liu, “Translingual Practice: the Discourse of Individualism between China and the West,” 186.
\item \textsuperscript{125} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{126} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{127} Moore, “Generation Ku,” 361.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Chan, “Chinese Danwei Reforms,” 100.
\end{itemize}
the main readership of internet fiction in China today). The introduction of a market economy triggered the transition from a pure socialist state to a more capitalistic state and instigated an overall structural change towards a more individualised and stratified society.

An evident impact of the market economy on the everyday life in China is the prevalence of the new ideology of mass-consumerism. In the late 1990s, as the Chinese government encouraged mass-consumerism on the basis that mass-consumption was closely associated with economic growth, consumerism became the new and dominant ideology in China. As a result,

The ethics of everyday life shifted from an emphasis on self-sacrifice and hard work for a greater goal, such as building the new socialist society, to a new focus on self-realization and pursuit of personal happiness in concrete and materialistic terms. In other words, what makes one’s life meaningful has changed from a collective ethics to an individual-centered ethics, similar to the shift from “being good” to “feeling good” observed in US society.

The transition from ‘being good’ to ‘feeling good,’ although observed frequently in areas where capitalism is practised, is arguably new in China, where the campaign of ‘Learn from Lei Feng’ (a notion of ‘being good’) was launched by Chairman Mao just a few decades ago. This transition can be marked as “[i]n China the pursuit of personal glory has replaced selflessness, and the individual grasps his life with both hands.” Moving away from socialism but closer to capitalism/individualism, this transition seems to be irreversible.

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131 Lei Feng was aggrandised to an almost sainthood status after Mao had hand-written ‘Learn from Lei Feng’ in 1963. Larson, From Ah Q to Lei Feng, 109. A recent unfortunate case in China caught the world’s attention. A two-year old toddler in Guangdong was finally sent to hospital after having been hit by two cars and ignored by eighteen passersby. CNN, “Chinese Toddler Dies a Week after Being Hit by Cars, Ignored by Passersby.”
132 Ong and Zhang, eds., Introduction, Privatizing China, 1
The changes in everyday life are equally reflected in the current job market in China. On the labour/job market, the socialist notion of being assigned a permanent job by the state to dutifully serve as a cog in society’s machine has been dissolved. Instead, the emergence of what Hansen described as “The Chinese Enterprising Self” collaborates with the notion of individualisation in this regard. This change has “enabled many young urbanites to view work not simply as their contribution to society or a political and economic necessity but as a newly available realm for autonomy and self-development”.¹³³ The notion of job has been transformed into a nexus for self-realisation.

From a state-oriented subject designated in various public sectors for making a utopian communist state, to a self-driven agent in a capitalistic society embracing autonomy and self-realisation, the Chinese people manifest an accentuated notion of individualisation in almost every aspect in their everyday life, in addition to the consumerist ideology and the labour/job market. Yan’s work on the individualisation of Chinese society, Hansen’s edited work on dissecting the issue of the rise of the individual in modern Chinese society, and the work edited by Zhang and Ong on the notion of China being privatised all substantiate the rising notion of individual/individualisation in today’s China. Yan’s work approaches the notion of individualisation being exercised in both rural and urban areas by elaborating a more individualised trend observed in kinship, family relationships and marriage, as well as that in young girls, youth culture and consumerism. Hansen’s edited work takes a different approach to examine the notion of individual-ness in private business, in contemporary literature, in the mentality of intellectuals, in laws newly promulgated, and, similar to Yan’s work, in work, love and family. In the work edited by Zhang and Ong, the notion of privatizing China was explored by examining the accentuating role of ‘self’ in terms of the new middle class, personal property and land, the

labour market and income, and the way in which self engages with various public spheres.  

Nevertheless, the notion of rising individual/individualisation implies a stronger sense of autonomy, which runs counter to collectivism-dominated and state-oriented socialist China, which legitimises the CCP regime. To handle the various socio-economic and political conflicts largely traceable back to the impact of a market economy and growing individualisation, the CCP regime, in recent years, has re-embraced Confucianism. A return to Confucianism helps to implement the notion of a ‘harmonious’ society.

Confucianism has been transformed over time; however the notion of ‘harmony in relationship’ has not changed much. It is described as “a code of ethics and conduct, meant to guide the relationships between human beings”. The most essential relationships

[...]

are hierarchical encompassing relationships between generations, within families, between the rulers and ruled. The duty of the subordinate in these relationships is to show respect and loyalty, while the duty of the superior is to lead by setting the highest moral and intellectual standards.

Subordination to superiors in the sense of respect, loyalty and the fulfilling of duties to maintain harmony in a hierarchical society is a key to Confucianism. To attain harmony, Confucianism highly supports a hierarchic social system consisting of three political groups: ruler/nobles, local gentry/magistrates and the

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134 For more information, see Hansen and Svarverud, eds., iChina; Yan, The Individualization of Chinese Society; Zhang and Ong, eds., Privatizing China.
135 O’Malley, Culture and Industrialisation, 332.
136 Chowdhury and Islam, The Newly Industrialising Economy of East Asia, 32.
137 Heisey described Confucianism as “a discourse system that values collectivism, hierarchical relationships, high-context and indirectness.” Heisey, “Confucianism and Utilitarianism in Jiang-Clinton Rhetoric,” 133. In this article, Heisey analysed former Chinese president Jiang Zemin’s two open talks in 1998 addressing respectively the Chinese audience and the American audience. The analysis shows that Jiang’s talk highly emphasised the notion of social harmony and national solidarity, which is Confucianism-dominated. This substantiates my argument that there has been a return to Confucianism in China, politically speaking.
general people (not unlike the three-tier CCP regime of the central government, local party cadre and the general people). In Confucianism, the ruler is regarded “as the crucial intermediary or surrogate – the ‘Son of Heaven’, who alone offered sacrifice at the Temple of Heaven”. In contrast, people “were indeed Heaven’s creation, and Heaven presided over their fate and fortune in a way expressed by the Mandate of Heaven”. The superior can only be vaguely restricted by codes of morality, whereas the subordinates behave as dutiful, compliant constituents for the Mandate of Heaven in a collective sense. The agency connecting the superior and the subordinates is the local elites/magistrates, who act as “an intermediary between the ruler and the people [to] shepherd the people as their guide and teacher”.

2.4.2: State ‘Strategies’ versus Individualised ‘Tactics’ in Contemporary China

The Chinese state, in recent years, has reinforced the notion of social harmony generated from Confucianism as its ‘strategies’ to institutionalise commoners, who have gained more awareness of individualisation. Jiang Zemin, former General Secretary of the CCP as well as former President, made a public statement celebrating the Confucian notion of ‘harmony above all’. In 2005, Chinese President Hu Jintao instructed the country’s leading officials and party cadres that “building a harmonious society” should be placed at the top of the party’s agenda. In 2006, the 16th Central Committee of the CPC concluded at its sixth plenary session in Beijing that social harmony should be prioritised in order to establish a true socialist Chinese state. Consequently, the notion of ‘harmonious society’ has become a significant guideline in China to be adopted by the Chinese state as a ‘strategy’ with which to manage the nation.

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138 de Bary, *The Trouble with Confucianism*, 93.
141 The crucial section of Jiang’s speech regarding the positive cultural impact of Confucianism on China can be consulted in de Bary, *The Trouble with Confucianism*, 107-08.
142 Hu, “Building a Harmonious Society CPC’s Top Task.”
Employing the strategy of ‘building a harmonious society’, the Chinese state exercises extensive censorship in public spheres, especially on mass media platforms. Dissenting behaviour or controversial discourse in a public sphere tends to be ‘harmonised’. (Beihexie 被和諧) – that is, to be silenced by the state. It cannot be denied that Chinese citizens/netizens are permitted a certain extent of individual freedom. This freedom is permitted insofar as the political sovereignty of the CCP is not infringed, the integrity of Chinese territory is not challenged and the Confucian harmony is not altered. Any large-scale mass-mobilised movement will be perceived as infringement; open circulation of discourses against sovereignty and integrity in written forms will be likely to lead to monitoring, or political prosecution.

On the one hand, many grassroots individuals strike back by using different ‘tactics’ on the internet to counteract the strategies implemented by the CCP regime. For instance, many internet users climb over the ‘Great Fire Wall of China’ to get access to forbidden websites such as Twitter or YouTube by using VPN (Virtual Private Network) to circumvent the censorship on-line, or by using software designed to circumvent the Great Fire Wall, such as Ultrasurf. When posting messages which contain politically sensitive phrases, many users choose

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144 ‘To be harmonised’ is a popular phrase invented by Chinese netizens. Chinese netizens play with the pun to express their discontent against the State Apparatus, which is exercised for the sake of harmony. One recent example is battles between a mythical creature Chaonima (Grass Mud Horses, the pun referring to a dirty Chinese phrase) and Hexie (River Crabs, the pun for Hexie 和諧 [harmony]). In battles, Grass Mud Horses (netizens) have been mercilessly hunted down by River Crabs (State Apparatus). Wines, “A Dirty Pun Tweaks China’s Online Censors,” and “China: Censors Bar Mythical Creature.”

145 Falun Gong, for instance, has been prosecuted to demonstrate CCP’s fear of intimidation from a large-mass, grassroots movement.

146 Han Han, a soft Chinese dissident, expressed his perspectives against Shanghai World Expo on his web-blog. An entry entitled “Kuailaiba Kuazizouba” (Come soon and go soon) argued that the Expo brought in more disadvantages than the advantages which Shanghai City Hall advertised. Later, this entry was deleted by the webmaster, which many netizens believe was allegedly conducted by political authority. However, this article has been replicated widely over the internet and Chinese media outside China. The whole article can be accessed, for instance, at <http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/10/4/20/n2882671.htm>. 20 April 2010, 5 November 2010.

147 The political perspective proposed by the 2010 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize Liu Xiaobo, poses a threat to the CCP government, who regards Liu’s draft of ‘08 Constitution’, in which a multiple political party system and the notion of Federal China are suggested as an attempt to subvert state power. Liu has been in prison since 2009. Neither Liu nor his wife was allowed to attend the Nobel Prize awarding ceremony in Oslo.
to increase the spaces between words, or to use a different symbol to replace one of the Chinese characters in the phrase to ensure the message will not be deleted. Some authors, when publishing their works, avoid using sensitive Chinese phrases to evade censorship if a forbidden message is involved, such as erotic scenes. Instead, they use Pinyin to refer to the Chinese phrases which they intend to express.  

2.4.3: Resolving to Inward Goodness as a Safe Way to Co-exist with Social Harmony?

On the other hand, with only limited political and civil rights in a society in which harmony is the ultimate guideline, many Chinese people choose to follow the teachings of Mencius: “Qiong ze Dushan Qishen, Da ze Jianshan Tianxia” 窮則獨善其身，達則兼善天下 (If poor, they attended to their own virtue in solitude; if advanced to dignity, they made the whole kingdom virtuous as well), however emphasising mostly the first part, developing one’s own ‘goodness’ in everyday life. By doing so, not only can an individual dodge tampering with off-limits areas concerning public affairs, but he/she can also be ensured to live in peace and comfort within a relatively private sphere surrounding ‘I’. In the contemporary Chinese context, this ‘goodness’ is largely defined by monetary value and by its consequence, material success, which promises an easier path to fame and privilege. Many Chinese people desire this kind of ‘goodness’, which reverberates the tendency of ‘feeling good’ in China discussed previously.

Desiring the individual inward ‘goodness’ is further reinforced by the one-child policy in China. The policy, promulgated by the Chinese government in 1979, now shows its negative impact, in terms of the upbringing of the younger

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148 This way of avoiding internet censorship is discussed in a conference paper given by Michel Hockx. Hockx, “Transgressive Fiction and the Control of Internet Literature in the PRC.”

149 The translation is by James Legge. 19 February 2010 <http://ctext.org/mengzi/jin-xin-i>.

150 See pages 74-76 for the discussion.
The one-child generation is very different from the previous generation in the following ways:

Their knowledge about the past has been channelled indirectly through movies, novels, and TV drama. Their literary sensibility has been nurtured by Japanese manga. This is a generation that was fed by ‘fast food culture’ while its members were growing up. Compared with the previous generation, they are much more independent, wilful and self-centred. Their way of absorbing things is DIY. 

The independent and individualised behaviour suggests a stronger urge to be noticeably different. The one-child generation appreciates the element of Ku (the Chinese equivalent of Cool) but this element is pursued in a “safe-cool” fashion, which is interpreted as “a partygoing esprit unattended by the kind of soul-searching sought by the proponents of the new European post-subcultural movement bent on repoliticising youth culture with a carnivalesque twist”. Behaving rebelliously without being iconoclastic, to the single-generation, works as a safety net in which they can be strongly individualised, which, to some extent, is “self-indulgence”. The non-iconoclastic, self-indulgent individualisation, constituted in a highly commercial culture in present-day China, where one’s identity is heavily built upon the consumer brand one goes after, leads toward ego-centrism seeking inward goodness in the sense of being more materially and professionally successful. By doing so, ego-centrism is practised in a safety zone without touching upon sensitive socio-political issues. Moreover, being

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151 The one-child policy is part of China’s population reform scheme. It is a complicated socio-political issue which can be tackled both positively and negatively. One negative impact is that many children have been spoiled to become more egoistic. Fong articulated her observation of the growing egoistic feature among ‘singletons’ in today’s China. Fong, *Only Hope*, 154-77.

152 Wang, *Brand New China*, 204.

153 For more information about the Ku element, see Moore, “Generation Ku,” 357-76.


155 Ibid., 218.


157 Wang has an in-depth analysis of the rapidly growing significance of the notion of ‘brand’ in China in regards to establishing one’s identity in the fashion of ‘cool’. Wang, *Brand New China.*
professionally and materially successful has always been considered positive in traditional Chinese culture as the idea of Guangzong Yaozu (To Bring Honour to One’s Ancestor, to Make One’s Family Proud) is still very active today.

To sum up, under the instruction of Hu Jintao, “a new socialist situation”\textsuperscript{158} is to be created for people to “live in peace and work in comfort”\textsuperscript{159} whereas “various social ills, which are a poisonous tumour in a harmonious society”\textsuperscript{160} must be cracked down on and eliminated. The guideline for a harmonious society, a cultural heritage from Confucianism, along with the political limitation on ordinary citizens’ participation in public affairs and their exercise of certain civil rights, encourages a non-iconoclastic, self-indulgent individualisation towards ‘feeling good’ realised by self-achievement. This self-achievement, to many Chinese people, means to live a good life, have a nice job, and to make their elder family members feel proud of them. In contemporary China, they are built, not comprehensively but to a major extent, upon a monetary value system mainly due to an aggressive capitalism, commercial culture and consumer society. The more material success, the more promising it is for a person to be recognised, approved and mobilised upward in this hierarchical society without violating the guideline of a harmonious society on the surface. Whilst living a good life, landing a promising job and gaining material success are universal wishes, these notions are relatively new in the Chinese context given its vigorous communist past since 1949 when individuals were considered principally to be agents serving the greater needs of the state.

2.5: Conclusion

The media revolution is bringing together many producers and consumers into one as ‘prosumers’, who oscillate between strategies and tactics to buttress fan cultures over various platforms of media convergence. Fan cultures such as this are also promoted in China, with internet fiction as one form of fandom product. At the same time, looking into the rise of prosumerism reveals the

\textsuperscript{158} China Daily, “Harmonious Society.”
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
resurgence of Chinese individualisation from the economic reform onwards. It is presented in an inward-looking style, seeking to develop one’s ‘goodness’ that has been largely determined by monetary value. This kind of ‘goodness’ has been aspired to by many Chinese. For this reason, I suggest that this goodness be examined on a collective level through the textual analysis of internet fiction in Chapters 4 and 5.

Internet fiction is not a brand new cultural product. It consists of two major parts: the re-institutionalisation precipitated by the revolution in the media, and the texts by which fiction is represented. The re-institutionalisation of internet fiction not only redefines the relationship between producers and consumers of popular fiction as producers and consumers have gradually become one, it also provides a new mode in which the mass production and mass consumption of popular fiction is operated to bring in a new dimension to popular literature, and to commercial profit. Operated within the new mode, the way the fiction texts are presented has a strong connection with Chinese individualisation, which is constantly played out as a collective desire flowing on-line. In the next chapter, the re-institutionalisation of the Chinese internet fiction production and consumption model will be examined to clarify the dynamics between producers and consumers, and the commercial effect which the model creates.

The present chapter has mapped internet fiction from a chronological (vertical) and spatial (horizontal) perspective. The mapping also directed us towards examining the prosumerism propelled by fandom activities seamlessly associated with the rise of Chinese individualisation made possible by the advent of market economy and a consumer society. These factors not only render the re-institutionalisation of internet fiction macro-structurally but also reflect the texts of internet fiction micro-structurally.

In the next chapter, I shall continue to explore the element of the re-institutionalisation of internet fiction by examining the reconfiguration of a digital literary field on the transnational Chinese literary sphere, especially in present-day China.
Chapter Three: The Macrostructure of Internet Fiction in China – Re-institutionalising a Digital Literary Field

3.1: Introduction

In this chapter, I shall give a short history of commercial printing in China to illustrate the close links between profits and publication in popular literature. In tracing the history, I shall argue that attention, relatively speaking, overrides profit as a newer driving force to produce popular literary products in today’s China. Chinese netizens crave attention over the internet, which corresponds to the individuality/individualisation analysed in the previous chapter. Second, I shall move on to discuss the formation of the digital literary field rendered by the reciprocation between prosumerism and the Chinese model. Third, I shall discuss the impact of the Chinese model as a manufacturer to output desire commoditised through works of fiction for on-line users at the grassroots level to collectively imagine their wishes, fantasies and desires.

3.2: From Commercial Printing to Commercial Websites – A Brief History of Commercial Publishing in China

China has a long history of commercial publishing. Improvements in printing technology (xylography; movable type made from various materials; colour printing) assisted the blossoming of publishing, which met the needs of an increasing group of literati readers in exchange for commercial profits. The existence of small-scale commercial publishing can be traced back to as early as the seventh or eighth century, bearing the responsibility for printing books 300 years ahead of official governments, which did not take the initiative in printing until the tenth century during the Song dynasty. Gradually, the state superseded the private sector as the main publication provider. The book industry in China went through a decline in the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties as a result of political instability. However by the mid-Ming era, commercial printing prospered as never before. In locating the origins of commercial publishing in the

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sixteenth and seventeenth century in China, Ko has stated that the monetary economy contributed to “[…] a proliferation of social groupings that arose from societal needs rather than the imperatives of the state but also a new repertoire of principles on which these groupings were organized”.\textsuperscript{162} It was in this societal-need oriented, fluidly-commercialised environment that publishing gradually became commercialised. Publishing houses which aimed at generating a profit by selling books emerged on a more comprehensive scale. The marriage of money and book represents a crucial feature of what Ko described as a ‘cosmopolitan culture’. In this culture, “[c]ommercial publishing made books one of the myriad commodities that money could buy”.\textsuperscript{163} To vie for the attention of consumers, books “had to speak directly to the readers by serving their needs, be it edifying their minds, gratifying their sense, or instructing them in practicalities”.\textsuperscript{164} Commercial publishing played a crucial role in shaping a prospering book market serving the needs of more general consumers (educated women, for instance) in Chinese society where literati, book collectors and bibliophiles, book merchants, book shop managers and household-based printers all participated in the grand picture of commercial publishing for their share of the profits.\textsuperscript{165} The Jiangnan area (which included Nanjing) had become the centre of commercial publishing by the late Ming era.

The prosperity of commercial publishing was interrupted by the Manchu conquest because of warfare in the Jiangnan area. Nevertheless, it was also due to the resulting de-centralisation that commercial publishing would rebuild and flourish in various areas throughout China later under Manchurian rule. The geographical expansion of commercial publishing led to the proliferation of books during the Qing dynasty when the “Qing book trade, coupled with the increased prosperity and the population growth of the eighteenth century, made possible not only a broader but also a deeper dissemination of texts in social as well as

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Ibid., 41.
  \item Ibid.
  \item Ibid.
  \item McDermott, “The Ascendance of the Imprint in China,” 82.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
This proliferation lasted into the Late Qing and the Republican era when commercial publishing was transformed into ‘Chinese print capitalism’, ‘[...] the commercialized, secularized, non-governmental, and nonphilanthropic production of texts for a popular audience’. Commercial publishing continued to commoditise literary products in pursuit of profits.

Chinese commercial publishing aimed at a growing reading population (on and off) since the mid-Ming era in a cosmopolitan urban culture. Economic capital (cost) is collected and invested to produce cultural capital (books) targeting the educated sectors (i.e. the literati) – a group which is endowed with a higher socio-symbolic capital in traditional Chinese society. The production of cultural capital has for its main purpose to generate more economic capital (profit) to sustain commercial publishing. The profit gained from the commercial act flows back in the form of investment to produce more commercialised literary products.

Accompanying this commercial printing was a growing penetration rate of popular literature. Starting from the mid-Ming dynasty to the late Qing/early Republican era (the era of the Tongsu Xiaoshuo, whose features and background have been discussed in the previous chapter), popular fiction has been closely associated with the expansion of commercial printing, which is related to the prosperity of the monetary economy and a cosmopolitan culture. Popular literature, to a large extent, has been commoditised since the mid-Ming era for the purpose of mass production and mass consumption. Owing to this commoditisation, profit plays a crucial role in the production and consumption of popular literature.

I argue that today, despite sixty years of rule by the Chinese communist party, profit as a strong motivator to promote the cycle of commercial publishing

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167 Reed, Introduction, *Gutenberg in Shanghai*, 8. Reed stated that the Western printing technology introduced into China in the late Qing period induced print culture, print commerce and print capitalism in a mechanical age in late Qing China, when the reading population was roughly 90 to 110 million concentrated in urban areas. From late Qing China to the Republican era, both official non-commercial print sectors and private commercial print sectors were prosperous, but with the latter growing rapidly. The development of private sectors leads to print capitalism. *Ibid.*, 4-12.
remains mostly unchanged. Nonetheless, in regard to internet fiction, profit does not remain the most significant motivator in the landscape of commercial publishing. The boom of internet fiction substantiates the tendency that profit-oriented commercial publishing has diverted its trajectory towards a more intensive attention-oriented one. Therefore, in the next section I shall argue that attention, rather than profit, serves as an even stronger motivator in today’s world of Web 2.0,\(^\text{168}\) which “is defined by co-creativity and the idea of an equivalence or mutuality in the power relation in the generation process that allegedly erases the old divisions between ‘producers’ and ‘consumers’”.\(^\text{169}\) This definition of Web 2.0 corresponds to the prosumerism discussed in the previous chapter.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that attention has completely overridden profit on the internet. Attention (which is easily associated with marketing) and profit are like two sides of the same coin; it is impossible to separate one from the other in a mass-producing and mass-consuming society. The more attention one commodity receives, the more likely the profit which will be generated from it. Yet, the argument I attempt to raise is the extent to which attention is influential in the commercial printing tradition in China. Attention holds a relatively stronger position and is regarded as more valuable in today’s China compared with the commercial printing since the period of Imperial China, and Republican China (profit was not deemed a major factor in Communist China before the economic reform), because advances in the media, specifically the internet, makes information distribution and reception unprecedentedly synchronised around the globe. The extent to which attention is required to attract internet users has become much more important in the on-line literary transnational sphere than the commercial printing tradition since late imperial China.

\(^{168}\) The term Web 2.0, a shorthand phrase which stands for ‘The Second Internet Boom’, was initially coined by Tim O’Reilly in 2004 to describe a revolutionary phase of internet development. Beck, *Web 2.0*, 1-3.

\(^{169}\) Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant and Kelly, *New Media*, p. 208. Web 2.0 benefits on-line users who are not necessarily gurus of technology. Ordinary on-line users can easily create a space of their own on-line by the convenience of various interfaces. Flickr.com and Wordpress.org epitomise the tendency of Web 2.0, the former being an on-line photo space where users set up their interactive photo albums, whereas the latter is one of the largest open-source virtual spaces for bloggers.
3.3: Attention Economy and Prosumerism – A New Model of Desire Production and Consumption

3.3.1: Prosumerism, Attention and Profit

Attention has become a scarce resource on the internet. Nowadays, internet users often find themselves in a predicament of facing too much information, too many websites to visit and too limited time. ‘To be known’ becomes a hot topic around which websites of various kinds (as well as internet users) are vying for attention. The exploitation of photographs featuring naked female bodies to attract attention to their websites, or paparazzi who set out to expose the privacy of celebrities (interestingly another form of fandom) exemplify the intense dynamics between attention (a scarce resource) and economy capital (money and profits) in the practice of everyday life. Many on-line users, in order to attract attention, breach other people’s privacy or upload their own naked photographs.

Attention economy, originally a purely economic term to elucidate the dynamics between consumers and advertisements, has been widely applied to commercial activities on the internet. According to Davenport and Beck, attention

[...] is the real currency of business and individual [...] In postindustrial societies, attention has become a more valuable currency than the kind you store in bank accounts. The vast majority of products have become cheaper and more abundant as the sum total of human wealth increases [...] The problems for businesspeople lie on both sides of the attention equation: how to get and hold the attention of consumers, stockholders, potential employees, and the like, and how to parcel out their own attention in the face of overwhelming options. People and companies that do this, succeed. The rest fail.  

170 Davenport and Beck, The Attention Economy, 3.
The notion of an attention economy has been re-examined and applied to the internet since 1997.\footnote{Goldhaber, “The Attention Economy and the Net.”} It is attention, in lieu of money, operating as the scarce resource which everyone is eagerly after because “[m]oney flows to attention, and much less well does attention flow to money”.\footnote{Ibid.} Accordingly, on the internet “[…] individuals and small groups are relatively empowered in this medium, because if they produce a website deserving of attention, hopefully and ideally the word will spread around the Internet and lots of people’s attention will be drawn to that site”.\footnote{Gauntlett, “Web Studies,” 12.} Only by first obtaining attention can profits be generated from within, and so attention is prioritised.

Web 2.0, introduced in 2004, accelerated and enhanced the notion of prosumerism. I further argue that prosumerism can be placed in this dichotomous scheme to change the dichotomy between attention and profit into a triangular scheme. The ‘prosumerism attention economy’ portrays a new cultural production model. Prosumption, triggered by fandom, which is “particularly productive”\footnote{Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom,” 37.} in present-day popular culture and participatory culture, offers a mechanism for ordinary internet users who do not possess professional computer skills and knowledge to easily cross the borderline between producers and consumers to have their voices heard, and to extend their identities in cyberspace. Whilst creating media content, prosumers use ‘individualised tactics’\footnote{This notion goes back to Michel de Certeau’s argument on tactics and strategies discussed in Chapter 2.} to first draw attention from on-line users, rather than profit. After enough attention from the grassroots has been accumulated, the notion of profits is mostly initiated by dominant socio-economic institutional powers (because they have enough economy capital), which feed on the prosumers’ collective on-line behaviours in various virtual communities. Again, this is not to say that attention was never an important factor in commercial publishing before today; what I intend to argue is that attention has never become such a scare resource for the public until today.

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{Goldhaber, “The Attention Economy and the Net.”}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Gauntlett, “Web Studies,” 12.}
\footnote{Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom,” 37.}
\end{footnotesize}
There are basically two modes to generate profits out of prosumed media content: through commoditisation or through advertisement. Some prosumed media contents can be commoditised off-line in the market, such as works of fiction or blogger’s articles which can be commoditised into books. For those which cannot, businesses usually jump at the chance to advertise their products on a webpage on which the contents are shared to take full advantage of the high attention rate. Prosumed streaming videos exemplify the second type of profit generating mode. In the triangular model of ‘prosumerism attention economy,’ grassroots prosumers create media content attracting dominant socio-economic institutional powers for profits. Instead of creating media content to lure profits out from general consumers’ pockets, dominant institutional powers minimise their traditional role of creating media content but play the role of regulating (a system or a virtual space in which prosumers create collectively) and of supporting (in the sense of offering prosumers virtual space and technical support). An example would be YouTube, which regulates prosumed contents and provides prosumers with new interactive features without being involved in content production. In this regard, ‘tactics’ of the grassroots overtake ‘strategies’ of dominant institutional powers to reverse the conventional top-to-bottom order of cultural production. What Certeau described as ‘silent production’ is now propelled much more towards ‘loud production’.

3.3.2: Prosumerism – Towards Desire Generating?

Desire has already been closely associated with mass consumption and mass production to generate commercial profits. In post-industrial societies, mass consumption has become a way of everyday life where the “capitalist process of producing […] was a fusion of expressed, popular desire and the powerful ability to replicate that materialization in a mass-produced, mass-marketed form”. The ideology of mass consumption, aiming at “promoting the limitlessness of desires to be satisfied by commodities”, in fact is “disseminated by an all-pervasive

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mass media [...]”.

In mass culture, mass commoditisation objectifies general consumers’ desire into concrete forms for profit-exchange because “commodities are the bearers of desire, they can be read as expressions of the forces that shaped and became embodied in them”. The notion of mass commoditisation has been extended into areas hitherto untouched by commoditisation in the practice of everyday life in the twenty-first century.

Prosumerism brings a new dimension to mass commoditisation. It can be observed that the extreme popularity of some prosumed media contents is not necessarily translated into monetary value. Yet they set a trend to engage other on-line users, a thriving proportion of whom are encouraged to take on the role of prosumers to create their ‘products’. Once the prosumed contents are collectively regulated under one specific model, the model, most likely, generates profits. The commercialisation of the model usually diverges into two types of commercial pattern of commodity and advertisement. Either way, prosumerism is tightly engaged with the notion of mass commoditisation.

In post-industrial societies, mass commoditisation was traditionally implemented from the top down before the advent of the internet. Dominant socio-economic institutional powers – NBC or Disney, for instance – are in charge of production to meet the needs, and most importantly, to objectify the desire of individuals so that their purchasing behaviour will be aroused. Now, however, prosumerism challenges that tradition to light up a path for institutional powers towards commercial profits by the attention which prosumers successfully pull in due to the prosumed media contents. Subsequently, institutional powers usually are engaged with the model in which prosumers are constantly recruited, regulated and supported by the model.

Whether attention or profit, desire is highly involved with instigating prosumerism in a triangular relationship. Prosumers, in pursuit of attention on the internet, produce media contents which catch people’s attention. Prosumers, who begin with a notion of ‘I’, are disposed to produce media contents surrounding

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179 Thompson, *Punk Production*, 6.
what they are most familiar with – their wishes, desires or fantasies – as a way for other on-line users to be easily associated with. It cannot be denied that the notion of producing media content targeted at the wishes, desires and fantasies of the grassroots is nothing new in advertising and marketing. Nonetheless the ‘loud production’ predominated by prosumers, arguably, reflects their wishes, desires and fantasies more precisely and straightforwardly. Grassroots prosumers are empowered by the internet not only to produce but also to replicate popular media content at high speed. The reproduction of desire through media content sets in motion the ‘prosumed attention economy’ moving forward to repeat its cycle of prosumed content – attention – profit.

3.4: Qidian – A New Chinese Model of Production and Consumption

The ‘prosumed attention economy’ trichotomy permeates on-line communities to constitute a different model for prosumerism. One fully-fledged and frequently-replicated model that has emerged in China is Qidian Shanda. The Qidian Shanda model will be examined through the notion of agents and institutions – two crucial elements in Bourdieu’s literary field – to reveal the ways in which and the extent to which the literary practice on the internet has been reconfigured. The examination will be based on the notion of prosumers as the core. Whereas traditionally authors, editors and publishers are directly involved with the literary production, with booksellers and readers at the reception end in a paper-based publishing business, prosumers – Qidian users – have been centralised into the core of production as publishers, and editors are gradually being edged out. Booksellers remain much the same at the later stage of the reception line to bridge the gap between physical books and readers. The reconfiguration of the ‘digital’ literary field will also be discussed.

First, I shall analyse the different roles assumed by prosumers from the basic notion of authors and readers to dissect the ways in which they are

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180 Although it seems controversial to refer to Qidian users as prosumers (given the number of visitors and the works actually published on Qidian), I am convinced that all Qidian users are potential prosumers. Even though many of them may not try to create literary works, they are enthusiastic about offering feedback and participating in discussion, assuming the role of book critics. This is why I insist on referring to Qidian users generally as prosumers.
integrated into the production core, the extent to which authors and readers overlap to lead to prosumerism on the internet, and the ways in which mediators have been reallocated to the outskirts of the production core.

3.4.1: Agents and Institutions Re-positioned in a Digital Literary Field – Centralised Prosumers and De-centralised Mediators

As a stark contrast to the ordeal of having literary works published faced by new authors who had neither Guanxi 關係 (Social Networking) nor membership of any literary societies, and who had no established fame as writers during the Republican Chinese era, the prosumers of popular fiction must have found it to be pleasantly easy to have their works published in the on-line Chinese literary sphere. Qidian, as well as many other literary portal websites (or weblogs) offers a space for prosumers to create and publish their works of fiction. The disappearing borderline between authors and readers has led to the rise of prosumers, who assume various roles in the core production.

3.4.1.1: Readership in Prosumers

Upgrading one’s status from an ordinary on-line user who is limited to database searching and browsing, and consuming portions of literary commodities, to a potential prosumer who can participate in the production of a literary commodity along with other social networking functions, has never been easier. The difference lies in a free registered account known as Shengda Tongxingzheng 盛大通行證 (Shengda Pass) on Shanda Qidian.

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181 It was usually difficult for new writers during the Republic Chinese era to have their works published. Without belonging to literary groups or societies (which means that they had no social networking to rely on), new writers often found their works to be constantly rejected by literary journals and magazines during that period. Hockx, “Theory as Practice,” 232-33.

182 A ‘free sample’ portion for a Qidian account holder is usually around 150,000 to 250,000 words. Reading beyond the portion requires the consumption of Qidian virtual currency, which stands at 1 RMB to 100 Qidian Virtual Currency. Without upgrading one’s account to VIP status, a book friend needs to spend 15 Qidian Virtual Currency to consume one single chapter. If the book friend upgrades his/her account to VIP (which is further separated into preliminary VIP account and advanced VIP account), a much cheaper reading rate will be granted. For a preliminary VIP member, the consumption rate is 0.03 RMB per thousand words; for an advanced VIP member, the rate is 0.02 RMB per thousand words. 11 July 2012 <http://www.qidian.com/Help/vipshenqin.aspx>. VIP status will be briefly examined in the upcoming sections.
A registered account enables an on-line user to move back and forth freely between a public literary space (the homepage of Qidian) and a private sphere (a designated virtual space of one’s own with membership, see Figure 8). The notion of a virtual private space is somehow similar to that of a social networking website, such as Facebook, where a registered member is allocated a private space. In that private space, the potential prosumer is offered a variety of interactive features to individualise his/her space. Generally speaking, a Qidian prosumer can conduct two types of activity: literature-related activities and non-literature related ones.\footnote{Non-literature-oriented features such as game-playing, merchandise-exchange or purchasing constitute the grand picture of Shanda Qidian’s business model of marketing and profit-generating. These features will be briefly examined in the section discussing publishers.}

To perform the literary-related interactive features to the fullest, a prosumer, in his/her space, has the following options: to browse and search for the preferred literary texts via Qidian’s database; to vote for one’s preferred works of literature\footnote{See section 1.5.3 in Chapter 1 for the voting methods.} (this function requires Qidian currency); to offer feedback and criticism on works published on Qidian; to tidy one’s ‘virtual’ bookshelf and library based on one’s favourite works on Qidian; to share one’s reading habit by organising a book or readers’ club; and to start any topic for public discussion, ranging from gossip concerning authors to political debates. Last but not least, a prosumer can apply to become an author.


A registered account enables an on-line user to move back and forth freely between a public literary space (the homepage of Qidian) and a private sphere (a designated virtual space of one’s own with membership, see Figure 8). The notion of a virtual private space is somehow similar to that of a social networking website, such as Facebook, where a registered member is allocated a private space. In that private space, the potential prosumer is offered a variety of interactive features to individualise his/her space. Generally speaking, a Qidian prosumer can conduct two types of activity: literature-related activities and non-literature related ones. A registered account enables an on-line user to move back and forth freely between a public literary space (the homepage of Qidian) and a private sphere (a designated virtual space of one’s own with membership, see Figure 8). The notion of a virtual private space is somehow similar to that of a social networking website, such as Facebook, where a registered member is allocated a private space. In that private space, the potential prosumer is offered a variety of interactive features to individualise his/her space. Generally speaking, a Qidian prosumer can conduct two types of activity: literature-related activities and non-literature related ones. To perform the literary-related interactive features to the fullest, a prosumer, in his/her space, has the following options: to browse and search for the preferred literary texts via Qidian’s database; to vote for one’s preferred works of literature (this function requires Qidian currency); to offer feedback and criticism on works published on Qidian; to tidy one’s ‘virtual’ bookshelf and library based on one’s favourite works on Qidian; to share one’s reading habit by organising a book or readers’ club; and to start any topic for public discussion, ranging from gossip concerning authors to political debates. Last but not least, a prosumer can apply to become an author.

The interactive literary features equip members to move efficiently between readers and authors. The Qidian webpage offers a simplified flowchart of five steps to obtain readership: Zhuce – Yuedu – Chongzhii – Shengji – Dingyue 注冊 – 閱讀 – 充值 – 升級 – 订阅 (Registration – Read – Top-up – VIP Upgrade – Subscription). However, a prosumer can do much more than that after obtaining an account. Apart from searching and consuming his/her preferred text, a prosumer can oversee the process of production by actively participating in criticism, suggestion and feedback, most of which will be

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\footnote{Non-literature-oriented features such as game-playing, merchandise-exchange or purchasing constitute the grand picture of Shanda Qidian’s business model of marketing and profit-generating. These features will be briefly examined in the section discussing publishers.}

\footnote{See section 1.5.3 in Chapter 1 for the voting methods.}

centralised in a sector entitled Pingba 評吧 (Cyber Salon of Book Criticism, Reviews and Feedback; Cybersalon hereafter).\textsuperscript{186}

Upon finishing a portion of reading on Qidian, a prosumer is welcome to click an icon ‘Canyu Benshu Taolun’ 參與本書討論 (Participate in Discussion of This Book) at the bottom of the page which displays the literary text, and be redirected to Cybersalon to publicise his/her opinions. Topics ranging from typographical mistakes to severe criticism against the whole work are allowed unless public concern is raised to ask for the intervention of the webmaster. Given the significance of the opinions and the active participation of readers,\textsuperscript{187} authors usually highly value the overall reaction of readers. After all, the attention index emitted from readers is a main concern of an author who is contending against other authors across the portal websites.

\textsuperscript{186} Cybersalon is located at <http://cybersalon.qidian.com>. Qidian encourages its readers to take advantage of this function to help authors improve their works. A slogan of Cybersalon ‘Wupinglun, Budushu’ 無評論, 不讀書 (No Criticism, No Reading), obviously encourages readers’ active participation. This is a scheme by which Qidian largely outsources its editorial workload to readers. Having stated that, this does not mean that readers can comprehensively take over the role of editors. The issue of a minimised editorship will be examined in the section on mediators.

\textsuperscript{187} Two popular works on Qidian illustrate the situation. \textit{Fanren Xianxiu Zhuan} 凡人仙修傳 (From Everyman to Demigod) has instigated 310,884 relevant topics for discussion. The total number of the messages posted on this discussion forum reaches up to 2,382,648. 4 December 2010 <http://forum.qidian.com/bookforumnew.aspx?BookId=107580>. \textit{Panlong 盤龍} (Coiled Dragon) has stirred up 217, 392 relevant discussion topics, with total message amounting to 673,871. 4 December 2010 <http://forum.qidian.com/bookforumnew.aspx?BookId=1017141>. 
Figure 8: The Designated Private Space with a Qidian Account
Apart from receiving the new job of becoming ‘outsourced editors’, the reader’s traditional role as an end consumer at whom attention index and profit are targeted remains basically unchanged. Nevertheless, readers can ‘earn’ benefits by their active participation, instead of only through purchasing behaviours. Once holding a free registered account, a reader is actively encouraged to upgrade his/her status. The status can go from a paid register account (hereafter ‘preliminary VIP account’), ultimately to a special VIP account (hereafter ‘advanced VIP account’) through top-up and through heavy consumption of literary commodities plus active feedback on Cybersalon by earning credits from Qidian Shanda as a reward for a reader’s active participation in consuming commodities and sharing his/her opinions. As long as a reader does an excellent job as an active consumer and as an editor, a special VIP account is just around the corner waiting for readers to earn.

To top-up into a registered account is easy, via a mobile phone, an ATM machine, or just over the internet using a credit card. The top-up value will be converted into Qidian virtual currency standing at the exchange rate of 0.01 RMB to one Qidian currency. A preliminary VIP account holder is offered more interactive features to compose on Cybersalon and to consume VIP chapters. However, if one willingly tops up more, or enthusiastically takes part in Cybersalon and massively consumes VIP sections of literary commodities of any kind, a user can be promoted from a preliminary VIP to an advanced VIP. As an advanced VIP account holder, one can extensively engage in almost all the interactive features on Qidian, consuming literary commodities at a cheaper rate, and exchanging commercial goods or playing games at a lower rate. Moving from being a free account holder to becoming an advanced VIP member, a reader

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188 See footnotes 56 and 57 for a description of VIP status, which is further divided into preliminary VIP and advanced VIP. Further detail can be consulted at <http://www.qidian.com/Help/vipshenqin.aspx>.

189 It is worth noting that prosumers from around the world can top-up using various methods (for example, Qidian has set up a top-up zone accepting New Taiwan Dollars). This suggests that Qidian is apparently targeting prosumers in a transnational Chinese literary sphere. Jinjiang Literary City, one affiliated portal website to Shanda Qidian, offers PayPal as a payment option.

190 Anonymous, “Erfenqian Wenxue de Chunchun Yudong” 二分錢文學的蠢蠢欲動 (The Budding of the Two Cent Literature).
not only manifests his/her enthusiasm supporting the virtual literary commodities as a consumer, but also demonstrates his/her potential for in-depth participation in Cybersalon as an editor.

3.4.1.2: Authorship in Prosumers

Apart from the on-line activities engaging criticism, feedback and other social networking behaviours, Qidian members can apply to become authors. Those who compose internet literature are also commonly known as Xieshou (Writing Hands). This term suggests that the output volume of many writers is high, but is not necessarily translated into adequate quality as a literary text. The standard by which the quality of an author is assessed is not necessarily lower, but it is definitely looser. For anyone who is interested in telling a story, he/she simply submits an on-line application, which is described by Qidian as an easy four-step process: Shenqing Zuozhe – Fabiao Zuopin – Shenqing Qianyue – Huode Gaochou (Applying to Become an Author – Publishing One’s Original Work – Proposing and Agreeing to Contracts-signing with Qidian – Being Rewarded with Author Payment and Royalties). Nonetheless, in reality, the initial two stages are relatively easier than the latter two stages.

To begin the path towards authorship, a prosumer only needs to send a request to the webmaster. Afterwards, the ‘author’s corner’, already present in one’s private space, will be activated. The applicant is required to upload a writing sample – the first few chapters of his/her work consisting of a maximum of 5,000 words – within forty-eight hours (the ‘corner’ will be de-activated either when no activity in the ‘corner’ is detected within forty-five days following the activation, or when the quality of the work submitted is too low to be granted the chance for publication). The applicant will receive notification of whether the work will be published or not. The 5,000 words will be reviewed by Qidian.

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191 The tips are offered on Qidian homepage. 4 December 2010 <www.qidian.com>.
192 There are no clear statistics about the ‘passing rate’ from readers to authors. However, it can be assumed that the passing rate could be high given the rapidly growing number of literary works published on Qidian.
editors. Once authorship is granted to someone, Qidian editors withdraw mostly from supervising the new author’s work, presumably because of understaffing, partially due to the marketing strategy to let prosumers tell their stories, unless special circumstances arise.\textsuperscript{193} This overseeing job will be continued by fervent prosumers, whose public opinions flowing in Cybersalon help to scrutinise the ongoing process of text production in all its aspects.

The granting of authorship means that autonomy is placed mainly in the hands of authors. The only counterbalance is generated from their readers’ participation. Editors and publishers will neither approach an author to rush the arrival of the next chapter (which used to be part of an editor’s job description), nor will they halt the serialisation (again, unless special circumstances occur).\textsuperscript{194} This job of pushing forward new chapters has been absolutely outsourced to readers.\textsuperscript{195}

Notwithstanding the pressure from readers, an author is entirely in control of his/her writing process. He/she can choose to revise, to delete any chapters, or even to stop serialisation any time, unlike their Republican predecessors who often were required to create serial instalments to pre-set deadlines. In addition, an author is allowed to publish as many works of creation as possible

\textsuperscript{193} There are generally two circumstances in which editors will presumably resume their role of reviewing a text: one is when a public concern is raised through peer censorship such as issues of plagiarism or guideline-breaching regarding a piece (or a section) of work being reported; the other circumstance is when an author makes a request to sign a contract with Qidian. In this case, editors will review his/her written works, ensuring that the works meet specific writing standards before a contract is signed. Other than these two circumstances, editors generally assume a more passive role.

\textsuperscript{194} One special case of the editors’ intervention is relevant to Romance, which will be briefly discussed in Chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{195} There is no specific rule to indicate how frequently an author is supposed to renew his/her works. Authors, however, are fully aware that the more frequently a piece of work is renewed, the more likely it is that readers will be attracted to the work. To outsource the job of pushing forward new chapters from authors and editors to readers, Qidian has devised a system of Gengxin Piao 更新票 (Renewal Ballot). Anyone who is not satisfied with the renewal speed of a serial work can use the Renewal Ballot system to urge new chapters to be produced. One ballot stands for the demand of 3,000 word renewal, one reader can cast four ballots at most. Each ballot will cost 100 Qidian virtual currency. If the author renews the number of words readers demand in the next 24 hours, he/she will be rewarded with credits into his/her account in proportion to the ballots submitted to urge for the renewal. Otherwise the renewal ballot will be returned to readers for them to use in future occasions. 4 December 2010 <http://big5.qidian.com/help/gengxin.aspx>. 
Moreover, authors have the absolute autonomy to decide what genre/subgenre their works will be categorised under. Once a work has been categorised, the author is strongly advised that the work’s category should remain unchanged. Last but not least, authors are marketers as well. Upon publishing, authors should put together an abstract of their work (not more than 400 words), carefully providing several keywords closely relevant to their work for search purposes. Authors normally know that this is where self-promotion/self-marketing lies. So the book abstract and the keywords must be eye-catching and directed straight to the basic desire(s) of readers in order to attract readers.

Authors are granted high levels of autonomy and freedom, which, unfortunately, is not necessarily translated into high income. Authors are seemingly rewarded by payment made according to the number of words an author publishes on Qidian, along with the royalties from copyrights and future franchises. Nevertheless, this is not as easy as is suggested on the 1-2-3 flowchart of becoming an author with Qidian. To receive payment from Qidian, authors need to choose whether they are operating on a contract basis with Qidian or not. Only authors whose works amount to 100,000 words and have been simultaneously. Qidian has a rule requiring that there should be a gap in word number between two works by one author. An author can publish as many literary works as he/she wishes only if the gap in word number between works remains at least 20,000 words.


Only extremely popular works of fiction will receive the chance to gain royalties from paper-based publication and franchises. Qidian indicates that the total number of works of fiction having been released in book form is merely around forty. 4 December 2010 <http://www.qidian.com/Help/qianyue.aspx>. Since this number has not been updated on the official website, we can assume the number of forty does not necessarily reflect the current situation. Even though without the latest number of works being published in book format, it can be safely assumed that the number must be rather low in proportion to the actual number of works of fiction flowing on Qidian, given that the cumulative number of literary works published on Qidian has been rapidly expanding (from almost 500,000 by 3 March 2011 to more than 600,000 works in early July 2011).

This is not to say that any work will qualify. Prose, poetry and finished works of fiction previously unpublished through Qidian do not qualify for the contract-based scheme. 4 December 2010 <http://www.qidian.com/Help/qianyue.aspx>.

In 2010, Qidian revised its royalty calculation system to reward authors with higher income. Qidian claims that as long as an author can keep his/her work to be subscribed by no fewer than 1,000 prosumers, a minimum ‘monthly’ wage of 1,500 RMB will be guaranteed. Of course, the more subscriptions there are, the higher the wage will be. Aside from the minimum wage, authors can also receive benefits in different forms. More detail can be consulted at <http://www.qidian.com/Help/qianyue.aspx>.

196 Qidian has a rule requiring that there should be a gap in word number between two works by one author. An author can publish as many literary works as he/she wishes only if the gap in word number between works remains at least 20,000 words.


198 Only extremely popular works of fiction will receive the chance to gain royalties from paper-based publication and franchises. Qidian indicates that the total number of works of fiction having been released in book form is merely around forty. 4 December 2010 <http://www.qidian.com/Help/qianyue.aspx>. Since this number has not been updated on the official website, we can assume the number of forty does not necessarily reflect the current situation. Even though without the latest number of works being published in book format, it can be safely assumed that the number must be rather low in proportion to the actual number of works of fiction flowing on Qidian, given that the cumulative number of literary works published on Qidian has been rapidly expanding (from almost 500,000 by 3 March 2011 to more than 600,000 works in early July 2011).

199 This is not to say that any work will qualify. Prose, poetry and finished works of fiction previously unpublished through Qidian do not qualify for the contract-based scheme. 4 December 2010 <http://www.qidian.com/Help/qianyue.aspx>.
exclusively published on Qidian will be considered towards a contract basis once an author applies for it. Even so, signing a contract does not guarantee a profitable income. The payment made to authors seems to be low. The income relies heavily on several factors: (1) the hits that a piece of work receives – the higher the number of hits a piece of work receives, a specific rate of payment, in accordance with the hits received, will be allocated to authors; (2) the number of VIP members who subscribe to the upcoming chapters of a work – the more one work is subscribed to, a specific rate of payment will be made to authors based on the subscription rate; (3) the number of readers who are willing to pay to read a VIP chapter as a non-subscriber – a proportion of the reading rate of per thousand words goes to authors; and (4) how much readers willingly ‘tip’ an author for a nicely-performed job.

On Qidian, a public broadcasting system placed in the top left corner of Qidian will show, in real time, how much a reader tips an author for a satisfactory job. In other words, authors endeavour to keep the readers’ attention to gain profits, if that was their purpose in applying to become an author with Qidian in the first place. Otherwise, they can take time and comfort over releasing their works, without considering the factor of profits at all, to simply fulfil their sense of self-satisfaction as a writer. Either situation harks back to the notion of attention as a more significant factor in the on-line Chinese literary sphere.

http://www.qidian.com/help/qianyue.aspx. Nevertheless, this new royalty calculation system only works with authors who have successfully signed a contract with Qidian. There is a long road from being an ordinary author to becoming an author who can successfully sign a contract with Qidian.

Interestingly, Qidian specifies how the model works in lengthy detail but not the payment made to authors who agree to enter contract-based status. It is vaguely mentioned that the payment is made differently from contract to contract; some successful authors have been rewarded by as much as up to 100 RMB per thousand words. 4 December 2010 <http://www.qidian.com/help/qianyue.aspx>. However, it seems that the ‘standardised’ payment to authors is 0.02 RMB per thousand words. Anonymous, “Erfenqian Wenxue de Chunchu Yudong” 二分錢文學的蠢蠢欲動 (The Budding of the Two Cent Literature).

This is a new scheme devised by Qidian to encourage readers to tip their favourite authors for a satisfying chapter. By doing so, Qidian transfers part of their paying obligation to readers. This scheme also smartly encourages prosumers to use Qidian virtual currency so that more top-up will be needed.

The public broadcasting system also functions as a marketing and social networking device. Marketing messages to inform prosumers of special promotions, activities or social networking messages such as wishing someone happy birthday can be broadcast through this system.
The relationship between authors and readers, two crucial agents (the former as the original literary text provider with the latter as the ultimate consumer of the literary commodity) in a digital literary field, has been modified by a number of features precipitated by the internet gravitating towards the tendency of prosumerism, guided by attention-seeking. Their relationship has become closer to the core of production where readers are outsourced with responsibilities as editors and censors. They are encouraged to get involved with the process of production by voicing their opinions, and by being provided with financial reward. Authors, on the other hand, are regulated more by Qidian because of the rules which they have to abide by. Nevertheless, this is not to say that authors aim for approval by Qidian. Given the fact that authors are not generously rewarded by Qidian, and readers can have a strong voice about any works on Qidian, authors are fully aware of the significance of readers to them.

Thus far, I have examined the significance of readers’ attention and the extent to which authors and readers cooperate to be integrated into the core of production of literary texts. While prosuming works of fiction on the internet has been becoming a tendency, other agents in a literary field where paper-based literary works are the cultural product have been repositioned and their functions have been modified. In terms of the repositioning of agents, the roles of publishers, editors, booksellers, authors and readers will be examined in the next section to exemplify the ways in which that repositioning takes place.

3.4.2: The De-centralisation of Mediators of Agents/Institutions – Publishers (Publishing Companies), Printers (Printing Houses), Editors, and Booksellers (Bookstores)

Commercial publishers, \(^{203}\) printers, \(^{204}\) editors and booksellers \(^{205}\) are mediators of agents and institutions which have indispensably operated between

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\(^{203}\) There is a blurred line between publishers (the agent) and publishing companies (the institution), both of which are crucial elements in a literary field. Therefore, I combine the discussion of the agents and the institution they pertain to into this section for an overall discussion of their decentralisation and reformulation.

\(^{204}\) The term ‘printer’ is used to refer to the agent, whereas ‘printing house’ is used to refer to the institution.
authors and readers in a paper-based publishing business. As a literary commodity, the text of a popular literary work will have come under various forms of scrutiny before it hits its market. A piece of text will be created and revised by its author, proofread with suggested changes or censored by editors before the text goes through several institutions (printing, publication, delivery service, bookstores/educational institutes/libraries) to eventually be approached by readers. Marketing strategies such as promotion and advertising are also involved to make the literary commodity popular enough to generate economic capital to support the institutions and agents in a literary field to produce and promote cultural capital.

Before the advent of the internet, authors and readers were like two ends of a production line with mediators coming in between. Nowadays, they are like two merging bodies overlapping one with the other because of the internet. Conversely, the role of mediators has been reformulated because of the prosumerism percolating on-line. The issue of the reformulated mediators’ role can be tackled by examining publishers, printers, editors and booksellers one by one.

3.4.2.1: Publishers

The role of a publisher has been described as “the boss” of the publishing business, “the power behind the throne”, who “must give the lead […] and must co-ordinate, guide, support, counsel, coach and inspire […]”. However, the digital trend redefines the dominant role of a publisher. As the leading figure in publishing, a commercial publisher has to be versatile in making publishing a sustainable or profitable business model. To achieve this goal, he/she usually assumes multiple roles, which I generalise as follow: provider (providing economic capital to recruit appropriate agents and equipment),

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205 The term ‘bookseller’ is used to refer to the agent; ‘book store’ is used to refer to the institution.
206 Wharton, “The Publisher’s Role,” 12.
207 Ibid.
208 Ibid.
209 The diminishing role of the publisher has already instigated academic discussion. See, for example, Borgman, “Books Bytes and Behaviour.”
coordinator (coordinating between agents and institutions to work towards one goal), decider (determining what to publish, what tasks to prioritise), regulator (censoring issues and regulating other agents), and marketer (promoting literary commodities independently or through cooperation with booksellers). These five roles overlap one another to a greater or lesser extent.

On literary portal websites such as Qidian, publishers still assume these five roles, but the roles have been performed in a technical-oriented and profit-driven fashion, except for the role of coordinator, which remains much the same in terms of making different agents and institutions under the business model cooperate together. To begin with the role of a provider, on-line publishers still provide economic capital, a large proportion of which is used to recruit new agents – such as computer engineers – to offer technical support over server running, webpage maintenance and new on-line interactive features which are added. In this regard, the on-line publishers’ role as a provider is closer to the sense of a technical supporter who offers prosumers an up-to-date virtual environment in which they feel comfortable producing and consuming literary commodities, and exercising their presumptive autonomy in different roles.

The role of a regulator and a decider, both of which used to be closely associated with the production of a piece of literary text, have been minimised on the internet. Publishers do not have the final say about what literary commodities to produce since the decision lies with prosumers. Conversely, publishers are tolerant toward prosumers, allowing almost anything to be created on their websites (as long as the national censorship is not breached) based on two practical reasons: first, literary commodities can be prosumed without the cost of traditional publishing and printing in a much shorter time; second, with a voluminous flow of prosumed literary texts pouring in, on-line publishers presumably do not have enough manpower to evaluate the market potential of each piece of work.\(^\text{210}\)

\(^{210}\) The average number of prosumers applying to become authors on a daily basis on Qidian was, according to the following source, 1,100. Anonymous, “Erfanqian Wenxue de Chunchun Yudong” 二分錢文學的蠢蠢欲動 (The Budding of the Two Cent Literature). The statistics,
Apart from the practical reasons, the priority on Qidian’s overall agenda, similar to all commercial publishers throughout Chinese history, is to generate profit, which will only be gained by fiercely contending with all other similar literary portal websites and maintaining its market-leading advantage.\(^{211}\) By observing the popularity ranking, on-line publishers easily learn towards which type, or what popular works of fiction the grassroots attention has been redirected. The prosumers’ attention becomes the best index for on-line publishers to determine which works to publish in book format later. Moreover, the prosumers’ attention illuminates a path leading to other forms of franchise for a solid share of profit. So on-line publishers are more concerned about the management of the portal website and the output of quantity, and arguably less concerned about the quality-control of the literary commodity.\(^{212}\)

In drafting guidelines and making rules, on-line publishers appear to play the dominant figure of a regulator and a decider. However, the content of guidelines and rules can be divided into two areas: state security and copyright issues. For state security, publishers comply with PRC State Council Order (No. 292) issued by the central government.\(^{213}\) Since 2000, the Chinese government has generated a list of forbidden content for on-line publication, namely pornographic or politically sensitive materials. In accordance with the state order, although taken a year ago, show the difficulty of evaluating the market potential of each piece of work, given the high volume of works submitted.

\(^{211}\) Qidian, in convincing advertisers to cooperate, claims that its current market penetration rate has reached 80%: 10% of the remaining 20% market penetration rate is shared among other literary portal websites affiliated to Shanda Qidian, such as Jingjian Literary City and Perfumed Red Sleeves. The remaining 10% is shared by all other similar literary portal websites independent from Shanda Qidian. 5 December 2010 <http://www.qidian.com/aboutus/ads/default.html>.

\(^{212}\) A piece of advice to new writers is offered on the Qidian author login page. The adviser, clarifying him/herself as a Qidian editor, suggests a list of factors contributing to ‘the popularity’ of a text. They are (in the order of importance): plot, high frequency to produce a new chapter, characters, and rhetoric/language. This editor of this advice depicts internet readers as the most tolerant readers who are not meticulous about typographical mistakes or inconsistencies in plot/story detail. They only need a smooth story to satisfy their little daydreams and fantasies, without caring much for artistic achievement. In this regard, internet readers are extremely easily satisfied. Anonymous, “Wangluo Shangye Xiezuo Xinshou Zhinan zhi Dagang Sheding” 網絡商業寫作新手指南之大綱設定 (How to Work out an Outline for Your Work: Guidelines for the Newbie to Internet Fiction).

\(^{213}\) State Council of PRC, “Zhongguo Hulian Wangluo Xinxi Guanli Banfa” 中國互聯網絡信息管理辦法 (Administration of Internet Information Procedures).
Qidian reminds users at the bottom of their homepage that it is imperative that every user abide by the order, otherwise any messages posted will be removed, and membership revoked. Even so, Qidian is constantly under fire being accused of circulating pornographic and violent texts, despite its efforts to carry out the state council order, which largely corroborates the previous assumption of Qidian’s understaffed status.

As far as the issue of intellectual property rights is concerned, Qidian declares that it owns the copyright of all the works published on its platform, but plagiarism and piracy permeate the internet. The pressure imposed by plagiarism and piracy not only resides outside Qidian, but also derives from within. As a somehow weak state council order executor and copyright protector, Qidian, therefore, depends on prosumers to adhere to the guidelines and rules. The way to attain that is through peer censorship of prosumers to report

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214 Recently, a news programme aired on CCTV financial channel openly accused Shanda Qidian of promoting pornographic and violent texts as Shanda’s extreme marketing strategy for profits. This programme demanded the intervention of the central government. Anonymous, “Shengda Wenxue Shehuangmen, Qidian Jinjiang Miaoxie Seqing Baoli”盛大文學涉黃門, 起點晉江描寫色情暴力 (Shanda Literature is Allegedly Involved with Pornography: Popular Works on Qidian and Jinjiang Deliver Contents of Porno and Violence). This is not the first time Shanda has been under suspicion of breaching State Council No. 292.

215 Many on-line users copy and paste original works on Qidian (including VIP chapters) on a multitude of discussion forums, BBS or portal websites. Using Xielongdao 邪龍道 (The Way of Evil Dragon), an extremely popular Qidian fiction, as a keyword search on Baidu generated 1,500,000 matching outcomes. Many matching outcomes indicate that this fiction can be fully accessed on many different websites or discussion forums other than Qidian for free. 5 December 2010 <http://www.baidu.com/s?wd=%D0%B0%FD%88%B5%C0%C8%AB%C4>C. Recently, the Copyright Society of China issued a strong statement supporting the legal action taken by Qidian against Baidu, because Baidu, for a long time, has tacitly permitted its users to circulate literary works from various internet portal websites, including Qidian. This behaviour compromises the copyrights of the authors and the portal websites to which they belong. Zhongguo Wenzi Zhuzuoquan Xiehui 中國文字著作權協會 (China Written Works Copyright Society), “Zhongguo Wenzi Zhuzuoquan Xiehui Shengming” 中國文字著作權協會聲明 (Official Announcement from China Written Works Copyright Society).

216 Qidian, arguably, is not impeccable in regard to its record of intellectual property right protection. An author filed a charge against Qidian, claiming that Qidian intentionally appropriated the title of his popular internet fiction to confuse readers on the internet. Anonymous, “Wangluo Xiaoshuo ‘Luofu’ Zuoze Wanghui Qisu Qidian Zhongwenwang” 網絡小說‘羅浮’ 作者王輝起訴起點中文網 (Wang Hui, the Author of the Internet Fiction ‘Luofu’, Pressed a Charge Against Qidian Chinese Net). One paper-based publisher complained that users on Qidian download their publication without legal authorisation. Anonymous, “Shehuangmen Yubo Weiliao, Shengda Youxian Daobanmen” 涉黃門餘波未了, 盛大又陷盜版門 (Not Quite Stepping Out of the Allegation of Pornography, Shanda is Now Trapped in the Accusation of Illegal Copyright Piracy).
any works breaching the state council order, violating copyright or committing plagiarism. Even though limited by actual manpower, the liability which Qidian strategically outsources to prosumers not only consists of producers/consumers and attention indexers, but also helps them with the role of regulating and decision-making in managing the literary portal website to ensure the integrity of the virtual community.

Contrary to the minimised role of a regulator and a decider, the on-line publishers’ role as marketer has grown enormously. Beneath the growth lies the overwhelming bombardment of the user with on-line advertisements, along with the rapid and large-scale enfranchisement of literary commodities which a literary portal website carries. Advertisements are manifested on the same page where readers consume their preferred literary texts to impress readers with non-literary commodities. Even though publishers do not have much of the final say on literary texts, they do have much to claim on the franchising of literary commodities, such as the right to adapt them into on-line games or movies. Large-scale literary portal websites, such as Qidian, have their own economic capital to dominate the rights to franchise the literary commodities prosumed on their websites, whereas other smaller-scale portal websites choose to collaborate with other businesses for a profit share from the enfranchisement. Whether by advertisement or franchise, whether through domination or cooperation, on-line publishers come up with new marketing strategies to expand their businesses into other areas and promote the literary commodities.

Qidian is one of the earliest of these websites to bring literary commodities into the next phase by their introduction of virtual currency. Virtual currency is nothing new in the on-line game sector, but it is a relatively new idea introduced into the on-line literature sector. Qidian, on the one hand, promotes the virtual currency system with the intention of converting as much free membership as possible into VIP membership (at the point of writing, one out of

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217 A list of internationalised famous brand manufacturers and merchandise providers cooperating with Qidian can be consulted at <http://www.qidian.com/aboutus/ads/client.html>, 15 December 2010.
every twelve registered members is a VIP); on the other hand, Qidian, using its high market saturation rate and versatility, aims at attracting more advertisers to use the Qidian platform as a showcase for their products. Qidian initiates strategies to link the notion of virtual currency with consumers’ physical products (well-known enterprises such as McDonald’s). Marketing strategies such as encouraging prosumers to purchase consumer goods by using their account credits, many of which can be earned through Qidian currency top-up and other credit-rewarding schemes, are set out.

Literary commodities are closely associated with the notion of franchisement. As the literary portal website which dominates the internet literature market in China, Qidian endeavours to maximise business opportunities. Many popular works of fiction on Qidian have been adapted into on-line games to be promoted by Shanda Qidian’s on-line game sector. Not only on-line games, but also TV dramas and movies are the targets of Qidian enfranchisement scheme through cooperation with the TV or movie industries. In terms of literary commodities per se, different formats for enjoying literary commodities have been newly introduced into the publication business. Members of Qidian are encouraged to take advantage of the notion of media convergence by consuming works of fiction on their mobile phone or Jinshu 锦书 (Bamboo), the e-reader which Qidian specifically developed for Qidian users. Apart from consuming

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218 The figure of one out of twelve is calculated from the statistics published on Qidian. The company’s webpage indicates that so far there are 30.58 million members, with 2.50 million of them having been upgraded to VIP status. There is no further indication about the ratio between preliminary VIP accounts and advanced ones. 5 December 2010 <http://www.qidian.com/aboutus/ads/default.html>.

219 Qidian has devised a credit-earning system, which I describe as a ‘participatory credit earning scheme’. Qidian encourages its members to participate in many aspects of its operation in order to be rewarded with credits. The major scheme includes (1) Criticism and Feedback on Works of Creation; (2) Suggestions for Improving Qidian’s Management System; (3) Votes on Bestseller Ranking; (4) Click on the Designated Advertisement on Qidian; and (5) Upgrade to VIP Membership. These are the major categories by which credits can be earned. More ways for members to earn credits can be consulted at <http://www.qidian.com/help/jifenxitong.aspx>. 7 December 2010.

220 Bamboo has a Wi-fi function. Users can go on-line, consume literary texts and subscribe to works from other bookstores which are in alliance with Shanda Qidian. Shanda Qidian boasts about having recruited 220 different publishing houses to offer their publications for e-subscription through an alliance named Yunzhong Shucheng 雲中書城 (Book Castle in the Clouds). The number of books available from the alliance is as many as three million. 7 December 2010 <http://cloudary.sdo.com/index.aspx>.
literary commodities in the traditional sense of reading texts, members can also listen to the text when they go on-line or on their mobile phone by subscribing to an audio book service.

To examine Qidian from the perspective of an on-line publisher, features which distinguish an on-line publisher from a traditional paper-based publisher are demonstrated. For on-line publishers, the tendency is to minimise their role of interfering with the contents of literary commodities because prosumers registered with their websites will clearly show what is popular, and what is commonly collectively fantasised by gravitating towards specific types of literary commodity, meaning genres or subgenres. Only when special circumstances arise will publishers (along with editors) intervene to resolve disputes or conflicts of interests, or to ensure that state laws are properly exercised, after peer censorship raises a concern. The roles which on-line publishers assume with great significance are technical supporter and marketer. By creating a comfortable environment in which prosumers devote themselves to producing and consuming, on-line publishers are dedicated to generating profits by franchise and media convergence consumption. Various innovative marketing schemes will only attract more attention from general users to their websites, where profits can be created to sustain the growing on-line publication business reciprocally.

3.4.2.2: Editors, Printers (Printing Houses) and Booksellers (Bookstores)

The many tasks performed by on-line publishers overshadow the existence of editors, printers and booksellers, who used to be an essential sector of the commercial publishing and printing business as a whole. Notwithstanding the distinctive status which editors enjoy in a paper-based publishing company where editors are analogous to a “public figurehead”\(^\text{221}\) who “has the final say in many things, and is recognized by the readership and by the advertisers as being of major influence”,\(^\text{222}\) editors in a digital literary sphere have lost their traditional prestige. Unlike on-line publishers whose multiple roles have been transformed –

\(^{221}\) Wharton, “The Publisher’s Role,” 12.
\(^{222}\) Ibid.
some of which have been minimised and others greatly expanded, editors face a diminishing significance in the Chinese on-line literary sphere. The most prominent part of the job of choosing a text for potential profit and of communicating between a text and its readers has been outsourced to prosumers. Their collective literary taste, either good or bad, is the index to attention and profits. Changing from being an active agent who engages with the production of text to a passive agent who intervenes only when called upon, editors have undergone a dramatic transition from having their power traditionally bequeathed to having their role minimised.

The remaining two agents (institutions) – printers and booksellers – perform even more menial roles in the world of digital publishing. Although printers are not engaged in the production of the text, they used to engage with the materiality on which a text is circulated. Since today a literary commodity can be produced and consumed without the use of paper, printers (and printing houses) have been edged out from the role of a mediator to a role of end-user, meaning that printers now have to wait for the decision of on-line publishers to determine whether the digital literary commodity will be converted into book form.

A similar situation applies to booksellers. That the physical literary commodity has been substituted by a virtual commodity implies the waning of books. Instead, documents created and converted for e-readers, mobile phones, desktop/laptop monitors and tablet PCs are gradually but steadily dominating the reading preference of general consumers. Booksellers (bookstores, as well as non-profit, educational institutions such as libraries) withdraw from the field of circulation to become apparently less significant. Bookstores have to promote different platforms of literary consumption, like Barnes and Noble with their e-reader Nook, or like Waterstones, which chooses to cooperate with Sony to promote Sony’s e-readers (the newest strategy today for bookstores to promote books is like Amazon, who created their own Tablet PC ‘Kindle Fire’ after their success of Kindle).

The rise and ebb of the roles of agents/institutions illustrated here illuminates a dynamic reformulation of the digital Chinese literary field. While
authorship and readership are combined in one role of prosumers to be in charge of producing a literary commodity preferred by the general readers for mass consumption, mediators such as editors, printers and booksellers have been marginalised. Publishers, although still appearing as dominant figures in charge of the overall management of the new production and consumption model on the internet, have their power internally eviscerated in the sense of making way for more grassroots tactics to produce texts of literary commodities, but externally fortified in the sense of aggressive marketing strategies to promote the literary commodities which they carry on Qidian into a wide variety of entertainment formats through franchises, media convergence and alliances with other agents/institutions.

3.5: Conclusion

The prosumption model, such as presented on Qidian, paves a way for general readers to head toward authorship and editorship. Formerly an elite’s prerogative, writing has now been transformed into the practice of everyday life of everyman. Yet what sets an elite and an everyman apart, arguably, is that the latter is satisfied with narrating a story which appeals to ordinary people like himself/herself. To common prosumers, being a storyteller narrating an entertaining and attractive story serves as a priority at the top of the agenda today. The story does not necessarily have to make sense; neither does it need to inculcate a high standard of moral values, or literary/rhetoric aesthetics into the fabric of the story. As an average consumer him/herself, a prosumer understands the motivation which drives other prosumers like him/her toward internet fiction. Consuming internet fiction is mainly for leisure (similar to the urban population who churned out Tongsu Xiaoshuo for leisure activity during the Republican era). A work of fiction which contains a philosophical discussion or a serious contemplation on the meaning of life would be the last one such readers would consume.

Even though the advent of the social media fundamentally transformed the production and consumption of popular fiction by lifting up the barriers between
production and consumption so that they have gradually merged into prosumption, the literary products remain formulaic in their story patterns, always revolving around a protagonist whose bizarre adventures easily leads to his/her success of being wealthy, powerful, and emotionally fulfilled. The majority of general readers, including prosumers, crowd towards a story with exciting plot, marvellous adventures to take them to an imaginary wonderland, replete with amazing characters freshly walking out of Japanese Manga, where anything can happen and where they can achieve everything as a way to escape the harsh reality and repetitive life routine as a human subject in an aggressively industrialised society where market economy is heavily practised such as China today.\textsuperscript{223} The stories told by authors speak for general people to reflect the daydreams and fantasies which both groups share and crave. To understand more fully their common daydreams and fantasies, an overall textual analysis to look into plot, story pattern and characters (factors which most prosumers are advised to pay careful attention to) is required to explore the desires of general netizens which reverberate through texts. Afterwards, a psychoanalytic approach will be adopted to illuminate the composure of the netizens’ desires, which is largely sustained by the rise of individualisation and the notion of more of an ‘I’ in the everyday life practice (which has been discussed in chapter two). Therefore, in the next chapter, I shall present the repetitive pattern embedded in the texts of works of popular internet fiction based on the popularity ranking list of Qidian.

\textsuperscript{223} One link located at the section of ‘applying to become an author’ will lead users to a webpage where one piece of advice to newbie authors is displayed. It advises that new authors learn the skill of creating characters from Japanese Manga. A character distinctive enough to be remembered helps a story with a repetitive, similar plot to other works of fiction to stand out. Anonymous, “Wangluo Shangye Xiezu Xinshou Zhinan zhi Jiaose Suzao” 網絡商業寫作新手指南之角色塑造 (How to Create Characters for Your Work: Guidelines for Newbie to Internet Fiction). This notion is consistent with Wang’s argument in \textit{Brand New China} that the literary sensibilities of the younger Chinese generation are nurtured by Japanese Manga. \textit{See} page 81.
Chapter Four: Male Fantasy\textsuperscript{224} of ‘Feeling Good’ – The Pattern of the Golden Triangle underneath Fiction Genres on Qidian Chinese Net

4.1: \textit{Introduction}

In this chapter, various examples with high popularity from the Qidian popularity rankings will be closely examined to reveal the common story pattern to establish what I will later argue to be Chinese fantastic mode in Chapter 6. Qidian offers as many as thirteen fiction genres, each of which contains several subgenres (see Appendix 1) on its Qidian Chinese Net and Qidian Female Net (excluding the other non-fiction genres and fiction genres on Qidian Literary Net). Based on my research methodology in Chapter 1, I divide all the fiction and subgenres on Qidian Chinese Net into four sections in accordance to their production rate and consumption rate. These four sections of the textual analysis of the fiction genres from the Qidian Chinese Net are where male prosumers gravitate towards. For this reason, the fiction texts can be collectively regarded as ‘male fantasy’. The first section – tier one – includes the top four most popularly produce/consumed genres of Urban, Eastern Fantasy, Chinese Immortal Swordsman and On-line Game. The second section – tier two – concentrates on History, the more consumed but less produced genre. Fiction genres from tier one and tier two will be discussed in depth to substantiate my argument of internet fiction flourishing in Chinese literary fantastic mode to carve out the same structure of works of fiction on Qidian Chinese Net for netizens to fantasise the desire of the golden triangle. The other less produce/consumed genres – tier three – focus on Western Fantasy and Science fiction. Neither of these genres will be examined in detail; they will be briefly reviewed to corroborate the main argument. The least produced/consumed genres – tier four – are Fan Fiction, Sports, Chinese Martial Arts, Military and Horror. They will be briefly analysed.

\textsuperscript{224} The notion of categorising the works on Qidian Chinese Net as ‘male fantasy’ and those on Qidian Female Net as ‘female fantasy’ was used in Hockx’s conference paper. Hockx, “Transgressive Fiction and the Control of Internet Literature in the PRC.” However, my definition of male fantasy and female fantasy emphasises the achievement of the golden triangle of material success, high socio-political status and sexual fulfilment. More is elaborated in regard to the ‘golden triangle’ which I propose in this chapter and the next chapter.
to demonstrate that there is a repetitive story pattern which points to the constitution of a ‘golden triangle of Chinese individualisation’, the notion of which will be further elaborated in Chapter 6.

4.2: Tier One – Most Popular Produced/Consumed Fiction Genres on Qidian Chinese Net

4.2.1: Xuanhuan 玄幻 (Eastern Fantasy)

4.2.1.1: The Chinese Counterpart of Western Fantasy Fiction

Xuanhuan 玄幻 (Xuan 玄: esoteric and mythical; Huan 幻: illusionary and unreal) did not officially enter the domain of contemporary Chinese popular fiction until the late 1980s. Huang Yi 黃易 (1952- ), a popular fiction writer based in Hong Kong, initially tried out a new style now known as ‘Eastern Fantasy’ – an encyclopaedia of both Chinese and Western literary and cultural elements such as science fiction, thriller, and Chinese Daoism, Buddhism and mythicism.225 His works, such as Datang Shuanglong Zhuan 大唐雙龍傳 (Twin Brothers), Fanyun Fuyu 翻雲覆雨 (Lethal Weapons of Passion and Love) and Xunqinji 尋秦記 (A Step into the Past), fascinate an enormous readership across the greater China area.

Nevertheless, the phrase is used slightly differently from its origin in Chinese literary cyberspace. Being the most frequently produced fiction genre, Eastern Fantasy mainly designates the narratives built under a world of Otherness which resembles Western Fantasy – fire-spitting dragons, treasure-hoarding dwarves, blonde fairies, long-bearded elderly wizards wearing pointed hats, Gothic-style castles occupied by pale, red-eyed vampires – in every way except for the identity of the protagonists. The main protagonists are always Chinese who become displaced into a mythical world of Otherness modelled after a

foreign land. Chinese characters intrude into this world of Otherness to exert a new order, always achieving grandeur at the end. The knowledge of Chinese culture – specifically Chinese kung-fu and philosophical thinking – is the pivot by which the Chinese characters differentiate themselves and which elevates them to the zenith. However, this is not to say that the Chinese characters are interpolated into a Western context with obviously Asian physical features. To eradicate physical ‘alienness’, the Chinese protagonist is usually reincarnated, entering a new body of a local resident but still strongly attached to his previous Chinese identity within.226

The Eastern ‘intrusion’ into a seemingly Western context usually lays the foundation of the story, accomplished by time-slipping or reincarnation. In *Douluo Dalu* (The Douluo Continent), the hero, whose previous life had been that of a prodigy practising Chinese martial arts and Chinese medicine, committed suicide but his soul was revived in a local boy in a world of Otherness known as Douluo Continent, where the manipulation of ‘spirits’ extracted from other creatures was an important magic skill to be acquired by anyone who aspired to become a magician. In *Doupo Qiongcang* (The Legend of an Inner Energy Practitioner), an extremely ordinary Chinese boy accidentally had his soul displaced into the body of a male prodigy in a world of Otherness where learning to control one’s Qi (inner energy) is the goal for achievement. His ‘force’ (the author never specifies what this force is) of the soul from the

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226 This does not mean that all Eastern fantasy works of fiction follow this basic pattern. There are also Eastern fantasy narratives which resemble Chinese martial arts narratives centring around adventures undertaken by a Chinese protagonist in a Chinese style of Daoist/Buddhist mythical world. However, my analysis focuses on the general tendency, instead of specific works of fiction.

Authors on Qidian, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, are the ones who determine which category they prefer their works to be classified into. Even if their works of fiction do not totally conform to the guidelines of sub-genres, publishers and editors will not attempt to re-categorise a work. Consequently, the growing blurring of borderlines among fiction genres or sub-genres is often observed. This is why I referred to this situation as an internet literary mélange and as intertextuality in Chapters 1 and 3.

Having identified the basic pattern of Eastern fantasy fiction, I cannot emphasise enough that intertextuality and literary mélange constantly take place. Works categorised under Western Fantasy but which abide by the pattern of Eastern Fantasy featuring a Chinese protagonist are also produced. This brings us back to the notion that authors exercise their autonomy in categorising while publishers and editors are relatively minimised in their power to determine the fiction category issue.
previous life was mysteriously multiplied in the new life. The hero benefited from the stronger force to achieve his amazing advancement in acquiring superior skills of manipulating his inner energy later. In *Shemu 神墓* (God Graves), an ordinary Chinese youth was reborn into a grave-yard in the dimension of Otherness where he shockingly found that gods and demons from both eastern and western worlds had been buried.

Regardless of how ordinary the hero had been in his previous life, he was surely given a second chance to live differently, including reconstructing the order of the Otherness. In this regard, the Chinese heroes undertake the same path as their Western counterparts do. Routinely, they follow the process of advancing from becoming a prodigy to obtaining sovereignty, necessarily and almost compulsively, with adventures spreading into several vertical spaces and an ever-stretching horizontal space. The superhuman power he secures by undertaking adventures and completing tasks justifies his arrival as the ultimate figure in the world of Otherness. In *The Legend of an Inner Energy Practitioner*, there are ten classes of ‘inner energy’ practitioner according to their ability to manipulate energy. The lowest class is Douzhe 斗者 (the novice), the highest rank is Douhuang 斗皇 (the emperor). To be propelled from one class to another, the aspirant has to go through nine stages. The whole layout of the classes is almost identical to that of a typical Role Playing Game. The complexity and difficulty of being upgraded to ‘the emperor’ also forecasts the multiple adventures which prosumers will be bombarded with. Currently at its 1218th chapter, this four-million-word work of fiction is still in serialisation. In *God Graves*, the male protagonist, after his reincarnation, took on a training package practising Chinese martial arts, inner energy and magic to recreate an order of a universe where gods and demons were absent. In *Emo Faze 惡魔法則* (The Rule of the Demon), the Chinese hero was reborn to be the eldest son of a powerful baron in a mythical land whilst his memories of his previous life as a Chinese medical practitioner directed him to study herbal medicine in the world of Otherness. His many adventures included discovering a secret concerning the gods, demons and the universe in a secluded chamber, being trapped on a remote island with two
gorgeous girls, obtaining power from a Mephistopheles-type magician, becoming wealthy by sailing a pirate ship named Heizhenzhu ‘黑珍珠’ (‘The Black Pearl’ – clearly a borrowing from the Hollywood blockbuster *Pirates of the Caribbean*), and taming a Queen Medusa who could turn people to stone. There are always adventures to come for the hero to have opportunities to show his superiority and to aggrandise his magnificence in every regard.

Eastern Fantasy (like Western Fantasy) ends the narrative with apotheosis, or some other form of elevated status. In *The Rule of the Demon*, the hero discovered that in his earliest life, he was Adam, the first of all mankind. He solved the universal mystery of the Genesis. The hero eventually inherited a powerful kingdom and three beautiful women. In *The Douluo Continent*, the hero not only assumed the role of ‘Master of Spirit’ and was honoured as the king across the continent, but also became a god. The narrative ends with an elderly person explaining to a passer-by why a new statue of pure gold was set up in the village to celebrate where the hero had been born. The protagonist in *Shouxie Feiten* 獸血沸騰 (Fiery Animal Blood) vanquished the lord of the underworld to restore peace to the Aegean Continent and became a king with three beautiful wives bearing sons for him. Fantasy fiction, either Western or Eastern, is engraved with the pattern of the golden triangle: wealth, high socio-political status, and sex.

Armitt compared fantasy fiction to a game-playing experience. In fact, the reading experience of fantasy fiction, both Western and Eastern, is close to that of a role-playing game in which players perform difficult tasks to vanquish Otherness, in order to be promoted to the next stage. The feeling of achievement is derived from the completion of those tasks. The action-packed plots percolating through Eastern Fantasy (also in Western Fantasy) are thus reminiscent of gaming experience.

From this perspective, it would seem that both fiction genres serve much more of the function of a mental game for readers to play. The ceaseless combat (a symbol of desire, which could be interpreted as an eagerness for higher

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achievement), the tireless attacks of non-human creatures (a symbol of Otherness) instigate the mental process by which readers play the game. The language which authors commonly use to describe the extraordinary power is not that different from the language used in game instructions since the roles such as warriors or magicians are usually classified into different numerical levels to indicate their ‘life span’ and ‘force’. Only when a player successfully fulfils a mission (always in the form of slaying an alien creature) can the player be upgraded to a higher numerical level for a longer life span, more lethal weapons and greater force.

In fact, most of the Eastern Fantasy works exemplified in the previous analysis have been adapted into on-line games, while others are rumoured to be under development. The long narratives filled with action-packed adventures provide a convenient source for the on-line game business. The pattern is predictable and repetitive, culminating in the hero securing fortune, power and women via adventures – a perceptible sense of individualisation is displayed from this perspective. This pattern, as my writing will later unveil, is largely reprised in every single fiction genre on Qidian Chinese Net. Producers/consumers of these popular narratives are likely to be drawn to the on-line games based on their favourite fiction, and vice versa. Producing/consuming fantasy and playing role-playing games, at a certain point, appear to have become one.

4.2.2. Dushi 都市 (Urban)

4.2.2.1: Traditional Urban Narratives – A Path to Literary Realism

Urbanisation has unanimously been one of the determining indices to measure the saturation rate of capitalism since the Industrial Revolution. The process of urbanisation renders mass production and consumption an indispensible ingredient of city life, which contributes to rapid economic development. Yet, urbanisation is more than just an index of economic

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228 *Emo Fazhe Online* 惡魔法則 online <http://em.sdo.com> and online <http://em.kongzhong.com>; *Shouxie Feiteng Online* 獸血沸騰 online <http://sxwz.baiyou100.com>; *Shemu Online* 神墓 online <http://shenmu.iccgame.com>; *Doupo Qiongcang Online* 斗破穹蒼 online <http://web.duowan.com/dpcq>.
development. Throughout the world, the rise of the fiction is closely associated with urbanisation.\textsuperscript{229} Being a base from where capitalism and industrialisation are further cultivated, urbanisation universally provides a platform on which multitudinous literary works thrive due to mass production and consumption, leading to the rise of both serious and popular fiction. Works of fiction are developed, on the one hand, into a leisure phenomenon, where literary trends derive; on the other hand, literary works featuring urban themes and motivated by urban elements as their narrative basis have flourished as well.

Under a fast-forwarding industrialised/urbanised environment, humans have been forced to deal with a dramatically changing society propelled by capitalism. Arguably, urban fiction (loosely defined as fiction in an urban setting) could be the initial fiction genre which shifts the focus of its main protagonists from the Romantic tradition of heroes and aristocrats to the Realist tradition of ordinary people from the middle or lower social classes, depicting them as they are in real life. What frequently happens in a growing metropolitan area, such as ordinary citizens’ struggle in everyday life, the poverty of the lower social classes, the clash between city dwellers and peasants, are easily ascribed to the creative inspiration of numerous fiction writers. Gradually, realism was employed as a tool of social critique in arts and literature against the new economic system. In the west, for instance, literary realism and naturalism\textsuperscript{230} were brought into being under urbanisation. American naturalism, according to Mitchell, “[…] emerged during a tumultuous period in American history, an era of unprecedented rifts and schisms that transformed a rural agrarian republic into an urban-industrial nation […]”.\textsuperscript{231} Moreover, Roggenkamp described the rise of American literary realism as an outcome of intense social and economic upheaval. “The changes attending industrial urbanization in the United States destabilized many of its citizens, and

\textsuperscript{229} For example, see Watt, The Rise of the Novel, 35-59.
\textsuperscript{230} The notion of realism and naturalism is defined as an opposite to romanticism and surrealism where the element of highly symbolic/representative/idealistic of the plot/characters is a crucial key. They are two literary trends which originated from Europe (including social realism in nineteenth-century Russia) in the late nineteenth century and spread to America in the early twentieth century.
\textsuperscript{231} Mitchell, Determined Fictions, 119.
literary realism became a way for intellectuals to process this unease.” Lehan further defined realism as a literary trend which should be located ‘[…] outward from the text toward historical representation. The death of an agrarian society and the birth of an industrial one produced a change both in the subject matter and technique of the novel’. Industrialisation and urbanisation, indeed, marked an era of transition. This transition provided a common background against which the literary trends of realism and naturalism initiated in Europe and later invigorated in America prevailed in the west for a significant period of time to reflect the struggles, sufferings and daily life experiences surrounding ordinary people in a capitalist society.

Similarly, in China, numerous literary elites during the early Republican Era projected their ambivalence towards Shanghai – the head-quarters of urbanisation and capitalisation during the so-called ‘Golden Age of Chinese Bourgeoisie’. Surrounded by the fascinating, corrupted, fast-paced cosmopolitan atmosphere, those intellectuals – be they May-Fourth patriots, left-wing socialists or Mandarin-and-Butterfly-school writers – ascribed their feelings to the fast-paced capitalism represented through urbanisation. Some works are about anxiety, uneasiness and depression resulting from capitalistic decadence in a sprawling cosmopolitan area that devours human nature, such as the left-wing intellectuals who saw Shanghai as a symbol of socio-political oppression and an embodiment of economic evil between the socially dominant and the subjugated. Other works are about dreams, sensations and yearning, which could only come about in an urban environment such as Shanghai, where new, advanced concepts and technology took root earlier than in other areas. Some writers from the Xinganjuepai 新感覺派 (School of Neo-sensationalism), originating in Shanghai, epitomised the works of sensation and yearning. Either prompted by desperation or dreams, literary intellectuals were motivated to enrich the landscape of modern

Chinese fiction at the turn of the twentieth century, when Chinese literary realism played a major role in constructing the landscape.235

4.2.2.2: Cyber Urban Narratives – Transforming Literary Realism to Literary Fantasy

Although China’s search for modernity since the late Qing period via urbanisation and capitalism in order to catch up with the west was disrupted for several decades, in the early 1980s the CCP regime began to implement Deng’s ‘Open Door Policy’ to embrace market economy and to re-urbanise China as a significant segment of the five-year economic plans. In 2010, the final year of the eleventh five-year plan, the penetration rate of urbanisation (one of the four major economic structures specifically delivered by the Chinese regime) is expected to reach 47%, up from 45% in 2005.236 Urbanisation will be continued in the next five-year plan aiming for a higher penetration rate throughout China. Consequently, the literary impact of urbanisation has been further intensified in China; the quantity of works of fiction produced and consumed has risen since the 1980s; the number of works with their background setting in an urban area has also risen. This phenomenon of the increase in narratives in an urban setting is, furthermore, greatly magnified on the internet literary portal websites.

With more works of fiction revolving around urban themes being produced and consumed in the post-Mao Chinese society, literary realism has returned to the surface as an important literary movement,237 but it hardly appears in Chinese literary cyberspace because most popular cyber urban narratives do not aim to present characters and stories as they are in real life. On the contrary, most of them appear to set out to fabricate a narrative in which the impossible can take place. Arguably, the increased amount of cyber urban narratives does not

235 See the following for a more thorough discussion of literary realism in China. Anderson, The Limits of Realism, and Wang, Fictional Realism in Twentieth-century China.
236 NPC and CPPCC National Committee, “Facts and Figures: China Main Targets for 2006-2010.”
237 See the following for a thorough discussion on the major literary trends in Post-Mao China, one of them being realism. Chen, “‘Misunderstanding’ Western Modernism,” 59-86; Button provides a full-scale analysis of Chinese literary realism, Button, “The Trials of Chinese Literary Realism,” 41-84.
necessarily offer literary realism a grand opportunity to be prosused digitally. Literary realism has given way to the literary fantastic over the internet.

A closer analysis of the cyber urban narratives would clearly attest to the transition from literary realism to the literary fantastic on account of the fact that most of the popular urban narratives are redolent with elements of fantasy. Urban, a featured fiction genre on Qidian, does not enjoy the highest production rate. However, it does overtake other major fiction genres in two respects – it enjoys the highest popularity rate and it has the most diverse sub-genres, thirteen for prosumers to choose from (see Appendix 1 for Urban sub-genres). The diversity of the sub-genres suggests that adopting an urban background offers authors a rich, handy, more accessible source of inspiration for their works since most prosumers are based in urban areas.

Out of this rich diversity of sub-genres, two stand out as the most frequently produced urban narratives: one is ‘Dushi Shenghuo’ 都市生活 (Urban Life), characterising an ordinary individual’s love relationship, life and career development; the other is ‘Yishu Chaoneng’ 異術超能 (Superhuman Power), featuring an ordinary individual’s urban life being dramatically transformed by accidentally receiving supernatural ability. With regards to production, Urban Life far surpasses Superhuman Power to be the most produced sub-genre among urban narratives. However, this numerical superiority in production is not equally reflected in the popularity rankings. Out of the top one thousand, Superhuman Power far exceeds Urban Life. Even a much less-frequently produced subgenre of ‘Guanchang Fuchen’ 官場浮沉 (Stories of Government Officials) is no less popular than Urban Life in the popularity rankings. The differentiation between rates of production and consumption suggests that while authors are inclined to create a narrative based on their observation in their everyday life (which helps to illustrate the fact that Urban Life takes the highest

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238 According to Qidian Chinese Net, there are 28,174 fictions enlisted under Urban Life, 18,819 fictions under Superhuman Power. None of the other sub-genres ever reach a number over 10,000, most of them stay under 2,000 in their respective total production. 3 September 2010 <http://all.qidian.com/book/bookStore.aspx?ChannelId=4&SubCategoryId=-1&Tag=all&Size=-1&Action=-1&OrderId=6&P=all&PageIndex=1&update=-1&Vip=-1>. For further detail, see Appendix 1 for the subgenres of Urban narratives.
production percentage of the thirteen diverse sub-genres), readers prefer narratives where unusualness or impossibility takes place in an urban setting with which they are familiar. Looking to the unattainability described as occurring in a metropolitan area, readers, subconsciously, can be argued to return to the notion of dream and fantasy.

If only judging from the laconic elaboration of sub-genre guidance on Qidian, Urban Life and Superhuman Power appear to represent two extreme ends of a spectrum. Whereas the former implies a literary realism due to the description of the everyday life of one ordinary individual, the latter strongly suggests a strong sense of fantasy because of the element of supernatural ability applied to the text. In this regard, between the two ends of the spectrum of urban narratives, literary realism seems to have one place to stay. Nevertheless, the actual situation is otherwise. These two sub-genres, in fact, are similar in their basic components – flat characters, and an unaccountable story outline. Most importantly, the deep structures of these two sub-genres resemble each other in the sense of the previously-discussed accentuated Chinese individualisation strongly delivered at the end, where the main targets of material success, high socio-political status and sex will be guaranteed to the male protagonists, once more, in a most unusual and unrealistic way in either sub-genre. In this regard, literary realism has hardly any place. The urban narratives produced and consumed in Chinese cyberspace could be regarded as having been rather remote from both their Republican antecedents of literary realism in the 1930s and 1940s, and their predecessor of literary realism in the post-Mao Chinese society of the 1980s and 1990s.

4.2.2.3: The Strategies of Urban Fantasy – Its Characters and Patterns

In terms of characters, the popular works from both sub-genres (also from other less frequently produced but popular Urban sub-genres) tend to create protagonists whose backgrounds are, mostly, limited to ordinary people who begin their daily life as powerless subjects subjugated to the ever-changing, vibrating urban environment. It is the city they depend on to live their dreams of having a peaceful and affluent life, but it is also the city that exerts pressure on
them to prevent them from approaching their dreams due to keen competition. Caught in this dilemma with which most readers identify, the protagonists resemble ordinary people whom readers would encounter in their daily life.

Ordinary or not, the depth or the development of the dimension of the main protagonists is hardly the chief focus of Urban fiction; rather, the focus is the ‘superpower mechanism’ by which a series of unusual, impossible events turn the protagonists’ lives upside down. The most common ‘superpower mechanism’ is the popularly-used motif of time-slip or rebirth. The protagonist travels through time into another urban dimension so that he is offered a second chance to live a better life, which does not seem possible in their previous lives. Other mechanisms include an inexplicable supernatural power bestowed upon protagonists; or protagonists accidentally appropriating or being bequeathed a device which does not belong to this world. Regardless of which ‘superpower mechanism’ the urban narratives adopt to justify the turnabout of the protagonists’ fates, there is an undeniable, higher, supernatural force to impart a second chance to protagonists who are ordinary and powerless in their primary lives.

Triggered by the superpower mechanism, a series of unusual events is incorporated into the main plot and the protagonists are led into a game of ‘turn of the wheel of fortune’, in which their ordinary, urban lives are accelerated into the extraordinary. There are still fluctuations and severe challenges; however, these are merely measures by which a strong sense of excitement can be fed to readers, and they are eventually vanquished. The lengthy narration will eventually flow back into a most aspired to and commonly expected groove which leads to the consistently never-changing ending of the golden triangle, which has been reprised so frequently that it now seems inevitable in most popular fiction in Chinese cyberspace.

Three urban narratives which have remained within the top hundred on the popularity chart exemplify this pattern. They are Chongsheng zhi Guandao 重生之官道 (Rebirth into Chinese Officialdom), Tianwang 天王 (The King of the World), and Xieqi Linran 邪氣凜然 (The Ring of Luck: an Urban Legend), coming respectively from three sub-genres: Stories of Government Officials,
Urban Life and Superhuman Power. The ‘superpower mechanism’ has been commonly employed in these three narratives. In *Rebirth into Chinese Officialdom*, the protagonist was reborn back in 1991 when China was rapidly on track to socio-political transformation rendered by economic reform and privatisation. Being reborn into a pivotal moment of China’s reform, the protagonist can realise his dream of reforming his beloved country by landing a high political position within the Communist Party. In *The King of the World*, the protagonist was offered a mysterious and beautiful naked girl, who was equipped with supernatural power. She was the outcome of a confidential scientific project. Her appearance into his life changes his ordinary fate as an orphan to a series of bewilderments, adventures and excitement. As for *The Ring of Luck: an Urban Legend*, the protagonist was persuaded to purchase a ring of luck. This ring was no ordinary ring – it had magic power to enhance an individual’s luck, and the protagonist’s life was changed from being a bouncer in a local night-club to moving towards becoming an influential figure of wealth and power in China.

The displacement initiates a series of adventures to help all of these protagonists to reconstruct the order of the world of ‘reality’. At the end, the protagonists always reach elevation or apotheosis. Accordingly, in *Rebirth into Chinese Officialdom*, the protagonist (the fiction is still in serialisation at the point of writing) has been escalated in his political career path. Immediately after his rebirth, he only landed on an insignificant position as a deputy director at a small, local police station. Yet in the latest chapter, he has already experienced swift promotion approaching closer to the central officialdom at the tender age of thirty. In the chapters to come, most likely he will arrive at the position of the General Secretary of the CCP. In *The King of the World*, the protagonist has been experiencing breathtaking events one after another, dominating a group of X-men-like comrades known as Xinrenlei 新人類 (Neo-Humans) who possess an array of supernatural powers. At the end of the fiction, the protagonist descended on Times Square from the sky to be worshipped as if he were Jehovah by the

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239 In the fiction, the protagonist is not only a political figure but also a successful businessman. He promotes his enterprise into other neighbouring countries such as Japan - even Sony Corp would endeavour to fawn upon him to make their business in China boom.
spectators at the scene. His god-like descent from the sky has been broadcast to
the world. As for The Ring of Luck: an Urban Legend, the protagonist took on a
series of adventures associated with criminal organisations. The luck-enhancing
ring brought him fortune, but also trivial troubles as a by-product sometimes. To
offset these troubles, he had to face more adventures and grew more and more
versatile as a result. Eventually, he retired to a remote foreign island with several
sexy women by his side and a fat Swiss bank account.

4.2.2.4: Urban Fantasy – A Pseudo Realism to Justify Fantasy

The incorporation of realistic elements with fantastic elements is not a
new idea. ‘Magic realism’, which originated in and once prevailed in Latin
America, now extends to other parts of the world.240 The extension epitomises
the propensity of a fusion of reality and fantasy. Consequently, magic realism is

[…] a mode suited to exploring – and transgressing – boundaries, whether
the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic. Magic
realism often facilitates the fusion, or coexistences, of possible worlds,
spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction.241

Extending from this notion, “[m]agic realist texts are subversive; their in-
betweenness, their all-at-onceness encourages resistance to monologic political
and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to
writers in postcolonial cultures and, increasingly, to women”.242

Whereas magic realism achieves a transcendence beyond the boundaries
to arrive at an admixture of rational and counter-rational elements for a more in-
depth cultural, political or minority representation through varying degrees of
resistance against hegemonic discourses, the urban realism in Chinese cyberspace,
despite being a similar concoction of unreal and real, serves as a device to

240 See the following for discussion of magic realism transgressing geological boundaries in
literature from other parts of the world. Hegerfeldt, Lies that Tell the Truth; Napier, “The Magic
241 Zamora and Faris, Introduction, Magical Realism, 5-6.
242 Ibid, 6.
straightforwardly translate the collective desire which prosumers have been fantasising in a verbally-fabricated urban wonderland into a temporary phase of psychological fulfilment. The element of reality enhances the sense of a plausible realness, but at the core of that plausible realness is pure fantasy. This fantasy helps to satisfy the collective desire of prosumers to achieve worldly success, high socio-political status and access to beautiful women, the first two of which (with the third serving as a reward for the achievement of the first two) being major criteria of success in the competitively capitalistic contemporary Chinese society.

One paragraph from a work illustrates this monotonous fantasy. In *The Ring of Luck: an Urban Legend*, the male protagonist purchased a luck-enhancing ring. When he was asked for his opinion of this magical product for a customer survey, the protagonist replied that he was not absolutely satisfied. After the surveyor had suggested that a full refund would be granted if the protagonist did not desire the ring anymore, he refused the suggestion because “Zhemei Jiezhi Nengdaigei Ren Sheme, Bujiushi Jinqian, Quanshi, Meinu” 這枚戒指能帶給人什麼, 不就是金錢, 權勢, 美女? (What can this ring bring to its possessor? Isn’t it all about money, power and beauties?). The protagonist further stated that anyone who intended to give the ring up must be a lunatic. Unlike the ring that symbolises ultimate power which has to be destroyed to restore peace in *The Lord of the Rings*, this luck-enhancing ring represents the affluent materiality and power which everyone is after. By spelling out the fantasy by which desire of craving for the golden triangle is virtually enlivened to satiate a hard-to-come-true dream, Urban as a mode of literary fantastic could be repeated in a most accessible way, openly inviting more prosumers to participate in a never-ending psychological masquerade where everyone can wear the trappings of wealth and power, easily, at one’s fingertips.

4.2.3: Xianxia 仙俠 (Chinese Immortal Swordsman)

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4.2.3.1: Beyond an Earthly Boundary

Whilst Chinese martial arts fiction in cyberspace concentrates on the exaggeration and aggrandisement of the Wu 武 (martial arts) component, a branch deviating from martial arts fiction gradually goes hand in hand with an obvious enhancement of ‘fancifulness’ and ‘illusoriness’, now generally labelled as Xianxia Xiaoshuo 仙俠小說 (Chinese Immortal Swordsman Fiction). The term explicates two crucial fundamentals: Xian 仙 (immortals living in secluded places or in heaven, generally a counterpart of fairy/elf/sorcerer in the secondary world) and Xia 俠 (Chinese swordsmen who exercise knightly chivalry in their communities).

This narrative is similar to fantasy fiction in the West in the sense of having its roots deeply embedded in ancient myth and folklore. Shanhaijing 山海經 (The Classic of Mountains and Seas) in which a mythical secondary world of fantasy creatures, personified animals, and myths of all kinds are presented, best exemplifies this element in ancient Chinese literature. Later, Chinese fiction such as Xiyouji 西遊記 (Journey to the West) and its contemporary Fengshen Yanyi 封神演義 (The Investiture of the Gods) brought the vernacular narratives which Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) labelled ‘Shenmo Xiaoshuo’ 神魔小說 (fiction of deities and monsters) to a new height.\textsuperscript{244} The literary impact of the genre is a melting pot of Zen, Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Chinese folklore and mythology, local belief, Chinese ghosts and spirits.

But arguably it was Huanzhu Louzhu 還珠樓主 (1902-61), with his Chinese Republican era masterpiece Shushan Jianxia Zhuan 蜀山劍俠傳 (The Legend of the Shushan Immortal Swordsman), who paved a path for the cyber immortal swordsmen fiction successors to follow.\textsuperscript{245} The mixture of immortality

\textsuperscript{244} Lu is likely to have been the first scholar to use the term Shemo Xiaoshuo 神魔小說 (Fiction of Gods and Demons) to categorise works of fiction about celestials, deities and demons produced in the Ming Dynasty. Lu Xuan 魯迅, Zhongguo Xiaoshuo Shilue 中國小說史略 (A History of Chinese Fiction), 160-87.

\textsuperscript{245} Huanzhu Louzhu was not the first writer to blend the notion of Xian and Xia together, given the fact that Pingjian Buxiao Sheng 平江不肖生 (1889-1957) had already dealt with the theme of Chinese martial arts and immortal swordsmen in his Jianghu Qixia Zhuan 江湖奇俠傳 (The
and Chinese knightly chivalry is fused with more Chinese philosophical and religious elements of Daoism, and its mysterious, adherent constituents of Chinese alchemy, white magic, astrology, mythological celestial power, Qigong, immortality, divination, spirituality, Buddhism and some Confucianism. The narratives also tend to move beyond an earthly boundary, aiming at a philosophical or religious revelation of Chinese thoughts on the essence of life and the harmony of the world through the interactions between humans (including semi-deities who are keen Daoist practitioners hinged on procuring immortality), nature and the supernatural (gods and celestials).

Immortality, chiefly deriving from Daoism, promises protagonists a method by which they can be transported into a superhuman or a higher, unearthly status. Acquired Chinese magic and innate celestial power in the immortal swordsmen narratives are described in a way reminiscent of Chinese martial art skills, with which the possessor could perform miracles. The element of immortality, comparable to magic power in the fantasy works in the west, positions immortal swordsmen narratives as an obviously Chinese style of fantasy. The concept of the swordsman was considerably and detectably reflected in the Chinese Immortal Swordsman narratives when they hit the market during the early Republic Era – those who possess superior skills were expected to bear a socio-political responsibility to perform beneficial deeds for their communities.

Chinese Immortal Swordsman narratives produced/consumed on the internet today are positioned ambiguously between fantasy fiction and Chinese martial arts fiction. With regards to immortality, this genre and fantasy fiction are alike in the sense of delineating magic and fancifulness; whilst the genre shares with Chinese martial arts fiction the sense of revolving around Chinese Immortal Swordsmen who perform beneficial duties for their communities. Yet generally speaking, the cyber Chinese Immortal Swordsmen do not escape the notion of being decorated with a strong sense of fantasy to generate the feeling of having

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Legendary Chinese Martial Arts Practitioners). Nevertheless, Huanzhu Luozhuzhu was the one who created a series of works featuring immortal swordsmen to familiarise readers during the Republic era with the theme. Cao Zhengwen 曹正文 (1950- ), Zhongguo Xia Wenhua Shi 中國俠文化史 (A History of Chinese Chivalry), 106-09.
the golden triangle achieved for producers/consumers to fantasise. It goes without saying that adventures of all kinds are the doses fed to Chinese netizens who approach this fiction genre enthusiastically.

Again, a displacement is needed to start the narrative. In *Xingchen Bian* 星辰變 (The Reversal of Stars), the protagonist accidentally discovered a meteor and thus the ultimate secret of nine swords, the mastery of which assured the possessor dominance over the universe. In *Zhuxian* 誅仙 (The Termination of Gods), the protagonist intruded into a life-or-death battle between a Daoist practitioner and a black magic worshipper by accident when he was young. He was adopted by a supreme Daoist sect to acquire intensifying celestial power through Daoism. In *Cunmang* 寸芒 (The Blaze of Glory), a legendary magic pill mysteriously appeared in modern-day Shanghai. The protagonist took the pill by which his martial arts, inner energy and Daoist celestial power were unprecedentedly intensified. The displacement always forecasts a series of adventures to come.

A series of adventures from flying to heaven to digging into hell is lengthily sketched out to reconstruct the world of Otherness, during which process, protagonists rely heavily on their superhuman powers acquired through practising Chinese martial arts, Daoism and Buddhism. In *The Reversal of Stars*, the protagonist had to defend himself from the attacks of all those who coveted the legendary nine swords, whether gods, men or ghouls/ghosts. In *The Blaze of Glory*, the protagonist, a modern-day top Chinese secret agent, started his adventures by eradicating all the martial art practitioners around the world who posed a threat to China to secure himself a one billion US dollar reward, then terminated werewolves and vampires. As there was no Otherness left to be exterminated in the human world, the protagonist had to travel up to heaven to reconstruct the order above which had been exercised since the beginning of the universe. In *Shenglong Dao* 昇龍道 (The Way of the Dragon), the protagonist was banished from the Daoist sect in China to modern-day London. As a Chinese who was familiar with Chinese martial arts, Daoism and Buddhism, he used his skills to tame Otherness raving in the human world, such as werewolves and
demons, who controlled the London mafia. As the horizontal spatial dimension from New York to Tibet could not satisfy the protagonist anymore, he had no option but to move vertically. Heavenly spirits or ghouls could not prevent him from transcending to the ultimate sphere of heaven. In *Fanren Xiuxian Zhuan* (From Everyman to Immortal), the author attempted to provide a fantastic fictional world taken from that of *The Investiture of Gods* and *The Legend of The Shushan Immortal Swordsman* to tirelessly depict a world of Otherness where deities, ghosts, ghouls and Daoist practitioners all blend together. The protagonist was featured as conquering the Otherness to intensify his inner force.

Whether it is a work of three million or five million words, the end will come in apotheosis or some other form of elevation. However, the end of the narrative usually is spelt out somewhat differently from the pattern of the golden triangle. Since this genre consumed heavily from traditional Chinese philosophical thinking of Daoism and Buddhism, the theme of conquering attractive females or acquiring valuable worldly possessions is not conspicuously present. Nonetheless, either the Buddhist thoughts of transcending worldly attachment to the stage where one sees ‘I’ as ‘anyone’, and ‘anythingness’ as ‘nothingness’, or the Daoist thoughts of returning mankind back to Dao – the way Nature develops in its original course – without disturbing it, is not presented at the end. And although the worldly attachment and the attractive ladies are not necessarily emphasised, they are never absent. In addition, the unprecedented high socio-political status is strongly amplified. In *The Reversal of Stars*, the protagonist not only became the legitimate possessor of the legendary nine swords, but also transcended to the status of an ultimate god who created a new universe by using half of his soul. In *The Blaze of Glory*, it took the protagonist a thousand years to go through all of the adventures, eventually dethroning *Yuanshi Tianzun* (The Celestial Venerable of the Primordial Beginning, one of the three highest deities of Daoism) to commence a new era of his own. He also resuscitated his beloved one at the end. In *The Way of the Dragon*, the protagonist transcended to outer space, encountering a mysterious figure who
described himself as the creator of the universe. The protagonist successfully defeated the creator, who vanished into thin air. Thereby, the protagonist assumed the role of Creator of the universe to begin his era. In another extremely popular work *Changsheng Jie* 長生界 (The Sphere of Eternality), the protagonist, only an ordinary inner energy practitioner at the beginning, eventually aligned himself with Chinese mythical figures such as Nuwa 女媧 (Nuwa), Pangu 盤古 (Pangu), Sanhuang Wudi 三皇五帝 (Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors) to defend the sphere of eternity against evil forces. The protagonist was the only one who survived various battles against evil forces to restore the order of the sphere of eternity. He lived forever to guard over the restored order.

Not straying away much from Eastern Fantasy (and Western Fantasy) in terms of its obvious story pattern full of fantasy elements, Chinese Immortal Swordsman provides producers/consumers with a range of fantastic narratives with a strong orientation of ‘Chinese-ness,’ which suggests a unique Chinese feature. However, despite the uniqueness, the story pattern is set for netizens to fantasise a supreme socio-political status makes the genre similar to Eastern Fantasy (and Western Fantasy) in Chinese cyberspace. They share one static, repetitive and predictable ‘grand-narrative’ 246 in their underlying messages created and delivered into their seemingly kaleidoscopic, variegated and dynamic texts – an underdog boy has successfully accomplished tasks and adventures and has been rewarded, to varying degrees, with high socio-political status, wealth and women. This boy, most of the time, is occupied by a tight schedule of undergoing adventures, acquiring forces, conquering ‘Otherness’ and arriving at divinity. Without much emphasis on the psychological description to allow the boy a chance to be fully developed into a round character, this boy could be argued to work more as a medium whose job is to introduce adventures for prosumers.

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246 Grand-narrative was initially proposed by Jean-Francois Lyotard to refer to a narrative that could offer a comprehensive explanation for human historical knowledge as well as experience. Here, I intentionally use the term in a non-orthodox way to indicate that this narrative, though taking different forms, elucidates the collective desire of those who engage and approach this ‘grand narrative’. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*. 
(participants) to play a role-playing game mentally,\textsuperscript{247} be it a narrative of ‘Chinese-ness’ or not.

4.2.4: 

\textit{Wangyou \textsuperscript{網遊} (On-line Game)}

4.2.4.1: \textit{Between a Physical World and a Virtual Secondary World}

In commenting on the Hollywood science fiction movie \textit{The Matrix}, Jenkins wrote:

The original movies, \textit{The Matrix}, took us into a world where the line between reality and illusion constantly blurred, and where the bodies of humans are stored as an energy source to fuel machine while their minds inhabit a world of digital hallucinations […]\textsuperscript{248}

Just as movie-goers gravitate toward \textit{The Matrix Trilogy} for a world balanced between reality and illusion (the same feature motivates the craze for the 3-D blockbuster \textit{Avatar}), on-line game fiction in Chinese cyberspace entices readers for a similar reason – a world fabricated upon the fusion between the protagonist’s reality and illusion in the narrative. By identifying with the protagonist, prosumers experience a \textit{Matrix}-like sensation of travelling between a world of ‘real’ and a world of ‘digital illusion’.

The birth of on-line game fiction clearly owes its existence to the on-line game industry. In today’s China, the on-line game industry has been booming.\textsuperscript{249} Among the various on-line games genres, MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer

\textsuperscript{247} Three works of the narratives of ‘Chinese-ness’ epitomised in the text have been adapted into on-line games: \textit{Xingchen Bian Online 星辰變 online} <http://xcb.sdo.com/web3/home/home.asp>; \textit{Zhuxian On-line 誅仙 on-line} <http://zx2.gameflier.com>; \textit{Fanren Xiuxian Zhuan On-line 凡人修仙傳 on-line} <http://fr.baiyou100.com>. Other works have been rumoured to be licensed into on-line games.

\textsuperscript{248} Jenkins, \textit{Convergence Culture}, 94.

\textsuperscript{249} In China, the number of people engaged with on-line games was 304,100,000 in 2010, up from 264,540,000 in 2009. CNNIC, “The 27\textsuperscript{th} CNNIC Report,” 31.
Online Role Playing Games) is the most popular kind. Since the turn of this century, the on-line game industry has been producing remarkable profits and has rapidly become integrated into the younger generation’s lifestyle. To many players, killing time in the virtual space interacting with other players to execute exciting, heart-throbbing missions – in order to be rewarded with virtual money or treasures, with psychological achievement, and with attractive virtual ladies – has become an alternative to self-fulfilment. Assuming any self-selected avatar, players enhance their sense of existence, experiencing a virtual, unreal but more desirable world which brings them excitement through their avatars. Users can manipulate their avatars to decide their next move. The fate of the avatar is under their control. There might be distress and difficulty involved when a player fails to move to the next phase, but this distress is merely temporary as they know that with persistent trying, the difficulty will be tackled, the frustration will vanish and the next phase will be reached, since players can always have a second chance. In the worst-case scenario, players can retreat from the virtual world without any physical damage done.

The notion of RPGs began in 1940s Germany with a psychotherapy intention of encouraging patients to play a different role to “give[s] the individual a greater degree of freedom”. Since then, role-playing and psychology have been correlated with each other. As the concept of role-playing has been extended, intentionally or not, into the era of the gaming industry, numerous participants have become obsessed with RPGs. By identifying themselves with the avatar, players are promised a way

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250 MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game) is the most popular type among MMOG (Massive Multiplayer On-line Games) in China. In China, MMOPPG took 61% of the on-line gaming market, and was preferred by 47.9% of the gaming population. However, MMORPG, in contrast to other MMOG on-line games, generated the largest revenue in the on-line game market in China in 2009. CNNIC, “Zhongguo Wangluo Youxi Shichang Yanjiu Baogao 2009 Niandu” (Chinese Online Game Market Survey and Analysis Report Year 2009), 37-38. MMOGRP indicates its massive capability on one server to be accessed, simultaneously, by a large numbers of users who assume different roles, by the default setting of the game, to interact with one another and to complete quests as the game unfolds on-line for them.

251 Nephew, “Playing with Identity,” 121.
[...] to escape a sometimes harsh reality into a dreamworld in which they can re-assert their personal power and individual sense of worth. Make-believe, as promoted by RPGs, replaces the real world with a better one, at least in an act of psychological displacement.\textsuperscript{252}

The dreamworld constituted in the virtual world by the interactive features of online games displaces game players to a dimension of ‘Otherness’ where the fiction work of similar story pattern discussed earlier is applied. In this virtual world, the player and his/her avatar are one entity. The exciting adventures spread out in the world of ‘Otherness’ help to enhance psychological fulfilment by subduing non-human species (such as in \textit{Warcraft}). In addition, the total score earned by undertaking the adventures and vanquishing obstacles can be converted into virtual currency, which can be converted into real currency or goods in everyday life. Both the psychological and physical achievements further encourage game players to continue visiting the virtual world through their avatars for more self-fulfilment. In some extreme cases, the fusion of the entities of players and avatars is so close that addiction issues arise.

\textbf{4.2.4.2: From On-line Game to On-line Game Fiction}

The experience of game-playing is truthfully translated in the New Literature genre of On-line Game. On-line Game, as the name of the genre denotes, has its story lying predominantly in a plot centering on the protagonist’s experience of playing an on-line game. The storyline weaves together a physical world and a virtual space from the perspective of the protagonist (much like a player caught between reality and illusion). Travelling back and forth between the protagonist’s boring, ordinary physical world and the virtual excitement in the fiction constitutes a ‘plot-within-the-plot’ narration, which attracts numerous netizens (much like \textit{The Matrix Trilogy}).

A sense of infusion is caused by the \textit{Matrix} style of the parallel narration transferring from an on-line world to an off-line world and \textit{vice versa}. Bouncing

\textsuperscript{252} Nephew, “Playing with Identity,” 125.
between the protagonist’s physical world and the virtual space resembles the
game-playing experiences in many prosumers’ real lives. Furthermore, various
new on-line-game terminologies or operational procedures introduced into the
text of on-line game fiction enhance the verisimilitude of on-line game fiction as
on-line game playing. The detailed description of character avatars in the on-line
.games, narrated by authors from the eyes of the protagonists in the fiction, not
only makes the reading closer to the netizens’ previous game-playing experiences,
but also makes it easier for them to become engaged. Thus, the narratives contain
many details depicting setting up the character avatar mode in terms of his
attributes. In Chongsheng zhi Zeixing Tianxia 重生之贼行天下 (A Reborn
Wanderer in the World), as the protagonist set up the avatar mode, he also
proceeded to check out the attributes designated to the avatar, doing what
everyone would do in their daily lives playing a new on-line game – following a
player’s instruction manual to set up the attributes of their avatars. Throughout
the narrative, game terminologies and instructions typical of a game manual are
constantly admixed with the text to create a resemblance of the text to a game
manual.

Employing the strategies of the parallel plot-within-the-plot, as well as
that of the scrutinised description of on-line game terminology and scenes,
authors of On-line Game fiction produce a text highly similar to a game-playing
experience. Each time the protagonist takes up his avatar on-line, the on-line
game-playing experience of the readers is easily recalled to generate a similitude
between reading and game-playing so that both activities can be eventually
associated together into one.

4.2.4.3: The Golden Triangle in On-line Game Narratives

Whilst the above-mentioned strategies of creating flux appear to serve the
purpose of simulating game-playing to attract readers, this new fiction genre also
resorts to employing the golden triangle for readers to fantasise. The success
which protagonists earn in the virtual world is always translated into equivalent
success in their off-line world. Playing on-line games secures for protagonists the
essence of the golden triangle: wealth, supreme socio-political status, and beautiful female companions. From the moment they assume their avatar in any specific on-line game, protagonist(s) in the fiction works are transferred from ordinary to extra-ordinary, from powerless to empowered. Ironically, this drastic change is impossible in the general netizens’ everyday lives, where success in on-line games usually does not secure for them the golden triangle.

In On-line Game, the protagonists are not necessarily ordinary. Popular works such as Conling Kaishi 從零開始 (Scratch from Zero) and A Reborn Wanderer in the World feature protagonists who are young people from wealthy families. They attend expensive private schools and drive fancy sport cars in their off-line lives. Other works such as Wangyou: Menghuan Xianshi 網遊: 夢幻現實 (Online Game: A Dream Realised) and Wangyou zhi Tiandi 網遊之天地 (The World of On-line Game) feature ordinary young men who barely make both ends meet in their off-line reality. The commonality shared by all protagonists is that they feel powerless, bored and eager for achievement. On-line games, as an intruder into their lives, provide the best solution to eradicate their boredom and grant them a sense of achievement.

Once protagonists have access to one particular game to select their avatar, powerlessness and boredom will soon vanish. They enter a world of Otherness identical to the world of Otherness presented in other fiction genres previously discussed. Monsters from traditional Chinese ghost stories, ninjas from Japan’s Warring Period, generals from Roman empires, fantasy creatures from Greek mythology are brought together to enhance the Otherness. It is through this Otherness that the magnificence of the protagonist inside the gaming world will be accentuated. In Online Game: A Dream Realised, the protagonist, who had been bullied in his real life, in the gaming world turned out to be a patriotic warrior who defended China from the infiltration of underground criminal organisations based in foreign lands. He was then honoured as the king of the gangs in China to protect his beloved motherland, located a legendary Pharaoh’s treasure, and defeated an arch-angel in a world swordsman tournament held in Europe. In Wangyou zhi Zhiye Rensheng 網遊之職業人生 (On-line Game as
Occupation), the protagonist, who was broke and out of school, was attracted to a new on-line game. This game invited him into an eastern fantasy world primarily comprising twelve ancient cities named after Chinese mythological figures. The protagonist had a tight schedule of taming fantasy creatures, fighting monsters and flattering beautiful females. Yet, the adventures that began from eastern fantasy lands were soon extended to a western fantasy land ‘Atlantis’, where the protagonist busied himself with fighting the Crusaders, enhancing his magic-power and chasing mermaids.

The success gained in the virtual world was equally reflected in the protagonist’s everyday life. Each time he came back from the virtual world, his socio-political status was elevated, his wealth accumulated and attractive female companion(s) fell for him in his off-line world. In *On-line Game as Occupation*, an ancient prophecy was embedded inside the on-line game to be deciphered only by the protagonist, who was bestowed with a mission to prevent Chiyou 蚩尤 (Chi You) from invading earth and establishing Huangdi 黃帝 (Empire Yellow) at the end. With his magic power mysteriously transferred from the on-line world to him in his off-line life, the protagonist reached the status of a god. In *On-line Game: A Dream Realised*, the protagonist owned the sole intellectual property right of the on-line game which granted him success in the virtual world at the end. Because of that, the protagonist surpassed Bill Gates as the richest person in the world, having three pretty companions and a lovely son.

On-line Game thus celebrates virtuality by seeing success in virtuality as transferrable into protagonists’ everyday lives. Most popular works of On-line Game do not endeavour to differentiate the protagonist’s reality from the virtuality. Contrarily, they emphasise the fusion as a way out of the ordinary everyday life for the protagonists. On-line game is not only a game; it is a mechanism by which ordinary game players can be guaranteed the golden triangle. The emergence of this genre reverberates with the lifestyle of many young on-line users for whom game-playing has become an indispensable part of life due to their emotional needs. Either they seek to escape from the stiff competition and pressure which they face in reality, or they strive to earn the satisfaction that one
does not easily receive in everyday life. Having stepped into this virtual world constructed by the authors’ imagination, readers fantasise the desires emblazoned by the golden triangle earned from the virtual world to offer them provisional comfort that success in a virtual world could be translated to reality. Digesting the imagination into their dreams/desires which are hardly put into practice in their everyday life, readers help to finish the final, delicate touch of constructing a virtual castle through their fantasisation by consuming On-line Game fiction.

4.3: Tier Two – The More Consumed but Relatively Less Produced Genre

4.3.1: Lishi 歷史 (History)

4.3.1.1: Historical Fiction – A Pending Controversy

A surge of production/consumption of historical fiction can be observed in China since the economic reforms. In fact, historical fiction has always been rather popular in China. Prominent Chinese historical fictions such as Sanguo Yanyi 三國演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms) are well-researched and widely-read for their literary and linguistic merits. Contemporary historical fiction writers such as Gaoyang 高陽 (1922-92) and Eryuehe 二月河 (1945-), with their works interpreting the Qing dynasty, enjoy enormous popularity among readers in the greater Chinese area. At the end of the twentieth century, New Historical Fiction (historical fiction with a new sense of historical awareness) was one of the predominant genres in the landscape of contemporary Chinese fiction.253

This trend of producing/consuming historical fiction has rapidly expanded into the digital world of internet fiction. Two independent sub-genres on the

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253 Cao argued that New Historical Fiction and Fiction of New Historicism are interchangeable terms, both indicating the historical narratives dated after Mo Yan’s historical fiction Hong Gaoliang 紅高粱 (Red Sorghum) in 1987. Nonetheless, the idea of ‘New Historicism’ is not relevant to the New Historicism in western academia, it is just a term borrowed to refer to historical fiction with a new sense of historical awareness. For more detail, see Cao Wenxuan 曹文軒 (1954-), Ershi Shiji Zhongguo Wenxue Xianxiang Yanjuo 二十世紀中國文學現象研究 (A Study of the Twentieth Century Chinese Literature Phenomena), 213-34.
major portal websites are historical fiction and military fiction. Qidian Chinese Net has put History alongside Military under one broad category due to their similarity of themes. In terms of the number of works produced, neither genre outperforms the fairly popular fiction genres discussed previously. However in terms of consumption rate, History much surpasses Military to be the fifth most popular fiction genre. Judging from the difference between production and consumption rates, History is the only fiction genre that is not consistent in its production and consumption rates. It could be argued that composing historical fiction could be more relatively complicated than other genres since authors are expected to demonstrate more in-depth historical knowledge, unlike other genres such as Eastern Fantasy or Urban, where authors can rely solely on their imagination.

4.3.1.2: The Popular Tendency of Fictionalising History – Factual Fabrication versus Unfactual Fabrication

Historical narratives, universally, always seem to have their pendulum swinging between ‘historicising fiction’ and ‘fictionalising history’. The on-line Chinese literary sphere is no exception. The heavy fabrication through one’s imagination to narrate history suggests that the pendulum has swung away from the tradition of ‘historicising fiction’ – in which authors strive to maintain the roles of both historian and fictionist – to the trend of ‘fictionalising history’ – in which authors lean more towards fictionist than historian – in Chinese cyberspace. Sanguo Zhi 三國志 (Records of the Three Kingdoms), written by Chen Shou 陳壽 (233-97), is an example of a more historically accurate account of Chinese history in the third century. The influential Chinese fiction The Romance of the Three Kingdoms, written in the fourteenth century, was obviously derived from the Records of the Three Kingdoms. Historical figures and events may have been re-interpreted and re-positioned in the fictional text at the author’s free will,

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254 Romance of the Three Kingdoms not only assimilates materials from The Records of the Three Kingdoms, but also the notes and commentaries on Records of the Three Kingdoms by Pei Songzhi 貝松之 (372-451). Roberts, “Afterword: About Three Kingdoms,” 946-47.
but overall, the fiction largely relies on actual historical figures and true events. By contrast, popular historical narratives on Qidian Chinese Net do not quite follow this tradition. Rather, authors are inclined to fabricate a dynasty which previously did not exist in Chinese history, but which bears a lot of similarities to one specific imperial dynasty. This type of fabrication I call ‘unfactual fabrication’ because there is hardly any historical truth in the narrative. There are also authors who claim that their creation is established on ‘historical truth’, such as using the Tang or the Ming dynasty as the background, with a group of real historical figures being introduced into the texts to interact with the protagonists. This type of fabrication I call ‘factual fabrication’. In both types, personal fabrication is a crucial key to writing historical narratives nowadays as a way to fantasise the desire of the Chinese netizens who enjoy internet fiction.

4.3.1.3: Personal Fabrication as the Key to History Fiction

In the end, ‘factual fabrication’ and ‘unfactual fabrication’ differ little, since the Chinese literary fantastic mode is equally and heavily applied in both. Historical accuracy seems to be the least concern to producers/consumers. Arguably, the low concern for historical accuracy but high interest in fabrication offers producers/consumers a larger space of their own, formulating an absolutely fabricated narrative setting in an ancient, faraway time and space, which they generalise simply as ‘historical’. In this space of their own, producers/consumers are allowed to fantasise their dream of becoming significant in a selected period of history. Concurrently, they enjoy the freedom of manipulating or interpreting history in a subjective, individualistic fashion rather than merely following an orthodox, established history.

Ironically, this struggle for freedom from orthodox historical discourse does not guarantee freedom from the mainstream desire of the golden triangle, which reverberates in the works of popular history fiction. The basic pattern of History narratives accentuates that one individual could create a butterfly effect to cause an enormous impact on history, while the after-effect of the butterfly effect is that this individual derives grandeur, is recognised for his greatness, and enjoys
wealth, high socio-political status, and, of course, attractive female companionship.

Similar to the fiction genres I previously analysed, an unusual displacement or intrusion has to take place to initiate the text. In the works of History, the most common displacement is time-slip. Either the protagonist travels back to a past or is reborn into a Chinese dynasty. In the three-million-word narrative *Jipin Jiading* (The Unusual Story of a Chinese Housekeeper), the protagonist, who unsurprisingly had led a plain life in present-day China, travelled through time back to an ancient Chinese dynasty resembling the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Being granted a job as a housekeeper for a local rich family, he took the chance to publicise his versatility and resourcefulness to impress his employer. In the nearly four-million-word work *Huidaoh Mingchao Dang Wangye* (Reborn Back to the Ming Dynasty to be a Prince), the protagonist was reborn back to the Ming dynasty into a local noble family. Similarly in *Bubu Shenglian* (Back to the Song Dynasty: A Story of Reincarnation), an ordinary social worker in present-day China had his soul reincarnated back to the Song dynasty (960-1279) into a local noble family.

Even though most protagonists were offered the chance to live a second life, they were not necessarily reborn into a prestigious background. This is why the protagonist had to experience adventures (many of which happened to them due to pure luck) to upgrade themselves from being merely a member of the local gentry to becoming the most socio-politically influential figure in the central government, second only to the emperor. In both *Reborn back to the Ming Dynasty to be a Prince* and *Back to the Song Dynasty: a Story of Reincarnation*, the protagonists were authorised to implement important missions by the central government. They defended China against Inner Asian barbarian invaders – Khitan, Jurchen, Mongolians; and against invaders from the sea – Japanese pirates. The protagonists were also busy ‘domesticating’ people within China on behalf of the emperor. From time to time, they would travel around China to secretly investigate the local government and yamen, playing the role of Bao Zheng (999-1062), who has been highly praised as the embodiment of justice.
Meanwhile, the protagonists always managed to spare themselves some time from their tight schedule to flirt with attractive women. In another extremely popular work *Qing Yunian* (慶餘年, *Celebrating a Fruitful Year*), the story is set in a non-existent Chinese dynasty called Qing (慶, which sounds very similar to the last Chinese imperial dynasty Qing). The protagonist, similarly, experienced accumulating wealth and escalating socio-political status after his soul was cast into a newly-born baby in this faraway land. Never would it occur to the protagonist that as someone who had no social networking in present-day China and who passed away lonely in a local hospital, that he would have the opportunity to be reborn into a much better life where he would find himself establishing a reputation, hoarding treasures, passing a national examination, defending China from barbarians, ascending to the status of prime minister and being personally befriended by the emperor.

Most History narratives, as expected, culminate in the grand achievement of the golden triangle. In *The Unusual Story of a Chinese Housekeeper*, the protagonist could not be satisfied with marrying the nobleman’s beautiful daughter and enjoying her dowry, he also passed a national examination, and was appointed by the emperor as the first ambassador to represent China coping with ‘barbarians’ – Europeans, Middle-Easterners, and other ‘disobedient’ Asian countries, such as Korea. The story concludes with the protagonist being made the Chinese ambassador, with tributes offered to him by ‘barbarians’ who are keen to fawn upon him, and with beautiful wives and children surrounding him.

In *Reborn back to the Ming Dynasty to be a Prince*, the protagonist not only became the emperor’s best friend and brother-in-law, but was also crowned as ‘Siberian King’ to monitor and ‘sinicise’ the barbarians from the north to nurture them with ‘culture’. Cooperating with the protagonist, the Ming emperor created the largest empire in the world. The story ends with both emperor and the protagonist standing side by side on the top of Mount Tai, looking down at the representatives dispatched by ‘barbarian’ kingdoms or tribes from all around the world to kowtow to China.
4.3.1.4: Fabrication, Time-slip and Individualisation

The notion of fabrication (either ‘factual fabrication’ or ‘unfactual fabrication’) leads to a self-selected (or self-created) period of time during which historical narratives are equipped with new insights or imagination to put what ought to have been objectively portrayed by a historian in a fairly subjective light at the free will of authors. The use of history as a subject for popular fiction writing suggests that it is not through the prosumption of fiction relevant to history that the reader can attempt to understand history; on the contrary, it is now through producing/consuming history, regardless of how ridiculous or misleading the delineation might be and how much it might veer from historical exactitude, that producer/consumers exercise their sense of self-empowerment, which lies with the belief that any ordinary Chinese person could create a butterfly effect on the course of history to become sufficiently pivotal to determine the direction of history. During the process, this insignificant person can make a positive contribution to the making of a more superior and invincible Chinese nation/state for Chinese nationalism to shine through in other parts of the world.

On the other hand, however, the repetitively used strategy of time-slip back to pre-modern China, arguably, implies that many Chinese people are eager for a chance to be reborn to a better life. The theme of time-slip/time-travel, which has saturated Qidian Chinese Net and Qidian Female Net (and is also a feature of some other major internet literature web portal sites such as Jinjiang Literature City), reflects the anxiety of Chinese netizens who seem to be discontented with their present lives. This convenient ‘time-slip/time-travel’ mechanism by which netizens stretch their imagination as far as possible, actually, offers them an outlet to collectively desire a ‘second chance’ in reality. Their dream of ascending to high socio-political status, deriving a fortune, and securing a wonderful relationship with one or more gorgeous women, arguably consists of Chinese individualisation operating in a collective fashion. Only by living a second life can an ordinary individual born at the grassroots level achieve such unattainable grandeur. That explains the fact that most protagonists in History fiction, despite the trivial and petty nature of their primary life, without exception
arrive at a pivotal status in history in their ‘second’ life. Travelling back to any period of time in China guarantees that the protagonists will walk away with what Chinese people have been collectively pursuing in an extremely market economy-oriented, materialised Chinese society – wealth, high socio-political status, and sex.

Whilst history is treated much less as a text through which one hopes to learn about historical events or facts, and much more as a text by which one could fantasise the desires of achieving greatness, authors and readers appear to be satisfied with using history to fantasise. Major characters and main protagonists of new works which are categorised under History, for the foreseeable future, will continue slipping through time and travelling back to an archaic dynasty to gain unprecedented success.

4.4: Tier Three – The Less Produced/Consumed Genres

Two less popular genres of which production/consumption rates still exceeds 5% are Western Fantasy and Science Fiction. Like the five major genres already discussed, these two genres follow the same path of the story pattern to fantasise the collective desire of Chinese netizens.

4.4.1: Qihuan 奇幻 (Western Fantasy)

4.4.1.1: Warcraft in Neverland

Qihuan 奇幻: (Qi 奇: strange and unusual; Huan 幻: illusionary and unreal) was not an adjective to describe a literary genre until translated fantasy fiction such as the Harry Potter stories and The Lord of the Rings was introduced into China, suggesting that a close relationship between this genre and the Western literary fantastic. To an enormous extent, Western fantasy fiction is a globalised cultural product disseminated through multi-media and literary texts, largely

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owing its inspiration to the consumption trends of *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings* or even the *Warcraft* series.\(^{256}\) This genre sets out to imitate fantasy fiction from the West for producers/consumers to imagine a distant, unfamiliar ‘foreignness’ whereby they fantasise through the text. The foreignness, creating estrangement, consolidates a sense of a mythical world of Otherness where (almost) everything is non-Chinese. The characters are raised in a faraway kingdom whose name sounds nothing but Western. The characters adopt Western names and are described as Caucasian.\(^{257}\)

Western Fantasy is an imitation of the literary fantasy that has flourished in the West. It often adopts the epic style of narrative. The narrative typically features a young hero whose life is comprised of three parts: underdog, prodigy and sovereign. These three parts correspond to the repetitive story pattern I have previous examined as displacement, experience in the world of otherness, and elevation/apotheosis. The first part, underdog, shows this hero as an ordinary figure. Yet the ordinary figure develops into a prodigy, mostly due to a displacement. In *Panlong* 盤龍 (Coiled Dragon), an ordinary boy discovered a ring inside which the soul of a legendary wizard resided. The wizard revealed secrets of magic to the boy previously unknown to the world, which helped the boy to turn into a prodigy. It is the displacement of the ring into the boy’s life that initiates his development into a prodigy. Contrarily, in *Jiushen* 酒神 (The God of Wine), an internationally acclaimed professional bartender died from alcohol poisoning only to wake up in an unknown, magical continent, his soul trapped inside the body of a child beggar. In this case, it is the innate knowledge and gift obtained in the previous life that triggers the underdog into becoming a prodigy in the space where the hero was displaced. In both cases, it is a necessary step to differentiate the hero from his peers, and also from others in the world of Otherness at an early stage. Usually the transformation from an ordinary figure to

\(^{256}\) *Warcraft* is arguably the most commercially successful massively multiplayer role-playing online game in the world and is known as WOW (*World of Warcraft*) by its players.

\(^{257}\) There are works of Western Fantasy in which Chinese protagonists are characterised as well. As I previously pointed out, intertextuality between various fiction genres is commonly practised to counteract the distinctive features pertaining to each genre.
a prodigy only counts for a small proportion of the narrative to impress readers with the unusual qualities of the hero, but is crucial for preparing readers for adventures to come.

The second part, from prodigy to sovereign – the main body of the narrative – details the hero’s rise to success of sovereignty when he had accomplished great achievements. Both the vertically and horizontally stretching spaces provide enough room for protagonists to undertake never-ending adventures. In Shanliang De Sishen 善良的死神 (The Lord of Death with a Kind Heart), the protagonist, in addition to busily engaging himself with learning alchemy and magic, defeating pirates, hunting for magical weapons, capturing fantasy creatures, challenged the Lord of the Underworld at the end. Out of the 208 chapters of this narrative, at least 200 chapters focus on describing the adventures which the hero undertook. In Coiled Dragon, the protagonist did not cease his heroic deeds even after having become a great wizard. He entered the underworld to challenge the Lord of the Underworld, also travelling up to heaven to confront gods of all kinds. His adventures make up most of the chapters of the narrative.

As for the ending, Western Fantasy reprises the ending of other fiction genres previously discussed. The protagonist is gloriously elevated, often through apotheosis. Yongbing Tianxia 傭兵天下 (The Legend of a Mercenary) ends its narrative by singing the praises of the hero after he had been transformed into the true God and the creator of the universe. Coiled Dragon culminates in the protagonist’s success in dethroning the greatest god to restore the order of the world of Otherness. The protagonist became a legend himself ever after. Xiedu 褻穢 (Blasphemy) devotes its final few chapters to depicting the transcendence of the protagonist into an unprecedented holy status. The final sentence uttered by the protagonist immediately after his transcendence is “Let There Be Light”, echoing the book of Genesis and placing him on a par with Jehovah.

Patching together a fiction work built on a similarly repetitive story pattern by consulting various well-known sources and by creating game-playing
experience, authors of mimic Western fantasy fiction conveniently use story materials already familiar to readers (like a wizard school or a ring of magic) through different media platforms to invite them into a simulated westernised mythical world where fortune, high socio-political status and women constitute a golden triangle to define the success of an individual. This definition of success is no different from what people look up to as worldly success in the primary physical world.

4.4.2: Kehuan 科幻 (Science Fiction)

4.4.2.1: From Saving the Nation to Fantasising Chinese Individualisation

Kehuan 科幻 (science fiction) is an abbreviated form of Kexue Huanxiang 科學幻想 (science and imagination) coined by Lu Xun, the notion of which was initially introduced in the late Qing period through translated fiction works. These stories carried a mission of persuading Chinese people of the necessity of science education and knowledge, believed to be the crucial factor empowering western imperialism, as well as a means to rescue China from its semi-colonial status by strengthening China scientifically. Meanwhile, the Late Qing writers who produced Chinese science fiction narratives used this genre to ‘[…] set forth the terms of China’s modernization project […] as a new political agenda and as a new national myth’. Through the ‘act of imagining and writing out the incredible and the impractical’, late Qing writers envisioned their technological future of China to share with their readers. In this regard, science fiction was not simply a narrative for leisure activity but was endowed with a higher purpose of the salvation of the nation.

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258 Some of the most popular Western Fantasy works have been adapted into on-line games. 
259 Wang, Fin-de-Siecle Splendor, 252.
260 Ibid., 253.
261 Ibid.
On the contrary, most current science fiction narratives on Qidian Chinese Net have already deviated from that higher purpose. The genre does not attempt to promote popular science, nor does it share any similarity with works by Isaac Asimov (1920-92) in the sense of his humanistic contemplation of the human condition in a futuristic time. The impracticality and the incredibility are still imagined and written out, but are merely used to work out a science fiction text in which the previously-discussed common theme of the golden triangle stands out as the unchanging motif. Accentuated Chinese individualisation as such is ubiquitously re-echoed in this genre as well.

The story may or may not be set in a futuristic time, but the protagonist, who starts out as ordinary in the narratives, will definitely be taken into the future and transformed into a significant figure. In Wangpei Jinhua 王牌進化 (The Evolution of an Ace), the protagonist, who was a suspect in a murder case, was accidentally introduced into another dimension of time and space; whereas in Xiaobing Chuanqi 小兵傳奇 (The Legend of a Soldier), the protagonist volunteered to be a low-ranking soldier to fulfil his dream of becoming a general in the galactic military. In Tunshi Xiangkong 吞噬星空 (Devouring the Starry Sky), the protagonist was a high-school student in the late twenty-first century.

Just as with other genres, the protagonists will be prompted into a series of adventures. In The Legend of a Soldier, the protagonist was unexpectedly involved in a series of battles against other galactic fleets. Meanwhile, he flirted with beautiful female officers and soldiers. In Devouring the Starry Sky (the work is still in serialisation up to the point of the writing), the protagonist was determined to become a Wuzhe 武者 (Warrior), which requires constant engagement with bloody fighting. The fighting started from the earth but soon extended to other planets. Even before this story is officially concluded, the protagonist has been awarded the title of Zhanshen 戰神 (The God of War) in the galaxy, which also brings him abundant wealth.

The adventures are only a mechanism by which protagonists are justified to achieve the golden triangle. Consequently, in The Legend of a Soldier, the
protagonist set up his own fleet and kingdom named Tang 唐 (Tang), crushing his chief opponents, unifying the universe, ascending to become the emperor of the universe and marrying several wives. Similarly, in *The Evolution of an Ace*, the protagonist was promoted to a fourth dimension of time and space. He replaced the ruler, who had been Odin, of that dimension, vanquished the dimension of the Otherness and successfully returned from there back to the present time. As for *Devouring the Starry Sky*, the way to bring the story to its culmination is most likely to conclude by celebrating the protagonist being venerated as the God of War in the universe.

Simply incorporating the story pattern detailing the unprecedented success of the protagonist into a scientific theme, without providing any scientific knowledge, the stories described above merely emphasise the male protagonist’s universal invincibility symbolised through wealth, incomparable socio-political status and adoration by several gorgeous female companions.

4.5: Tier Four – The Least Produced/Consumed Genres

There are still five more fiction genres left undiscussed: Tongren 同人 (Fan Fiction); Jingji 競技 (Sports); Wuxia 武俠 (Chinese Martial Arts); Junshi 軍事 (Military) and Lingyi 灵異 (Horror). Two commonalities shared by the genres are (1) both their production and consumption rates remain relatively low, under 5%; and (2) the same story pattern is still heavily reprised for the golden triangle to be implemented in the narratives at the end.

Producers/consumers appear to seek after quite different texts in these five genres. Fan Fiction originated from the notion of “the product of unauthorized writers taking characters and settings from television shows, movies, comics, or books and writing stories about them”\(^\text{262}\). In other words, fans derive their re-creation of original popular works distributed by the mass media – a behaviour that exactly corresponds to the prosumerism where active participation takes place in current popular culture universally. While the sport news documents what has

\(^\text{262}\) Mazar, “Slash Fiction/Fan Fiction,” 1411.
actually taken place on the sports field, Sports authors write about what they imagine to have taken place on the field, as well as off the field – all the strict training, the competition against adversaries, the new sports skills which the sports figure hero acquires – to elaborate the means and process by which the ultimate victories are achieved. The glory, either on an individual level, team level, or even national level, is accentuated. Chinese Martial Arts sets out to continue the Chinese swordsman tradition of performing marvellous martial arts skills by which Chinese swordsmen can serve out social justice for their communities. As for Military, the narratives are designed to depict military strategy and warfare either by re-interpreting an historical past event or campaign or by imagining a future world. Whereas Horror, as the title indicates, is developed from the notion of describing ghosts, apparitions or phantoms to instigate a sense of uncanniness which Freud suggests as “occur [ing] when something that is familiar is alienated, through a process of repression, and then returns to us in an uncanny form”. Readers are attracted by the feeling of uncanniness for a different reading experience.

Nonetheless, the different textual tendencies across various fiction genres, in their underlying structures, gravitate towards a similar fantatisation of collective desires of what has been previously discussed. Most popular works from each genre play around the notion of writing out the golden triangle by spinning around the similar story pattern examined earlier to deliver the fantasisation at the end. In the next section, I shall use one extremely popular work of fiction from each genre to illustrate the situation.

*Shengdoushi zhī Xie Sheshou 聖鬥士之邪惡射手 (The Evil Sagittarius of Saint Seiya)*, the most popular fan fiction on Qidian Chinese Net, describes an up-to-no-good Chinese youth mysteriously being transported into the imaginary world of *Saint Seiya*. The protagonist assumed the role of Sagittarius,

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263 Grenville, “The Uncanny,” 19.
264 *Shengdoushi Xingshi 聖鬥士星矢 Saint Seiya* (Saint Seiya: Knights of the Zodiac) has been an extremely popular Japanese Manga, later adapted into Anime to be broadcast over TV Asahi in the late 1980s. The story features five high-school Japanese boys engaging in constant battles against the knights of the twelve signs of the Zodiac and other figures from both Greek and Nordic myth to protect Athena.
outperforming the other eleven Zodiac warriors to become their leader. He marched towards victory, defeating their common arch-enemies to receive high socio-political status and wealth at the end as a ruler of the world of Otherness. In *Women Shi Guanjun* 我們是冠軍 (We are the Champions) from Sports, the protagonist, a football prodigy on the Chinese national team, dreamed of competing against his childhood friend Kaka (the Brazilian football mid-fielder recruited by Real Madrid Club de Futbol in reality). In the story, Kaka’s father became a Chinese and his mother a Brazilian to justify why Kaka was related with China in many respects. To fulfil the dream, the protagonist and his teammates travelled to Europe, where they conquered prominent European football clubs one after another. The fiction culminates in the ultimate glory and honour of championship with the Chinese national football team winning the World Cup at the end (it is worth noting that this work was released around the time of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, in which the Chinese team failed to qualify for the final 32 teams). The protagonist, upon taking up football as his career, accumulated wealth, high socio-political status, and a beautiful wife. From Chinese Martial Arts came a popular work *Jiudingji* 九鼎記 (The Chronicles of Nine Chinese Tripods). This work features a young man who was reborn into an ancient China divided into various kingdoms. After endless adventures, it was eventually revealed to the protagonist that his soul was the fifth reincarnation of the Almighty God, who visited China every thousand years to rejuvenate the country and who had previously been reincarnated as Duyu 大禹 (Dayu the Great), Qishi Huang 秦始皇 (Emperor Qinshi Huang), Li Bai 李白 (Li Bai), and Shijia Moni 釋迦摩尼 (Gautama Buddha). The protagonist unified China fulfilling the prophecy to rejuvenate China, afterwards vanishing from the human world into eternity. All Chinese people sang praises to glorify him. In Military, *Fuhuo zhi Zhangdou zai Disan Diguo* 復活之戰鬥在第三帝國 (Reborn into the Warfare of the Third Reich), the story features a present-day young Chinese who was reincarnated in the Second World War period. The protagonist altered the course of European history by arriving at the position of the German Chancellor of the
Third Reich. He superseded historical figures such as Hitler and Mussolini to dominate the supreme socio-political arena in Europe. The story has not yet concluded, although an ending implying that the protagonist would unify the world to be its grand ruler is not unlikely. Last but not least, Guichuideng 鬼吹燈 (Ghost Blows Light: A Chinese Tomb-Raider’s Story), a well-read fiction which epitomises the Horror genre, sets its story in present-day China with a first-person narration. The protagonist was ‘exiled’ to Inner Mongolia during the Cultural Revolution and encountered a series of mysterious happenings – ghouls, spirits, local legends and treasures. The protagonist’s exploration into mythic locations was accompanied by a rich mixture of Chinese astrology, fortune-telling, local folk practices, legends and ghastly elements. At the end, he emigrated to the United States to start a new life, inevitably with precious treasures and a beautiful woman by his side. Most works of fiction from these five minor genres, much conforming to the works from other more prosumed genres, seek to implement the golden triangle to generate the fantasisation for Chinese netizens to have their desires temporarily realised through the texts.

4.6: Conclusion

Regardless of genre, a repetitive pattern of an underdog achieving grandeur in his life by travelling into different time/dimension, or by receiving an out-of-this-world device in his present life, is clearly perceived. Unsurprisingly, the grandeur is always comprised by wealth, high socio-political status, and sex, the three elements desired/fantasised by Chinese netizens. This desire is spelt out by the heavy application of the three phases of displacement/intrusion, experiences/reconstruction of the world of Otherness, and apotheosis or elevation in most works from each fiction genre. The three phases are full of incredible and impossible elements, just as can be frequently seen in virtual games. The implementation of the three phases through which the grandeur of wealth, high socio-political status, and sex can be achieved helps producers/consumers to undergo a game-playing experience, producing/consuming the popular texts in a manner similar to engaging oneself with a mental on-line or video RPG game.
In this chapter, the fiction genres on the male-dominated Qidian Chinese Net have been examined in the order of their production/consumption rate from high to low. In the next chapter, the focus will be shifted to the Qidian Female Net, where Yanqing 言情 (Romance) is the only genre produced/consumed by mostly women. A repeated story pattern, without exception, is reprised in Romance, but in different ways. In what ways the golden triangle is spelt out differently yet continued into Romance to make the whole landscape of Chinese internet fiction an intertextuality of fantasising the collective desire of golden-triangle consummation will be analysed in the next chapter.
Chapter Five: Female Fantasy – The Golden Triangle in Romance Fiction on Qidian Female Net

5.1: Introduction

In Chapter 4, I examined all of the fiction genres on Qidian Chinese Net to show that a similar story pattern of three stages is implemented throughout the popular fiction works on Qidian Chinese Net to attract netizens towards a golden triangle whereby wealth, high socio-political status, and sex can be fantasised through producing/consuming the texts. In this chapter, I shall continue to demonstrate that the same notion of promising an imaginary golden triangle is embedded into the Romance narratives on Qidian Female Net, only spelt out less straightforwardly. In addition, Romance narratives are not only about heterosexual narratives in which a Prince Charming rescues a Cinderella and they live together happily ever after; there are also homosexual narratives in which a Zeus figure subdues a Ganymede to develop homoerotic and everlasting love/physical relationship. Therefore, after a short overview of the development of Romance and an explanation of how that genre fulfils the golden triangle, this chapter will analyse homosexual narratives and heterosexual narratives respectively to examine the way in which the notion of golden triangle is applied.

5.2: The Mass-production of Popular Romance Narratives in the West

Modern popular romance usually falls victim to social criticism and academic censure on account of its mass production, profit-making orientation and shallow, stereotyped content. Thus although romance as a genre entered English usage to refer to vernacular French narratives of adventure and love, today it has deviated from its original positive connotation. Despite serving significantly as “[…] the origin of the modern fiction […] the ancestor of almost all contemporary popular fiction […]” due to its various literary elements, the genre now known as ‘popular romance’ suffered from deliberate denigration from
the elites in early modern England, due to the threat of print materiality potentially undercutting their legitimacy as elites. Following the contemporary romance formula which can be traced back to Pride and Prejudice and Jane Eyre, the genre is now easily associated with the cliché of love only, causing this genre to be regarded as “[…] something both trivial and feminine”.

Nowadays, Romance covers a wide diversity of narratives. Romance can feature a love relationship during the American Civil War, such as Margaret Mitchell’s Gone with the Wind; a love triangle between a human girl, a vampire and a werewolf, such as Stephenie Meyers’s Twilight series; a love relationship blended with a time-travel theme, such as Diana Gabalton’s Outlander series; or even an erotic fiction featuring theme of sadomasochism, such as E.L James’ Fifty Shades of Grey trilogy. To help distinguish romance from other fiction genres, the Romance Writers’ Association suggests that a ‘popular romance’ narrative is defined by the presence of

A Central Love Story: The main plot centres around two individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work. A writer can include as many subplots as he/she wants as long as the love story is the main focus of the novel; and

An Emotionally-Satisfying and Optimistic Ending: In a romance, the lovers who risk and struggle for each other and their relationship are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love.

These two crucial elements help to circumscribe the boundary of popular romance as a fiction genre. The two elements are, more or less, reflected in the romance narratives spreading to the other parts of the world, as well as to the internet.

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270 The Association is based in the US, with its primary goal offering support and social-networking to authors whose writing interests concentrate on romance narratives. It claims to have already more than 10,000 members who are professional romance writers registered with the website as members. 25 February 2011 <http://www.rwanationa.org>. The criteria cited are from <http://www.rwanational.org/cs/the_romance_genre>. 25 February 2011.
5.3: A Romance Tradition in Chinese Popular Literature

5.3.1: From *Caizi Jiaren* 才子佳人 (the Genius and the Beauty) to the Modern-day Cyber Romance

Luomanshi 羅曼史 (Romance), a phonological translation of the word ‘Romance’ into the Chinese language, is used comprehensively to refer to love stories. However, the translation from English does not mean that love stories are a purely Western literary practice. Love-themed literary works have been popularly consumed in China such as poetic works such as *Kongque Dongnan Fei* 孔雀東南飛 (Peacocks Fly to the Southeast, anonymous, composed during the Eastern Han period [25-220]) and *Changhen Ge* 長恨歌 (The Song of Everlasting Regret) by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) as well as dramatic works such as *Xixianji* 西廂記 (Romance of the Western Chamber) by Wang Shifu 王實甫 (1260-1336).271

One clear indication of the notion of romance is attested by the prevalence of the ‘genius and the beauty fiction’, which began to prosper in the late Ming period and flourished throughout the Qing period. The genius – a handsome, promising and talented young man usually from a poorer financial background, and the beauty – a beautiful, smart, well-versed young woman usually from a rich family, are the centre of this type of fiction.

The stories often consist of three stages: encounter (where the genius and the beauty fall in love); separation (where they are forced to be apart); and reunion (where a marriage between them concludes the story).272

The beauty, who is always well-educated, takes an active role in choosing her ideal companion, which goes against the traditional patriarchal institution of arranged marriages. Rejecting the patriarchal institution, the beauty usually falls

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for a genius who is equally literate but from a less prestigious family background. Consequently, their love is not blessed by society. The external barriers, either set by the beauty’s parents who symbolise the patriarchal institution from which the beauty and the genius strive to defend themselves, or other wealthier suitors who are preferred by the beauty’s parents, hinder the beauty and the genius and lead to a temporary separation between them.

Due to their reciprocal faith in love, the genius and the beauty successfully survive adversities and conquer obstacles, usually by the genius passing the national examination to achieve high socio-political status. In return, her patient wait for his career success is rewarded by her parents’ consent to their marriage.

Typically, having gained the two major goals which every member of the middle class is after (high social-political status and a beautiful companion), the genius will soon withdraw from his newly acquired official position, disappearing to a faraway rural location with the beauty to avoid being engaged in future political turmoil. Neither the genius nor the beauty is concerned with high socio-political status; rather, it is mutual love and their admiration for each other’s literary talent that matters. The acquisition of the status merely serves as a means by which the genius can be recognised by the beauty’s parents.

The genius and the beauty story pattern was reprised in many works of Tongsu Xiaoshuo fiction in the early twentieth century, but arguably with more variety. Out of the 137 popular fiction genres during the Republican Era, 30 of them can be generally categorised as popular romance. The popular romance, mostly, features a smart beauty and a handsome genius who try to make the relationship work through a series of dramatic struggles. They may or may not come from different socio-political backgrounds. In some cases, both of them are from equally insignificant backgrounds. Some works of fiction conclude happily,

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273 Zhou described high socio-political status and beauty as the two ultimate goals which a genius pursues throughout his lifetime. Zhou Jianyu 周建渝, Caizi Jiaren Xiaoshuo Yangjiu 才子佳人小說研究 (A Study of the Genius and the Beauty Romance), 108-14.
274 Zhang Gansheng 章贛生, Mingguo Tongsu Xiaoshuo Lungao 民國通俗小說論稿 (An Introduction to the Popular Fiction during the Chinese Republican Era), 28-30.
others tragically. The Tongsu Xiaoshuo love stories eventually were marginalised in Communist China.

5.3.2: The Popularity of Romance in China since the Economic Reforms

‘The genius and the beauty’ popular romance has been revived in modern form in the greater Chinese area since the economic reforms of the 1980s. The enormous popularity of the romances by Qiong Yao 琼瑶, and the media enfranchisements adapted from her love stories, attests that Chinese people could be very susceptible to the genre. In the digital age, well-known internet writers such as Pizi Cai 痞子蔡275 and Tengjingshu 藤井樹 (1976- ) are helping to bring the ‘love genre’ to a new zenith with the success of their fiction on-line. Although Cai’s works seem to attract mainly male readers, the market appeal of romance is clearly demonstrated. Once the notion of literary portal websites was initiated in the greater Chinese area, several popular websites276 have been established especially targeting female readers to produce/consume large quantities of Romance narratives.

A national survey conducted by Zhongguo Huliang Wangluo Xinxi Zhongxin 中國互聯網絡信息中心 (China Internet Network Information Centre) in 2010 indicated that among all the internet literature users, men accounted for 55.7% whereas women accounted for 44.3%.277 Although still falling behind, female internet literature users are full of commercial potential, which has attracted the attention of the internet literature portal sites. Whilst male users gravitate towards genres packed with action and adventures such as Eastern Fantasy or On-line Game, female users are mainly magnetised by romance.278 Even without precise statistics, romance is arguably the most prevalent fiction genre in Chinese cyberspace. Xianwang 鮮網 (My Fresh Net), the largest literary

275 See section 1.1 in Chapter 1 for the significance of Cai’s work.
276 There will be detailed information about what the literary portal sites are in the upcoming section.
277 Wang Jingjie 王京婕 (Wang Jingjie), “Wangluo Wenxue Xiaofei Nannu Youbie” 網絡文學消費男女有別 (There is a Gender Difference Between Internet Literature Consumption).
278 See Ibid. and ---, “Wangluo Wenxue Yonghu de Liangda Tezheng” 網絡文學用戶的兩大特徵 (Two Major Features of the Internet Literature Users).
portal website, which is based in Taiwan, categorises its works of fiction into four Guan 館 (pavilions) – two of which contain Romance fiction only.\(^\text{279}\) Another website, Jinjiang Wenyue Cheng 晉江文學城 (Jinjiang Literature City), begun in 2003, claims that 750 new romance fiction works are created and submitted to it on a daily basis, the total number in its database having reached a stunning 650,000.\(^\text{280}\) Hongxiu Tianxiang 紅袖添香 (Perfumed Red Sleeves), set up as early as 1999, boasts about being the most senior female-dominated literary website and has collected roughly 1,920,000 romances.\(^\text{281}\) Xiaoshuo Yuedu 小說閱讀網 (Fiction Reading Net), which advertises that it has 20 million readers, has divided its websites into three Ban 版 (Versions), one of which is dominated by romance narratives only.\(^\text{282}\) On Qidian Shanda, only two genres have accumulated over 100,000 works – Eastern Fantasy and Romance, with the latter obviously targeting female users. Readers (chiefly female) craving for romance will be redirected to another homepage entitled Qidian Female Net once they click on Romance on the genre selection menu on the Qidian homepage.\(^\text{283}\)

5.4: Romance – The Female Version of the Golden Triangle

5.4.1: From 'Unconditional Love' to 'Conditional Love'

The production/consumption of romance in literary virtual space especially designed for female users is phenomenal. Whilst singing praise to the never-changing theme of ‘seemingly’ unconditional love, romance narratives

\(^\text{279}\) The four pavilions are Yiwen Guan 異文館 (Pavilion of Works of ‘Otherness’); Langqing Quan 浪情館 (Pavilion of Works of Hetero-erotic Romance); Danmei Quan 聖美館 (Pavilion of Works of Homo-erotic Romance), and Tongren Guan 同人館 (Pavilion of Works of Fan Fiction). 20 February 2011 <www.myfreshnet.net>.

\(^\text{280}\) Jinjiang Literary City is in partnership with Qidian. 20 February 2011 <http://www.jjwxc.net/aboutus>.

\(^\text{281}\) Perfumed Red Sleeves also has a partnership with Qidian. 20 Feb. 2011 <http://topic.hongxiu.com/aboutus/aboutus.html>.

\(^\text{282}\) The three versions are: Nansheng Ban 男生版 (Male Version); Nüsheng Ban 女生版 (Female Version) and Xiaoyuan Ban 校園版 (Campus Version). Each version will redirect its readers to a different website where prosumers can have access to the type of works they prefer. 20 February 2011 <www.readnovel.com>.

\(^\text{283}\) See footnote 48, for more information about the overall structure of Qidian Shanda and its Female Net.
incorporate various fiction elements to increase its diversity. That Romance can be assimilated with a wider variety of other genres – such as fantasy, thriller, science fiction, history, military – is nothing new. Most fiction genres and sub-genres on Qidian Chinese Net are to be found on Qidian Female Net (or other romance fiction portal websites such as Jinjiang Literary City or Perfumed Red Sleeves) to serve as diverse, colourful coatings wrapped around the common theme of unconditional love.

Despite its focus on depicting ‘seemingly’ unconditional love, Romance in Chinese cyberspace is more than just about love. It is where the notion of golden triangle, which was discussed in the previous chapter, is spelt out for female netizens to fantasise their desire for the female version of the golden triangle. The way for female netizens to implement the notion is different from that for male netizens. Whereas male netizens crave for adventures by which they can gain wealth and high socio-political status and be rewarded with sex (symbolised by several attractive female companions) because of their wealth and high status, female netizens are eager for love (and to a certain extent, sex, which will be elaborated in the upcoming section), which serves as the means by which wealth and high socio-political status can be rewarded to female protagonists. Whereas male netizens intend to have the golden triangle implemented in a straightforward way by engaging in the pursuit of wealth and high socio-political status, both of which serve as means by which sex can be gained easily, female netizens reverse the sequence to seek love not only to fulfil an emotional need but also as a mechanism by which they anticipate being materially satisfied and socio-politically elevated through a patriarchal relationship.

The reversed sequence of the golden triangle implemented by and for male netizens is played out by and for female netizens. Ironically, the female version of the golden triangle gives one fundamental, crucial element suggested by the Romance Writers’ Association a twist, turning the element of ‘unconditional love’ into ‘conditional love’. Whereas the sequence for male netizens in their golden triangle is gaining wealth and arriving at high socio-political status, which leads
naturally to sexual gratification, female netizens regard love as a measure by which wealth and high socio-political status will be recompensed.

5.4.2: One Genre, Two Politics of Sex and Love

Whilst fantasising a perfect love relationship, female netizens further complicate the landscape of popular romance into two types: homoerotic romance and heterosexual romance. Homoerotic romance provides not only a reading for love but also an experimental ground where female netizens exercise voyeurism to project their sexual fantasies, whereas heterosexual romance concentrates more on reading for love as an emotional satisfaction and escape. Commonly, the two types of romance are involved with fulfilling a female version of the golden triangle, albeit with a different sexual orientation. In homoerotic romance, female netizens seek to have a relationship in which the golden triangle of material success, high socio-political status and especially sex, in the form of grotesque eroticism, is achieved through love’s consummation.

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284 The reason I use the phrase ‘homoerotic romance’ instead of ‘homosexual’ is because homoerotic romance explores more of the sexual aspect while depicting a male/male relation than the heterosexual romance, generally speaking (there will be an explanation of why female/female relation is not discussed, see footnotes 298 and 299). Arguably, the more explicit description corresponds to the politics of sex as the main component in a male/male relationship for female prosumers, who look to the outlet of experiencing voyeurism without identifying with either one of the protagonists. It is worth noting that between September and December 2011, the section of Cunai Danmei (Homoerotic Love) has been totally deleted. My speculation is that the explicit eroticism depicted in homoerotic (usually more explicit than heterosexual romance narratives) narratives has become an obvious target for state censorship. Interestingly, visitors to the guidelines of Romance sub-genres from Qidian Female Net at <http://www.qdmm.com/help/changjianzuopin.aspx> [13 December 2011] will find that the homoerotic love section is not there. However, in the guidelines of all fiction genres and sub-genres on Qidian Chinese Net at <http://www.qidian.com/News/ShowNews.aspx?newsid=1007009> [23 July 2009, 13 December 2011], the homoerotic section is still listed. The deletion of the whole section does not mean that the homoerotic works are removed as well; they have been re-categorised as part of heterosexual romance based on their story features. For instance, one popular homosexual romance Fengqi Yunyong zhi Shuangsheng 凤起雲涌之雙生 (The Adventures of Twin Brothers) has been re-assigned to Xiandai Yanqing 現代言情 (Modern-day Romance). Even though the section has been deleted, I believe that my analysis of the Romance narratives still holds due to the fact that the inclusiveness of homosexual romance narratives is a constant practice across major Romance-oriented literary portal websites in China, such as Jinjiang Literary City (there are authors who complain that their works have been severely ‘harmonised’ by the state on Jinjiang). Because of the state censorship, many homoerotic romance narratives, most likely, will be re-allocated to more secluded BBS or discussion forums, such as the Lucifer Club at <http://www.lucifer-club.com/login.php>, where a preliminary test to show how much a user understands homoerotic narratives is required. Once having failed the test, a user will not be able to register for free membership.
Producing/consuming homoerotic romance, female netizens justify the pornographic element by converting it into the desire for ‘Otherness’ in the form of gay eroticism. Assuming the role of an omnipotent ‘voyeur’ to fantasise desire for Otherness through a female Gaze, female netizens seek love’s consummation practised in an erotic fashion but equally rewarded with material satisfaction at the end. By doing so, they feel less intimidated over projecting their sexual fantasy through their gaze at the physically attractive gay couples, the erotic elements involved, and love’s consummation in homoerotic romance.

Conversely, in heterosexual romance, female netizens set out to re-enact the golden triangle of high socio-political status, wealth, and (arguably less) sex through love’s consummation. As well as the position of ‘voyeur’, female netizens also assume the role of ‘participant’ in the sense that many female netizens would identify themselves with the female protagonist. Sex is also involved, but much less in an erotically grotesque fashion so that sex practised between male and female protagonists would be considered ‘normal’.

In other words, in assuming the voyeur’s position in producing/consuming homoerotic romance, female netizens fantasise desire(s) for the golden triangle with a heavier stress on sex (which also allows them to fantasise sex outside the boundary of social norms); conversely, in assuming both the voyeur’s and the participant’s position in producing/consuming heterosexual romance, female netizens still fantasise desire(s) for the golden triangle, but with a more straightforward emphasis on love (with less sex and less grotesque practice in order to stay inside the boundary of the social norm). Thus, it is clear that both types of Romance deliver a similar underlying message of a female version of the golden triangle, differing only in the extent to which the politics of sex and of love are exercised respectively in homoerotic romance and heterosexual romance.

In the following section, I shall discuss homoerotic romance, then heterosexual romance, in detail to examine the ways in which a female version of the golden triangle is played out in each.
5.5: Cunai Danmei 純愛耽美 (Pure Love and Absolute Aesthetic) – Towards Female Voyeurism through Homoerotic Romance to Project Physical Desire

5.5.1: Homoerotic Romance – A Brief History in the US and Japan

The origin of modern homoerotic romance has been closely associated with fan fiction. Both in the West and in Japan, heterosexual female writers’ works exploring same-sex relationships, eroticism and the homosexual-world from a female’s idealised perspective, developed coincidentally in the 1970s. In the US, these works are known as ‘slash fiction’, a particular kind of fan fiction frequently focusing on male/male relationships, and occasionally on female/female relationships. Slash fiction is so popular that some critics claim that “the history of fan fiction studies, for the most part, is a history of attempting to understand the underlying motivations of why (mostly) women write fan fiction and, in particular, slash”. Appropriating male characters from popular media works such as Star Trek, X-Files or The Lord of the Rings, women are allowed an opportunity to “[...] construct narratives that subvert patriarchy by reappropriating those prototypical hero characters who usually reproduce women’s position of social disempowerment [...]”, so that women can “[...] write out a radically different romance narrative and an unconventional conceptualization of community, gender, and relationship”. As the internet has become the main creation and distribution platform for slash fiction writers, this sub-genre of fan fiction has been more widely circulated among readers. The rising tendency of incorporating eroticism into the ‘homosexual imaginary

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285 Even though the slash fiction in the US will be used as the main example in this section, I would like to point out that slash fiction does not seem to have originated in the US alone. It has been suggested that it was a spontaneous movement about the same time in the US, and in the UK, Germany, Australia and Canada. Salmon and Symons, “Slash Fiction and Human Mating Psychology,” 94. This is why I use the term ‘the West’ instead of ‘the US’.
287 Hellekson and Busse, Introduction, Fan fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet, 17.
289 Ibid.
landscape’ of the creation, slash fiction is now usually related to erotic literature to subvert patriarchal stereotypes of sex and gender.  

Coincidentally or not, male homoerotic romance for female consumers developed in Japan almost simultaneously. In the early 1970s, the Japanese Manga industry welcomed the advent of the first group of professional female Manga artists. They boldly subverted the gender roles portrayed in Shojo Manga 女子漫画 (Girls’ Manga), a genre previously dominated by male artists. Whilst some female Manga artists subverted the traditional gender roles of women in their works with a strong bi-sexual implication, others explicitly depicted purely male homoerotic themes in their works. The audacious praise for male homosexuality in Girls’ Manga has been recognised and followed by generations of female Manga artists. In the late 1970s, June, a bi-monthly magazine publishing gay-erotic stories and Manga for female consumers, became commercially available. Both professional and amateur female artists used the platform, collaborating to challenge the dominant gender discourse and masculinity. 

To construct a plot around the theme of Bishonen 美少年 (Beautiful Boys) and their love/erotic relationship to express the element of Danbi Mono 耽美もの (Pure Aesthetic and Beauty), the female Manga artists who prefer to present romance between beautiful boys in their works are commercially successful, which helps to create a subculture of BL, Yaoi or Danbi 耽美 (Pure Aesthetics), producing the cultural context featuring love and eroticism between beautiful boys or handsome men in large quantity.

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291 Schodt, Dreamland Japan, 121-23.
292 Danbi Mono 耽美もの (Pure Aesthetic and Beauty) is a traditional genre of Japanese literature and art. The genre emphasizes the idea of ‘pure beauty’ or ‘total aesthetics’ to be highly glorified and elevated above a sense of morality and reality to worship beauty in an often anti-social context. Ibid, 120-23.
293 Both BL and Yaoi are acronyms to apply to male/male romance-oriented Manga aimed at female readers. BL stands for ‘Boy’s Love’, whereas Yaoi is coined from Yamanashi Ochinashi Iminashi やまなし おちなし いみなし (No Climax, No Point, No Meaning). Though nowadays used interchangeably, these two terms are slightly different as Yaoi suggests a more eroticism-
The female consumers who indulge in imagining and fantasising love/erotic relationships between beautiful boys are nicknamed Fujoshi (Rotten Girls), a term intended to connote “[…] an ironically self-deprecatory reference to their obsession with things not viewed as proper – at least not in a society that wants to regard women as chaste beings cut off from sexual expression […]”.

The sub-culture reflects the sexual politics appropriated by female consumers in two regards: on the one hand, by consuming eroticism between two attractive men, female consumers can keep themselves at a safe distance without identifying with the protagonists, thereby practising voyeurism; on the other hand, they attempt to subvert the chauvinist bondage imposed on them as women.

5.5.2: Homoeroticism in Chinese Cyberspace

The prolific homoerotic romance phenomenon both in Japan and the US has found its resonance in the greater Chinese area. Female netizens in the area have responded positively toward this brand-new genre of US style slash fiction and Japanese style BL/Yaoi since the early 2000s, but with the latter much more popular than the former. In the early 2000s, Japanese BL/Yaoi fiction and Manga were consumed and emulated mainly by Chinese female netizens. At present, many romance fiction portal websites usually have one section

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296 The notion of ‘brand-new’ is in the sense of homoerotic works massively produced and openly circulated for females by females because the male homoerotic works of fiction prior to the early twentieth century were allegedly produced by and for men. In late Imperial China, male homoerotic fiction such as Yixiang Cunzhi (A Fragrance for Springtime), Bingerchai (From a Man’s Cap to a Woman’s Hairpin), Qingshi (A History of Passion) composed in the Ming dynasty, or Pinhua Baojian (Treasured Mirror for the Connoisseur of Flowers) in the late Qing period, already preceded the advent of modern homoerotic fiction. Although accentuating the male homoerotic element, homoerotic fiction in late Imperial China is different from modern homoerotic fiction because the latter is heavily female-oriented. For more detail on homoerotic fictions in late Imperial China, see Hinsch, Passions of the Cut Sleeve, 119-61; Zhang Zaizhou 張在舟, Aimei dē Licheng (An Ambiguous Passage), 200-488.
297 Qidian Female Net used to have one sub-genre categorised as Homoerotic Romance. Out of the three major sections of Jinjian Literature City, one is devoted to homoerotic romance.
collecting the works of love/erotic relationships between men classified as ‘BL’ or ‘Homoerotic Romance’. With the growing proliferation of homoerotic fiction, it did not take long before fiction of the same theme, but between women, came to be known as GL (Girl’s Love). 298 Whereas the BL romance that features erotic relations between masculinely attractive men and androgynous boys has consolidated its popularity, pretty women romance still falls far behind in popularity. 299 In Chinese cyberspace, ‘Pure Love and Absolute Aesthetics’ is frequently associated with homoerotic romance between men. The slogan suggests that love and physical attractiveness promise to go beyond the gender boundary for female netizens to fantasise a male/male love/sex relationship.

The BL homoerotic romance mostly plays with the notion of gender and sexuality in a patriarchal social institution. The central love story abides by a patriarchal model, consisting of a male-dominant and female-submissive stereotype traditionally operated in a love relationship. This is where a pair of interesting, strongly sexually implicated homoerotic terms coming into play: Seme せめ (‘seme’ from Semeru 攻める meaning ‘Attack’ in a sexual relationship) and Uke うけ (‘uke’ from Ukeru 受ける meaning ‘Receive’). As the two terms travel to the greater Chinese area over the internet, female netizens pick up the terms to use them, in a cute way, as Xiaogong 小攻 (Little Attacker) and Xiaoshou 小受 (Little Receiver). A homoerotic relationship operating under the most perceivably traditional patriarchal institution is usually delineated as

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Perfumed Red Sleeves, similar to Qidian Female Net, used to list Homoerotic Romance as one of its sub-genres. Again, as I visited these three portal sites in December 2011, I found that only Jinjiang still seems to resist state censorship by maintaining a homoerotic narrative section (even though many texts have been ‘harmonised’) whereas the other two websites appear to have completely removed the homoerotic section.

GL has not been as pervasive as BL in today’s Chinese cyberspace. On Qidian Female Net, Read Novel or Perfumed Red Sleeves, GL is not featured; on Jinjinag Literature City, one separate section especially assigned to GL works is at <http://www.jjwxc.net/fenzhan/dm/bh.html>. GL is also euphemised as Yuri 百合 (Lily), a term to imply love between women in Japan. The borrowing of the term by GL writers suggests that the homosexual romance narratives in Chinese cyberspace have been under strong Japanese influence.

Due to the less prevalence of GL than that of BL, GL will not be discussed here. Nonetheless, this genre deserves academic attention in examining the construction of gender and sex in a female/female relationship, as well as the ways in which it attempts to expel, or conform to patriarchal hegemony.
Qianggong Ruoshou 強攻弱受 (a strong, dominant attacker and a weak, submissive receiver). Of course, there are exceptional cases where there are a submissive attacker and a strong receiver, yet cases such as this are not the mainstream.\textsuperscript{300} Using the terms of attacker and receiver suggest that the body position female netizens assume homosexual men would adopt in their sexual encounters would also be extended into the position the protagonists take in their love relationship – a reflection of patriarchal practice by which the physically powerful subject will adopt the dominant role to control and conquer the submissive.

5.5.3: \textit{Homoerotic Romance and its Sex Politics – Grotesque Eroticism}

The queerness\textsuperscript{301} emitted from most homoerotic romance on Qidian Female Net neither subverts nor averts the patriarchal institution itself. In fact, the queerness exercised in the genre reinforces the patriarchal pattern despite the different sexual preference presented in the texts. In a typical homoerotic romance, the dominant ‘attacker’ role is usually assumed by a more physically masculine and extremely handsome male protagonist, while the submissive ‘receiver’ role is substituted by a physically fragile and androgynous young boy. Female roles are either absent, marginalised, or pose a threat to the attacker-receiver relation (such as a mother who is opposed to the unconventional relationship, or a young woman who is made an arch-enemy to compete with the

\textsuperscript{300} There can be four basic combinations: Qianggong Ruoshou 強攻弱受 (a dominant attacker and a submissive receiver); Qianggong Qiangshou 強攻強受 (both the attacker and receiver are dominant); Ruoshougong Qiangshou 弱攻強受 (a submissive attacker and a dominant receiver); and Ruogong Ruoshou 弱攻弱受 (both the attacker and the receiver are submissive). In homoerotic writing, the first two types are more common, especially the first one. The latter two are rare, with the last one hardly existing.

\textsuperscript{301} I intentionally avoid using the words ‘gays’ and ‘lesbians’ to refer to homoerotic romance narratives because this narrative aims at heterosexually-preferred audiences. The term ‘queerness’ is used instead to “talk about a relation between something perceived to be solid or stable and its destabilization into something else […] the solid is the commonly understood, the taken-for-granted in any given context, standing in relation to its distortion.” Umphrey, “The Trouble with Harry Thaw,” 25.
receiver for the attacker), which constitutes an overtone of “[...] open to hostility toward the female characters”\textsuperscript{302} in homoerotic romance to flow through the text.

Being physically, socially and politically superior, the attacker is often highly sexually experienced since he is frequently described as a playboy (until he encounters a receiver who instigates a sense of ‘freshness’ in him). The attacker’s playboy image implies his hetero-sexual preference. By contrast, the receiver’s natural-born sexual preference is intentionally ignored. Most homoerotic narratives do not care to elaborate on this issue at all. What is emphasised is the pro-feminine physical traits of the receiver and how he came to be subjugated. The ambiguity surrounding the receiver’s sexual preference and his slender, fragile and androgynous physical features reinforces his subjugation, which conforms to the patriarchal institution. Consequently, a homoerotic romance, typically, begins the narrative with an encounter between the attacker and the receiver, the former surpasses the latter in terms of his wealth and socio-political status. The difference in family background and socio-political status between them, as well as the social discrimination against a same-sex relationship, make the ‘struggle for the relationship to work’ an indispensible part of homoerotic narratives.

A series of struggles are introduced into the narratives to ensure that the dominance always remains with the attacker, not the receiver, thereby reinforcing a traditional patriarchal model. Throughout a typical homoerotic romance, the dichotomy between domination and submission is rarely dynamic or reversed. The submissive role is usually engaged with a series of attempts to reject either the relationship or the dominance of the attacker, yet any slight subversion put forward by the submissive androgynous boy will be suppressed, forestalled, even penalised by the dominating masculine man. At the end of the narrative, the boy will be tamed and protected, and will remain submissive in the relationship, as opposed to the man, who behaves as the dominant guardian.

\textsuperscript{302} Blair, “She Should Just Die in a Ditch,” 120. The grudge held against female characters often by female prosumers is an interesting topic. Due to the limitation of this thesis, this topic will not be analysed here, but it does deserve further academic attention.
Grotesque eroticism, a unique feature of homoerotic romance, is introduced to the text to ensure that the patriarchal model is not subverted. It includes aberrant sexual practices such as rape, gang rape, orgy, kink and sadomasochism; tabooed social behaviour such as incest, necrophilia and fetishism, and scientific impossibilities such as men conceiving children, and women transgendered into men overnight (much like Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*). On the one hand, female netizens use this feature to ensure that the patriarchal model is not subverted because the attacker often takes advantage of, or even initiates, the grotesque eroticism in order to proclaim his dominance over the receiver. However on the other hand, female netizens also use this feature to project their sexual desire and to practise voyeurism by continually testing and integrating the grotesque eroticism to experiment with how far they can push the boundary to explore gender and sexual abnormality.

Nowadays, due to a stricter exercise of censorship, female netizens are forbidden to incorporate grotesque eroticism in a sexually explicit way. To overcome this problem, either they make it more implicit through metaphors and indirect language, or they retain the tabooed sexual behaviour without being sexually explicit. As a result, works assimilating tabooed social behaviour, an extremely rare element in heterosexual romance, are composed more frequently. For instance, *Fengqi Yunyong zhi Shuangsheng* 風起雲湧之雙生 (The Adventures of Twin Brothers) centres around incest, depicting the non-sibling love relationship between a pair of twin brothers, who are constantly involved in adventures during which their love for each other grows stronger; *Jiepi Shaoye* 潔癖少爺 (Prince of Mysophobia) describes an ambiguous relationship between a father and his first-born son, with this first-born son having strong feelings with his younger brother, forming a triangular love dilemma. In *Shaonian Kuang* 少年狂 (The Craze of a Youngster), a Chinese Daoist priest discovered an infant. The

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303 For example, works which describe the receiver being raped by the attacker but later developing a Stockholm syndrome attachment to have feelings for the attacker is common among homoerotic romance.
infant was raised by the priest but ended up having a romantic feeling for the priest; a sense of incest between ‘father’ and ‘son’ may be read between the lines.

5.5.4: Homoerotic Romance and the Golden Triangle

So far, the strategy of grotesque eroticism is proving to be a market booster, allowing female netizens to violate social norms in a more acceptable way in homoerotic romance in order to test boundaries. Even so, as discussed earlier, the confirmation of a patriarchal model is established by the fact that the attacker usually takes the lead in his relationship with the receiver. Although grotesque eroticism implies an attempt to escape from traditional sexual boundaries, this feature is simultaneously used to reinforce the attacker’s dominance and the receiver’s submissiveness. In his position in the dominant/submissive relationship, the attacker is frequently advantaged by his socio-political status and wealth, with the receiver being in a relatively disadvantageous position. The examples from the previous section illustrate this point. Either the attacker or the receiver can take the initiative to make the relation start to work, however the attacker will always assume the dominant position in the relationship throughout, with the receiver looking up to him and making every effort to stay in the relationship with the attacker.

A love without struggle is not considered true love. Consequently, the typical story spends most of the narrative unfolding how the attacker and receiver struggle to make the relationship work (usually in the form of adventures together). In Yigong Tianxia 一攻天下 (A Fierce Attack on the World), the attacker was an ordinary person in modern-day China, but his soul was reincarnated into an ancient time to become an emperor. The receiver, a young pretty boy, swore to assassinate the emperor. Yet after spending time with the emperor, the boy’s hatred gradually vanished. Their mutual feeling grew after various adventures were undertaken and dangers vanquished. In Zhongdu 中毒 (Poisoned), a person was reborn to be the eldest prince of an imperial dynasty. The prince fell for his tall, strong, handsome yet estranged father, who was the attacker as well as the emperor. Most of the chapters concentrate on structuring
the struggles between the attacker and the receiver, in the form of various adventures.

Regardless of how much dramatic struggle there has been, the relationship will work out at the end to have an optimal closure. The attacker and the receiver will be together, still in the dominant-submissive position. More importantly, the love ensures that the receiver is secure in terms of wealth and socio-political status, thanks to the attacker (this pattern is similarly and commonly reflected in heterosexual romance as well and will be discussed in the section on heterosexual romance). Some relationships end with marriage; others conclude in civil partnership (of course there are also relationships which end in tragedy, but works taking this course usually prove to be less successful on the popularity rankings). Either way, the receiver is formally affiliated to the attacker, sharing the attacker’s wealth and high socio-political status, regardless of whether the receiver is mobilised from the bottom of the society, or has already been part of the higher stratification of the society. Thereby, in *A Fierce Attack on the World*, the emperor ‘married’ the androgynous would-be assassin and continued his reign in the kingdom. In *Poisoned*, the prince finally united with his handsome and masculine father. His father shared with him everything he had – his love, his power, and his dynasty.

5.5.5: Between Patriarchy and Female Voyeurism – A Confirmation of the Golden Triangle

The homoerotic motif and its gendered, patriarchal pattern in Chinese cyberspace are similarly reflected in slash fiction and in BL/Yaoi Manga to make the genre part of the ‘globalised female voyeurism mechanism’. This globalised mechanism provides heterosexual women with a chance to project their curiosity/fantasy toward sex – a politically grey area from which women are expected to veer off but into which men are expected to dive. In a homoerotic world constituted by heterosexual women, imagination can go wild, social norms can be set aside, sexual desires can be explored, and promiscuity is justifiable. In this regard, the homoerotic romance on Qidian Female Net (as well as on other
similar literary portal websites for females) resembles the situation which Thorn argues is embedded within BL/Yaoi:

[…] there is an undeniable voyeuristic element, because most readers and artists are, in fact, females. Many fans also clearly take pleasure in seeing their male characters suffer. It is common for male characters to be raped, even (or perhaps most notably) by the men who love them […] while readers may imagine themselves in the place of one of the male characters, they may also objectify them at the same time […]

Imagining/simulating a queer world in which handsome men, beautiful boys, and the physical intimacy between them have become the voyeuristic objects for females is now established as a genre. By producing/consuming this specific genre, female netizens, collectively, turn upside down the common social practice of the ‘Male Gaze’, whereby men are bearers of the ‘look’ with which they seek visual pleasure from women in a patriarchal social system. Through the practice of the Female Gaze, female netizens are left with two options. One is to identify themselves with one of the male protagonists (arguably the beautiful boys in most cases) to be “[…] offered an opportunity to explore sexual and gender options, for most readers such experimentation remained in the realm of fantasy” to make prosuming homoerotic romance an experience which is “[…] constrained only by the limits of the pen and the imagination, the ambiguous form of the beautiful boy shows readers that neither the body nor the psyche need be shackled by norms”. The other is to identify with no characters at all but to return to the notion of purely visual pleasure seeking. The chauvinistic or patriarchal anticipation and regulations in a social institution on female sex drive can be ignored through the voyeuristic practice. Female netizens can exercise

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307 Ibid.
pure voyeurism without feeling intimidated, guilty or ashamed of gaining sensual
pleasure. Sexual and power subjectivities are reversed as a ‘sweet revenge’ for
females for their position of subjectivity in accordance to social norms. With
either option, female netizens undertake a simulated experience of unbounded sex
to fantasise sensual/sexual desire in a highly imaginative distant but safety-
reassuring world.

To a certain extent, the homoerotic love provides the chiefly heterosexual
female netizens with not only a different route that leads to the ultimate outlet of
witnessing the consummation of love, but also an alternative to heterosexual
romance, in which female subjectivity to a patriarchal social system is a constant
struggle between subversion and submission. Nonetheless, most homoerotic
romance would follow the groove in which most heterosexual romance has been
trapped – a return to and an acceptance of patriarchy which concludes in
celebrating the notion of golden triangle. As love and the struggles for the
relationship take place in the most unusual way (such as to be reborn into another
time or space to fall for one’s father, brother), the consummation of love
 guarantees that the wealth and high socio-political status of the attacker is
extended to the receiver through marriage or partnership. The extension suggests
a reward to the receiver, who ultimately returns to the notion of a subjugated
subject to the patriarchal social system, being affiliated to the superior dominant
male figure in a relationship.

Homoerotic romance serves as a playground for female netizens to explore
and experiment with their sexuality through ‘looking at’ the struggles and the love
consummation of the two enchanting male characters. Nonetheless, the
consummation never comes about without always being rewarded with wealth
and high socio-political status at the end to position the two men into a dominant-
submissive dichotomy in accordance with the patriarchal norm. This formula is
similarly and more frequently reprised in constructing heterosexual romance.
5.6: Yanqing Xiaoshou 言情小説 (Heterosexual Romance) – The Cinderella Complex\textsuperscript{308}

Whilst the gradual infiltration of homoerotic romance offers an alternative for female netizens to project their sexual fantasies by practising female voyeurism, a plethora of heterosexual romance narratives following the preliminary notion of ‘The Genius and The Beauty’ mixed with The Cinderella Complex of patriarchal capitalism is presented. A love relationship between a smart beauty and a handsome genius still serves as the basic pattern. Nevertheless, the notion of the accentuation of individualisation against the Confucian hegemony practised in Chinese society is minimised. The beauty’s patient wait for the genius’s ascent to higher socio-political status hardly remains. The handsome genius, unlike his Ming predecessor who usually came from a less significant socio-political background, is always prestigious in his socio-political status and affluence. As a contrast, the smart beauty is situated in the position similar to that previously designated to the genius in the late Imperial Chinese period. She comes either from a much less socio-politically significant background or from a similar one to the handsome genius yet always slightly inferior to his position. This background usually paves a subsequent path for a Cinderella story to be easily unfolded. Coming from a less advantaged socio-political background also allows space for the beauty to be mobilised upwards to demonstrate the notion that she depends on nothing but her naturally-born asset – her looks and her intelligence – to gain happiness. Nonetheless, the approach of self-dependence, which appears feminist, at the end of the narratives serves as a means by which the beauty gets mobilised upwards whilst making her ‘assets’ valuable to the handsome genius so that she becomes affiliated to him in the story.

5.6.1: ‘Conformance’ and ‘Resistance’ – One Sub-genre, Two Approaches

\textsuperscript{308} Dubino defines the Cinderella Complex as patriarchal capitalism. It is a pattern which is reprised in a multitude of popular romances. As “the narrative link between marriage, love and women’s economic success” [104] came out (such as Pamela, Pride and Prejudice, Jane Eyre, and most Harlequin romance), this type of romance became immediately popular. Dubino, “The Cinderella Complex,” 103-04.
Generally speaking, there are two approaches in the heterosexual romance at the present time, one being ‘conformance’ – the more traditional approach in which the heroine is situated in an obvious submissive position to the dominant hero. She is fresh and innocent to the world to be guided by the more experienced male protagonist. The other is ‘resistance,’ which arguably forms a higher percentage of heterosexual romance, casting the female protagonist in a less submissive or docile light than she would be expected to take in a traditional patriarchal society. She can be rather demanding and dominant in her relationship, or behave as a prima donna in a feminist fashion. Despite being situated in a Cinderella lifestyle where she meets a prince charming, the heroine is nothing like Cinderella waiting for her prince charming to appear with a glass shoe. On the contrary, she usually makes crucial decisions or initiates struggles, subverting the conventional patriarchal ideology on gendered institutionalisation to seek more socio-political space. She is brilliant and can be rather cool. She can be as predatory as a jaguar to jump on an appropriate male subject when she is ready. This is a strong attempt at a re-interpretation of the traditional male-dominated and female-subordinate patriarchal model.

Such a female protagonist is clearly observed in most of the popular heterosexual romance narratives. In *Wanqingsi* (Hair Pulled-up), the heroine was determined to make the hero, who was biased against her in the first place, fall for her by playing hard to get. Many chapters of the romance are devoted to the careful scheme of the heroine to demonstrate her intelligence and resourcefulness to the hero. In *Pingfan de Qingchuan Rizi* (Time Slipped into the Ordinary Days of the Qing Dynasty), the heroine endeavoured to make things work in her way and make people like her better, such as her grandmother, who was lukewarm to her at the beginning of the romance, so that her ‘position’ inside the family would be more valued. In *Buliang Shaofu* (The Wicked Young Husband), the heroine travelled through time to be married off to a powerful family. She had to get the calculating and demanding family members from her husband’s side to take her

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309 On Qidian Female Net, a tag of ‘prima donna heroines’ is provided for female netizens to select.
side. In *Shunun Gonglue* (The Strategies of the Eleventh Daughter), the heroine, after being reborn into an ancient time, realised that as the eleventh child in a big family, she would face harsh competition among her siblings. She made up her mind to become engaged in a series of strategies against her siblings for a power play to be treated better in the family. In *Qieda Buru Qi* (Wives Are Superior to Concubines), a non-pliant heroine was presented. She became the second wife of the hero and faced the challenges raised by her unfriendly mother-in-law, step-children, and the hero’s concubines. The story stresses her careful scheme to turn the challenges to her advantage in order to gain more respect from the hero’s family members, as well as ensuring for herself a higher position within the family. In this regard, the resistance type of the heterosexual romance seems to support Schofield, who argued that romance in disguise provides “[…] a psychologically necessary outlet for female aggression, independence, and frustration through a subversion of the romance text.”\(^\text{310}\) From this perspective, heroines are endowed with more diversity and anti-tradition.

Nonetheless, the heroines’ diversity does not equally extend to the depiction of heroes, who are much more homogeneously perfect in every way. There are two fundamental formulas: first, he has to be physically attractive and versatile in his character; second, he is definitely affluent and socio-politically influential. Therefore, it is common for heroes to come from a powerful, wealthy or aristocratic background, unlike their Ming-Qing predecessors. Even if this is not the case, he is likely to achieve material success eventually to afford for his heroine a happy and affluent life (however, I would like to point out that this type of hero is rare).

In spite of his supreme versatility and physical charisma, he may not be the greatest, the most wonderful guy when a hero and a heroine meet for the first time (but he is definitely the most physically attractive man she has ever met!). In a large number of cases, he even comes across as cruel and diabolic, which allows more justifiable struggles and dramatic sub-plots in the narratives. But he is always forgivable for his ostensibly detectable flaws or controversial behaviour,

\(^{310}\) Schofield, “Romance Subversion,” 78.
the secrets/traumas catalysing his cruelness will be revealed to justify his behaviour, which culminates in an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending. Much like Jane Austin’s *Pride and Prejudice*, it is a love which begins in misunderstanding but concludes in understanding. In *Fengqiu huang* (Male Phoenix Imprisons Female Phoenix), the heroine travelled through time back to the Jin dynasty (265-420 A.D.). She fell for the calculating and vindictive hero, who intended to take revenge for a personal cause by emotionally torturing her. He planned to let her fall for him so that he could manipulate her. She discovered his conspiracy, which turned out to be justified since she later came to realise what a severe trauma he had undergone because of his former relationship with the owner in which her soul was cast for reincarnation. They came to a deeper understanding and appreciation of one another, and he proved to be an impeccable Mr Right, who promised her eternal love and happiness. In *Jinzhi Yuye* (Golden Boughs and Jaded Leaves), the hero was the emperor of a powerful kingdom in ancient China. The heroine came into the court determined to seek revenge against the emperor but began to have romantic feelings for him once she understood that he did what he had to do as an emperor. In return, she was made the empress at a young age. The versatility of female protagonists’ personalities does not override them being subjugated by male protagonists emotionally and socio-politically.

5.6.2: *The Heterosexual Romance and its Sex Politics – A Return to Patriarchy*

Interestingly, the sex politics and the ending of most narratives always suggest a return to a patriarchal society, albeit with constant resistance. In terms of sexual politics, heroines, in many cases, appear promiscuous and play hard-to-get. Her flirting, lax behaviour is easily one of the major barriers leading to misunderstandings between him and her. She always proves to be a virgin. Notwithstanding, she is, subsequently, sexually ‘cultivated’ and ‘explored’ by him (and mostly him only), given the fact that she is sexually innocent and he is sexually experienced. Through cultivation and exploration, she learns the
pleasure of sex from Mr Right. Grotesque eroticism is absolutely absent from heterosexual romance texts because, mostly likely, women would feel uncomfortable on the grounds that they tend to identify themselves with the heroine in the narratives. Even if there is some physical violence exerted by the hero on the heroine, the behaviour is always subsequently found to be excusable. For example, in *Hair Pulled-up*, a young girl was being ‘raped’ by the remarkably handsome hero when the soul of an ordinary girl from present-day China was cast into the victim. This victim is the heroine who was detested by the hero/perpetrator, who intended to humiliate the victim by physical violence. However, they turned out to be mutually attracted later in the story.

When it comes to the ending, female protagonists, to some extent, still retain their independence and characteristics, yet compromises towards the patriarchal code are assimilated into the narratives. She will stop behaving promiscuously or nymphomaniacally (even seemingly in most cases), and become less bossy and less of a diva. Behaving like a good wife and a good mother are anticipated by the heroine, who in return will be rewarded with a perfect Mr Right, whose wealth and high socio-political status also extend to her when the marriage relationship between them has been established. This differentiates popular romance from the traditional ‘genius and beauty story’ in the sense that in the former the heroine meets the hero who already had everything in life except for a female companion, but in the latter this is not necessarily so. She is there to fill the gap to make his life, which becomes also her life, a perfect circle. Unlike their Ming-Qing predecessors, heroes and heroines in cyber popular romance rarely withdraw into a rural retreat from the high socio-political status he has previously enjoyed. In most cases, the story ends either in the consummation of the love between hero and heroine (which arguably can be taken as a continuation of his current status), or by indicating clearly that both of them enjoy his wealth and status afterwards. The fairytale cliché of living happily ever after is reprised to conclude that the heroine now has her Mr Right, who will fulfil her emotionally and materially.
Overall, the compromises made in regard to the patriarchal code make the heroine more admirable to him and to the other characters around them for being a ‘nice woman’, but on the other hand, regardless of how much independence she exerts to resist the patriarchy, she will need to be recognised by the patriarchal system for being a good woman. Without this element, she will not be considered to deserve the Mr Right and the affiliated values of wealth and high socio-political status which he has brought to her. The compromises suggest that she, by consensus, agrees to return to a patriarchal institution abiding by the ‘codes of the father’.

5.6.3: Heterosexual Romance and the Golden Triangle

The repetitive pattern of Romance substantiates what Bagchi has argued that the romance narrative “[…] is always a re-reading of the known tale in a new milieu”. However, the repetitive pattern (such as the Harlequin formula by which a young innocent woman is romantically involved with a handsome, older man), according to Modleski, poses a female form of narrative pleasure that helps to manage the anxiety/rage which women feel in a patriarchal society. Reading romance offers a mechanism in which anxiety/rage-management against a dominating patriarchal system is practised.

The extent of the prevalence of romance narratives translates as the extent of the female predicament in a patriarchal system. The extensive prosumption of Heterosexual Romance on Qidian Shanda does not happen by accident; it, similarly, reflects the female condition in present-day China. By producing/consuming Romance, female netizens subconsciously realise that there is no easy way for them to subvert the patriarchal system. So they choose to return to the patriarchal system in the texts, at the same time fulfilling the Chinese individualisation by fantasising an achievement of the female version of the golden triangle. Turning unconditional love into conditional love, female netizens, arguably, take the achievement of golden triangle as a way to reward themselves.

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312 Modelski, Loving with a Vengeance, 1-26.
and erase their anxiety/rage by agreeing to return to the ‘code of the father’ eventually. The return is rewarded by achieving the golden triangle, which is what many females are after. Through consolidating a relationship, a woman is able to receive wealth and high socio-political status as her bonus to enjoy an affluent and influential lifestyle. Her story serves to soothe female netizens who are trapped in a condition of ‘patriarchal capitalism’ in reality.

5.7: Conclusion

Homoerotic romance and heterosexual romance have different approaches towards the politics of sex to smuggle in female sexuality for the gaining of sexual pleasure, and of love to preach about the necessity of a ‘conditional love’ for acquiring material satisfaction in today’s China. Either type of romance, at the end, returns to a patriarchal pattern, revolving around the same theme of a female version of the golden triangle throughout the majority of narratives from both types. Whether using romance as an experimental ground to exercise female voyeurism to project their sexual fantasy or as a measure by which constant struggle against the patriarchal institution is exerted to eventually derive a ‘conditional love’ for emotional fulfilment, a link between love/sex and wealth/socio-political status is unavoidably made. Female netizens celebrate the notion of the golden triangle that they fantasise in a patriarchal social institution in which a subversion against the patriarchy is difficult. Love is incorporated with a strong hint of capitalist exchange value to confine love in a conditional status, which helps women to secure wealth and arrive at higher socio-political status. Rather than working hard to gain wealth and high status themselves, female netizens seem to be attracted to the notion of receiving them by being affiliated to men with a successful career and a prestigious family background. Only when these three crucial components are integrated can love be consummated to actualise the conception of ‘living happily ever after’, rendering the female fantasisation to the fullest to satiate their desire.

With the male desire and female desire embedded being presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, I shall apply psychoanalysis to the repetition of the
pattern for a deeper understanding of the message delivered through the texts of works of popular Internet fiction. In the next chapter, this psychoanalytic approach, in particular an approach based on Freud, Lacan and Žižek, will be elaborated to show the ways and the extent to which psychoanalysis can shed more light on the netizens’ collective desires to substantiate my previous argument of enhancement of individualisation in contemporary Chinese society, and the further exploration of the notion of the ‘golden triangle’ in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.
Chapter Six: Desire, Fantasy, and Internet Fiction in China

6.1: Introduction

In Chapter 3, the new model of prosuming internet fiction was linked with "grassroot" desires and fantasies. In Chapters 4 and 5, I provided various examples from the top of Qidian popularity rankings for a thorough analysis of the highly similar story pattern with a strong sense of fantasy reprised in each example. Using the textual analysis, I intend to substantiate my argument in this chapter that desire is intensively spelt out by the element of fantasy, which eventually serves to constitute a ‘golden triangle’ aspired by many Chinese netizens. This golden triangle is in tune with the notion of 'feeling good' examined in Chapter 2 as the notion of individualisation in China is enhanced. Through textual analysis, the kinds of desire and fantasy which grassroots prosumers aspire to might be understood more clearly. As desire is embedded in the psyche, I propose to approach the desire of Chinese netizens from a psychoanalytical perspective. Therefore in this chapter, I shall elaborate the theoretical frameworks of Freud, Lacan and Žižek to demonstrate how psychoanalysis can illuminate human desire, and eventually apply to deciphering more about the desire/fantasy exercised. The desire/fantasy permeated in the texts, I argue, takes the form of the Chinese literary fantastic mode reprised in the texts of popular Internet fiction for Chinese netizens to fantasise and be fantasised.

Desire recurs and is spelt out in various forms in the everyday life of human beings. Mass production and mass consumption of cultural commodities intensify the recurrence of desire, much like the mass production and consumption of popular literature around the world and Internet fiction in China. Mass production and consumption behaviour, arguably, is an action to relive and replicate desire in humans, regardless of what that desire might be. Similarly, in the landscape of popular fiction, mass production, consumption and replication is best epitomised by the recurrence of fiction genres. Romance, for instance, has been of interest to academics for understanding female psychology and the social environment. This chapter will therefore first discuss literary genres as a
repetitive social implication to link with the exposition of desire later in the chapter.

The theoretical framework of psychoanalysis helps to elaborate the role of internet fiction, which I argue can be analogous to Lacan’s *Objet petit a* \(^{313}\) to project Chinese prosumers’ fantasy and desire through their Gaze at internet fiction for an endless personal pursuit of the unattainable otherness expanded and constituted by the order of language (desire is described, expanded and further complicated by language *per se*). Moreover, I shall attempt to go beyond the role of internet fiction as *L’Objet Petit a* to further explore various genres of internet fiction as agents through which Chinese prosumers articulate their socio-cultural and historical consciousness.

### 6.2: Genre – A Recurrent Social Implication

Taxonomy, as Foucault often pointed out, has been exercised in human society to impose an idea of ‘the order of things’ on various cultural practices in everyday life, especially in industrialised societies. The literary practice we have become familiar with as ‘literary genres’ have been derived from this idea of industrial taxonomy, a long tradition that has evolved from thought on the order of things. The distinction of literary genres in the present day clearly reflects the basic idea of taxonomical classification which “[...] is an industrial matter. It is enacted in publisher’s catalogues and booksellers’ classification [...]”. \(^{314}\)

Beyond those industrial characteristics, genre classifications also have their socially symbolic connotations because they

[… have an organizing force in everyday life. They are embedded in material infrastructures and in the recurrent practices of classifying and differentiating kinds of symbolic action. And they bind abstruse and delicate negotiations of meaning to the social situations in which they occur. It would almost be a definition of genre to say that it is a

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\(^{313}\) This notion will be further elucidated in section 6.5.2.

relationship between textual structures and the situations that occasion them […]\textsuperscript{315}

It is therefore clear to see that genres are not only a compulsory behaviour collectively performed in human society, but that they are also equipped with a social connotation to serve as an instrument “[…] to mediate between a social situation and the text which realises certain features of this situation […]”.\textsuperscript{316} The instrumental mediation enables genres to be “[…] typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations”.\textsuperscript{317} With these typified recurrent rhetorical actions, “a set of conventional and highly organized constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning”\textsuperscript{318} arise. Through tracing and tracking the recurrence, genres could operate as a “rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigencies […] connecting the private with the public, the singular with the recurrent”\textsuperscript{319}. As a result, recurrence is a key element here. It is through the repetition and commonality in a multitude of genres that we would be led to understand more about the interpellation between any text and its social situation. Furthermore, authors and readers who are engaged with any specific text could be understood more deeply by how they interact with the society in which they live.

By the same token, I would argue that not only genres – in this chapter I specifically refer to fictional genres – but also subgenres, which always abide by the principle of taxonomy and classification in an industrial society, could be examined by the same standard to arrive at a higher comprehension of the relationships between producers/consumers, texts and society. By examining the recurrent themes in genres and subgenres of internet fiction, I shall attempt to illuminate more of the connotation of internet fiction as a social phenomenon.

6.3: The Diversification of Fiction Genres, Sub-genres and the Intertextual Internet Literary Mélange

\textsuperscript{315} Frow, Genre, 13.
\textsuperscript{316} Ibid, 14.
\textsuperscript{317} Miller, “Genre as Social Action,” 31.
\textsuperscript{318} Frow, Genre, 10.
\textsuperscript{319} Miller, “Genre as Social Action,” 37.
In China, genre and subgenre practices have accelerated since the late Qing period when Chinese fiction set out on its path to modernity. Authors of the Tongsu Xiaoshuo made use of the genre and subgenre classification to attract their urban consumers. Translated fiction also participated in the classification.\textsuperscript{320} The new genres of fiction – detective fiction in a Sherlock Holmes style; romance fiction that emphasised the freedom to look for one’s love and happiness – found their way onto stages alongside the traditional Chinese fiction genres such as Wuxia Xiaoshuo (Chinese martial art fiction).

The juxtaposition of new and traditional genres and subgenres of popular fiction has been inherited by internet fiction, where as many as thirteen fiction genres, each of which contains several subgenres (see Appendix 1), comprise the literary landscape. Guidance on each subgenre is provided to assist prosumers with a clearer picture in which they could locate what they prefer (see Appendix 1). This expository guidance suggests a precision of subgenre classification.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, on Qidian Shanda and other similar literature portal websites, the richness of New Literature genres and subgenres and the flourishing of traditional fiction genres and subgenres are not simply juxtaposed; they fuse with one another, or undergo fission to form new genres at an amazingly high rate to satisfy the enormous reading demand. A work of fiction with romance as its major theme can have any one of several background settings. It could be set in a faraway land full of knights, fairies and fire-spitting dragons – a basic element in fantasy fiction in the West; in remote outer space where wars among solar systems are ongoing affairs – a fundamental element in sci-fi fiction in the West; or in a secret sect where the protagonist learns unique martial art skills to overshadow all the other martial art practitioners – an essential element in Chinese martial art fiction. With the distinction between various genres of fiction growing more and more blurred, the multiformity of fiction themes/narratives increases. This intertextual situation of the ‘nuclearisation’ of fiction contexts – fusion and fission to cause more genres of fiction to appear on-

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{320} See section 2.2.2 in Chapter 2 for a discussion of locally composed popular fiction and translated popular fiction in the Republican Chinese era.
\end{footnotesize}
line – reflects the feature of hybridisation of bridging old and new, linking West and East. This hybridised nuclearisation, which I propose to designate as an ‘internet literary mélange’, is a typical internet fiction phenomenon as well as a strategy to appeal to readership. The internet literary mélange percolates on-line throughout the transnational Chinese cultural public sphere to reflect an imaginary world constituted by Chinese language but with a strong global touch in choosing and composing fiction genres and themes.

6.4: Deep Structure, Surface Structure – The Recurrence of Desire and Fantasy

That the ‘internet literary mélange’ has an intertextualised characteristic along with a complicated taxonomy of fiction genres and subgenres seems to suggest a more multi-layered, complicated overall picture of internet fiction in terms of the diversification of genres and subgenres. One could speculate this may be partially due to globalisation (since several genres are obviously triggered by their counterpart genres in foreign lands) and partially due to the renaissance of popular Chinese fiction.

Nonetheless, the heterogeneity of the fiction narratives stays merely on the superficial level. Beneath the intertextual style of the literary mélange, the heterogeneity is only a measure to redecorate a homogeneous message delivered collectively by one cardinal textual tendency. The similar story plots repeat and recur so frequently in genres and subgenres that the mélange itself ceases to be as diversified and polychromatic as the fiction appears on Shanda Qidian – despite the fact that the accumulated works have already reached up to 600,000 at the point of writing. That is to say, the mélange, to a large extent, becomes strongly patternised with its recurring theme, which is addressed through the repetitive tendency. What lies beneath the magnificent kaleidoscopic coatings is one homogenous message repetitively delivered. In this regard, internet fiction and Tongsu Xiaoshuo differs from each other due to the fact that internet fiction carries a repetitive message from various fiction genres whereas Tongsu Xiaoshuo was quite diverse yet parochially forced under the label of Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School.
This situation could be better construed in an analogy with the linguistic concept of deep structure and surface structure. In 1957, when *Syntactic Structures* was published, Chomsky raised the notion of Deep Structure and Surface Structure to substantiate his concept that the semantic meaning of a sentence is determined by its deep structure, disregarding the different forms which a surface structure presents (for example: both of the sentences ‘Mary loves John’ and ‘John is loved by Mary’ refer to the same semantic connotation in terms of their deep structure even though their surface structures are not identical). Although the notion was later further transformed and reformulated to be directed away from its primitive definition, Chomsky’s initial notion of Deep Structure and Surface Structure could be helpful when applied to today’s Chinese internet fiction. The plethora of fiction subgenres and the plenitude of internet fiction resemble the surface structure, while the deep structure, represented by the common textual trends and patterns that recur and repeat, points to a more homogenous message delivered on a collective level of producing and consuming fiction as a way to fantasise and to desire for a dream.

In this regard, not only can the deep structure be construed as the homogenous pattern delivered by the heterogeneous fiction subgenres, but also that deep structure can be understood from the perspective of the unconsciousness of prosumers on a collective level. Whilst the notion of surface structure performs as the collective consciousness of prosumers who have their specific preference toward the variety of the subgenres of the internet fictions, the notion of the deep structure, working as collective unconsciousness, uniformly points to the fantasy, the desire and the dream aspired to together by prosumers, notwithstanding that what is fiercely aspired to does not come true easily in today’s highly competitive and aggressively capitalistic Chinese society.

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321 Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish, “Syntax.” Chomsky’s notion of deep structure and surface structure is much more complicated than the analogy I have proposed to apply here. The idea of the deep structure corresponding to several surface structures in one sentence is only a small portion of Chomsky’s linguistic theory in syntax. In fact, there could be more than one deep structure in one sentence. However, for the sake of the analogy, I use only the preliminary notion of the contrast between deep structure and surface structure to elucidate the contrast between the seemingly intertextualised literary mélange and one recurring theme surrounding the mélange. For more detail, see Chomsky, *Syntactic Structure*.
6.5: Desire, Fantasy, and the Real – A Psychoanalytical Approach

Desire prevails in human society and constitutes a fundamental part of human nature. Scholars from many disciplines have endeavoured to shed light on this complicated yet elusive element of human nature since Freud’s psychoanalysis attempted to provide an in-depth perspective on the issue from within individual psychology, rather than from external factors and the environment.

Popular fiction can be said to be a by-product of an industrialised/capitalist society whereby humans, under the pressure of a socio-political transformation in all aspects brought forth by the new economic change, search for an outlet to release their stress and boredom. This conforms to Freud’s “[…] notions of artist production fantasies of wish fulfilment”. 

Freud further proposed the notion of the Pleasure Principle, arguing that humans are born to gravitate towards pleasure and fun, which is precisely the reason why the general public read for pleasure. Reading for pleasure has been practised widely in industrialised societies around the world. By examining the texts of popular fictions from a psychoanalytical perspective, we can understand what kind of pleasure human beings get from reading and what the desire is that is linked with this pleasure.

6.5.1: The Notion of Desire – Lack, Loss and Hollowness

Desire remains one of the most frequently examined topics in psychoanalysis. According to Freud, desire is subjugated to the unconscious in a repressed status as the pleasure principle is forced to yield to the harsh reality principle. The subconscious is a realm where our repressed wishes and desire reside, beyond the reach of language. Upon emerging, desire needs to be delivered in a socially acceptable form so that the delicate balance between superego, ego and id within one individual will not be disturbed. Otherwise,

322 Habib, Modern Criticism and Theory, 572.
323 Homer, Jacques Lacan, 11-12.
desire will be likely to be manifested as an abnormal, anti-social behaviour which requires psycho-clinical attention, such as phobia and anxiety.\footnote{Kahn, “The Repetition Compulsion,” and Spielvogel, Western Civilization, Volume II, 734-35.}

This clinical notion of the relationship between desire and the subconscious was adapted by Lacan, who elaborated desire by not only clinically, but also linguistically dissecting the desire which dwells in the depths of the subconscious. Dissecting desire in a linguistic fashion, Lacan attempted to force the subconscious into the conscious, which was considered by Freud impossible to achieve. Whilst using language to reconstruct the subconscious, Lacan referred back to language as an important mechanism to shape desire, which is amorphous.

Lacan’s three registers of human awareness are central to understanding desire. The three registers which constitute reality to human beings, according to Lacan, are the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. These three registers denote a process during which a human is coerced to differentiate ‘subject’ from ‘object,’ recognising that there is an external world outside the individual’s ‘I’, and establishing his/her identity, which is primarily determined by language systems, an infinite combination of an unlimited chain of signification comprised of signifiers and signified. Whilst establishing an identity, that human gradually loses their attachment to the pure materiality of existence, commencing from the Imaginary Stage,\footnote{The Imaginary stage refers to a transitional stage between the pure materiality of existence, which is a term Lacan coined as The Real, and the Symbolic. The Real is closest to the material real, which is absolutely beyond the expressibility and the reach of signification, outside of the Symbolic Order, the linguistically constructed reality subjectively recognised by humans. During the Imaginary stage, humans set up identification and idealisation, the fundamental elements of fantasy and ego. Although human still have some contact with the Real, they are already growing vulnerable to the Symbolic. The Real will never be attained by humans starting from the time when they enter the Mirror Stage, the transitional stage from the Imaginary Stage into the Symbolic Order. Felluga, ‘Modules on Lacan I’. The source of this interpretation of the three registries is from the previous source and the following one, Felluga, “Modules on Lacan II.”} in which a human enters the language system to merge into the symbolic system, acting as a signifier himself/herself.\footnote{Felluga, “Modules on Lacan II.”}

Desire, which “[…] is at the origin of every human act”,\footnote{Williams, “Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity and the Vita Lingua,” 85.} thrives on hollowness and is caused by the lack and loss experienced from the moment when a human child is forced to separate from its mother, which is a traumatic
experience. This lack and loss become exacerbated over the period of the development of three drives, which correspond to the aforementioned three registers respectively as need, demand and desire. Need can be satisfied, for survival’s sake, when a human is born as a premature entity without the comprehension that there is a profound differentiation between him/her and the external world. On the contrary, demand and desire can never and will never be satiated due to that sense of lack and loss initially generated by the departure of that premature entity from his/her mother. Humans are thus gradually forced forwards in a world of ‘Otherness’, against which they are provided with no alternatives but to establish their identities, principally through language, in the overwhelming symbolic system. This sense of lack and loss, a consequence of a premature entity being separated from the mother and slowly being assimilated into the Symbolic Order to become a hollow subject, instigates an unrelenting pertinacity within him/herself to replenish the hollow within by seeking unattainable objects of desire, one sign (signifier/signified) after another, in order to fill up the lack, the abyssal hollowness. Throughout his/her lifetime, each human carries on this unrelentingly pertinacious yet doomed-to-fail attempt, endeavouring to replenish the eternal sense of lack and loss, which, ironically, will never be fulfilled. 

Eagleton pointed out that “[t]his potential endless movement from one signifier to another is what Lacan means by desire. All desire springs from a lack, which it strives continually to fill”. The lack and hollowness becomes a primary drive by which desire thrives within the unconsciousness of humans, who are in constant pursuit of an impossible fulfilment from one signifier to another along the chain of signification in the world in which they reside.

6.5.2: Fantasy – Its Multiple Roles in Realising Desire

328 Homer, Jacques Lacan, 87
331 Eagleton, “Psychoanalysis,” 145.
Desire, the pursuit of all human beings, is amorphous and objectless. It is “always the desire for something that is missing and thus involves a constant search for the missing object”. To attempt to speculate what the missing object possibly is, a human can only resort to the assistance of fantasy because “unconscious desires are manifested through fantasy”. In other words, human beings are confronted with lack but are unsure what to seek for replenishment. This is where fantasy steps in to perform a series of imperative but tricky tasks in terms of how desire is caused and pursued in the circuit of the symbolic system.

If desire is construed as the unconscious aim of a human’s life to lead him/her unto the journey of endless yet fruitless search, in an attempt to replenish, fantasy can be analogously comprehended on two auxiliary levels. First, fantasy is performed as the means by which a human being strives to realise desire. Second, it serves as the apparatus by which a human being constitutes reality.

Since the Real is far beyond the reach of human beings, the ‘real’ commonly recognised and accepted as the ‘truth’ is actually constituted through subjectivisation – to endlessly associate signified with signifier along the chain of signification in a way that makes the most sense to human beings individually. No one can or will perceive the world in a purely objective light after the subjectivisation. This subjectivisation itself, in fact, is a part of the individualised fantasisation of the Real. The fantasy version of reality is where humans attempt to realise their desires through the assistance of the very same apparatus itself.

Apart from its auxiliary role in pursuing desire, fantasy can be said to also play a dominant role in objectifying desire per se. As an apparatus on which humans rely to imagine/constitute their individual reality, fantasy simultaneously causes and sustains desire. Desire, most of the time, cannot be symbolically articulated in language systems due to its essence of being objectless; yet fantasy, in contrast, is easier to objectify because it usually depends on and is mutually supported by a real object, or an imagined scenario, in the external world through Gaze – the looking at something through fantasisation to equip that ‘something’

334 Žižek, “The Seven Veils of Fantasy.”
with the subjectivisation of an individual human’s intended desire. Thus, through
gaze, humans project their desire onto an object or an imagined scenario which, in
its original sense, does not carry any subjectivised signified. The Gaze, triggered
by the process of fantasisation, makes the object/the imagined scenario to be what
Lacan refers as *Objet petit a*.

The notion of *Objet petit a* originates from the hollowness within human
beings, who set out to chase a lost object to replenish their hollowness even
though they never realise what the object is that is lost to them. Lacan introduced
the phrase, using a to “denote[s] the object which can never be attained, which is
really the cause of desire rather than that towards which desire tends […] *Objet
petit a* is any object which sets desire in motion […]”.

However, *Objet petit a* will have to set desire in motion through fantasy. Fantasy, which “[…] functions
as an empty surface, as a kind of screen for the projection of desire”, is not “the
object of desire, neither is it the desire for specific objects; it is the setting or the
mise-en-scene of desire”. In this triangular relationship of *Objet petit a*, desire
and fantasy, we can see how the relationship works insofar as a real object or the
imagined scenario serving as the *Objet petit a* diverges from its crystal clear,
objective meaning in the real to cause desire through fantasy, which is projected
onto the object to render that divergence of meaning. So, to help to articulate the
notion of desire, a human being tends to be propelled, unconsciously, towards
locating a real object or an imagined scenario to set desire in motion by projecting
one’s fantasy onto the *Objet petit a* in the symbolic system, and believing that
he/she could materialise the desire in an attempt to replenish the hollowness. In
this regard, fantasy is not merely reckoned as a means for or an apparatus to
desire; desire owes its existence to fantasy. Fantasy is operated as an
intermediary between the Real and desire to lure humans into falsely taking *Objet
petit a*, a subjectively fantasised version of a real object or an imagined scenario,
as their ultimate answer to the quest of desire. The quest will continue again until

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335 Evans, “Desires,” 128.
336 Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 8
the hollowness arises from within shortly after a desire appears to be satisfied through *Objet petit a* (which, ironically, will never be satiated).

Performing as an intermediary between the objects/images and desire, fantasy does not genuinely associate objects or imagined scenarios from the Real with desire in humans’ fantasy reality to allow them an open window from where they can probe into the chasm of desire. Fantasy covers the desires of human beings with an embellished veil to prevent them from taking a direct look into the Real for any possibility of a chance, even if it is a slim one, of a full and an everlasting satisfaction of desire. Despite their repeated efforts, humans are subjugated to fantasy as fantasy gives out its version of desire to them in the fantasy reality, which is far from the *Real*. From this perspective, fantasy dominates human subjects’ quest for desire. This is why Slavoj Žižek reminded us that fantasy “[…] does not simply realise a desire in a hallucinatory way, but rather constitutes our desire, provides its co-ordinates – i.e., literally ‘teaches us how to desire’”.

Whilst desire is realised through and by fantasy, fantasy has been formulating desire for humans to have an object or an imagined scenario to long for.

### 6.5.3: Postponement and Repetition – Reaching Desire’s Satisfaction

On top of its dominant role of formulating desire, fantasy, contradictorily, impedes humans from obtaining and realising desire too soon. The postponement of desire is a component pertaining to fantasy’s ‘teaching module’ to allow the postponement of satisfaction that humans believe will be brought about by the realisation of desire. Žižek pointed out that “[D]esire is historical and subjectivized, always and by definition unsatisfied, metonymical, shifting from one object to another since I do not actually desire what I want. What I actually desire is to sustain desire itself, to postpone the dreaded moment of its satisfaction”. The postponement of satisfaction actually turns out to be the postponement of desire which, once fulfilled, disappears instantly. To fantasise

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339 Žižek, “Fantasy as a Political Category,” 100.
about the way desire becomes satisfied and how one human being would move
towards that satisfaction sequentially enables humans to crave, to imagine the joy,
the fulfilment of the moment as they make believe that their desire would be
realised. In this regard, the postponement *per se* already poses as a source of joy
from which humans receive, to a great extent, satisfaction through fantasi-sation.

Nonetheless, the postponement does not last forever. As the
postponement eventually comes to an end, fantasi-sation towards another object or
imagined scenario is engineered once more to make up for the desire which has
been realised but of which the satisfaction already vanishes afterwards. The
repetition of fantasisation can be analogously translated into a form of ‘desire
reproduction’ in the sense that desire will always be present (not disappearing
once the desire is realised and the satisfaction is gone) to pose as an ultimate,
abstract goal for humans to ceaselessly and hopefully crave, imagining by the
very assistance of fantasy what assumes and performs its previously-elaborated
multiple roles.

Performing its multi-tasks in the light of substantiating desires, fantasy can
be described as resting upon a heavily paradoxical but reciprocal relationship with
desire. Human beings, after all, have been repeating a pattern of longing for a
hollow amorphousness known as desire. On the quest for desire in human beings,
fantasy comes along to help to substantiate the amorphousness. First, fantasy
constructs a reality in which it prevents humans from contacting the Real to work
as fantasy reality. In this individual fantasy reality, fantasy refers to a real object
or an imagined scenario so that humans would locate a signifier upon which they
gaze to find a position against which they could situate themselves in the flowing
symbolic system for a possible reach towards desire. Moreover, fantasy helps to
realise desire but also teaches humans how to desire. One crucial thing humans
are taught is to postpone their realisation of desire because fantasisation itself is
an enjoymenr. The postponement of desire indirectly leads to fantasisation and to
fantasy being repetitively reproduced in a circular motion to satisfy desire, which
culminates but evaporates at the moment when it appears to be fulfilled.
Afterwards, a new pursuit of desire begins to “[…] return to its circular path, to
continue its path to and from the goal because “[t]he real source of enjoyment is the repetitive movement of this closed circuit.” Human beings, strictly speaking, do not need desire to be realised. The postponement of desire, which leads to the repetitive reproduction of fantasy, is already the ultimate psychological satisfaction for humans.

6.5.4: Che Voglio? Che Vuoi! – Whose Desire Is It?

Having discussed the relationship between desire and fantasy, an important issue which now arises is ‘whose desire is it?’ As humans search repetitively in a circular system for desire, it seems to make sense to claim that the desire they pursue is their own. What they desire is ‘che voglio’ – I want. Insofar as whose desire it is, Žižek, however, argued that, as desire is pursued humans should take into consideration the question ‘che vuoi’ (what do you want of me?) as an essential way to understand the abyssal, amorphous desire, instead of seeing desire as ‘the desire that is purely mine’.

Going back to the notion of the Symbolic Order, humans are hollow signifiers, searching for a variety of signified along the chain of signification in the external world. Through the Gaze, human subjects look for appropriate signifiers/signified (in the sense that the appropriateness refers to subjectivised fantatisation), projecting their desire onto an object/an imagined scenario, turning it into a momentary Objet petit a, to replenish the emptiness. This process, albeit appearing subjectivised, is a reflection of the gaze of ‘Otherness’. Only through the existence of Otherness and the differentiation from Otherness can humans situate their position in the external world by associating themselves with the tremendous chain of signification, which is defined and counter-defined by Otherness. That is to say, the subjectivisation would not have been able to take place had it not been for the position of ‘relativity’ provided by Otherness in the symbolic system.

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Žižek, Looking Awry, 4.
Ibid.
Ibid.
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In terms of the pursuit of desire, then, the position of ‘I’ is no more important than the position of ‘others’ because “[t]he original question of desire is not directly ‘What do I want?’ but ‘What do others want from me? What do they see in me? What am I for those others?’” 344 To make themselves a ‘meaningful’ signifier (in their respective fantasy reality) in the external world, humans, unintentionally but unavoidably, explore the notion of ‘che vuoi?’ to fulfil the desire that appears to be one’s own, but is also the desire of others simultaneously. Thus, as humans project their Gaze of desire onto one object or one imagined scenario for possible satisfaction, they also, unconsciously, intend to satisfy what others want from them, fulfilling the Gaze of others.

The fashion business best exemplifies the notion of ‘che voglio’ and ‘che vuoi’. Whilst numerous consumers relentlessly pursue fashion trends, clearing out their wardrobes to make room for new clothes, not only do they want to present the fashionable items on themselves for satisfaction, but also are eager to be appreciated by the gaze of others. The reaction of others (a process of attaching a signified to a signifier even though the signified varies from one individual to another) could further stimulate the satisfaction of the fashion consumers, who enjoy being gazed upon. The fashion item would, most likely, instantly lose its ‘value’ if it was worn by a fervent fashion consumer who, by accident, arrives in a ghost town or a faraway land where no one understands the modern connotation of ‘fashion’. Consequently, as one human desires through fantasy and by gaze, he or she is, in fact, desiring what others want from him or her.

As to be desired and desiring ceaselessly reverberate in the Symbolic Order of signifier and signified ceaselessly, the notion of ‘Che Voglio’ is always associated with the notion of ‘Che Vuoi’, forming a loop of desires in which that what one desires actually reflects what other desire.

6.6: From Fantasy to Literary Fantasy – The Chinese Literary Fantastic Mode on Qidian

344 Žižek, “From Che vuoi? To Fantasy,” 49.
In popular literature, fantasy, in the form of the literary fantastic, plays a crucial role for authors/readers to fantasise. Here, I shall argue that the literary fantastic, a metamorphosis of the notion of fantasy as an apparatus and a means by which human beings play out desire, is applied formulaically to all genres of fiction in Chinese cyberspace. This formula has been closely analysed in chapter 4 and 5 where the similar story pattern, ranging from Eastern Fantasy to Romance, has been reprised to comprise a Chinese ‘golden triangle’ for Chinese netizens ‘feel good’ after having engaged with the mass-produced/consumed products of Internet fiction. Here, I would further argue that the literary fantastic works as a mode, which arguably originated from the flourishing of fantasy fiction after the Industrial Revolution and now permeates other fiction genres in the Chinese on-line literary sphere, satiates desire to allow netizens engaging with Internet fiction to fantasise a psychological fulfilment. Producing/consuming the text permeated with Chinese literary fantastic, Chinese netizens, I suggest, practise their gaze on works of fiction as the Lacanian notion of L’Objet Petit a to constitute their desire in a maze of language. Meanwhile, their gaze at the maze of language, which helps to construct desire, is bounced back and forth between the desire which is mine and the desire which is of others.

6.6.1: Fantasy Fiction in Western Europe after 1800

As “a human attribute” expressed via human imagination, fantasy is well reflected in literature, having always resided in human society in various forms such as fables, myths, fairy tales, epics and romances. In contrast to literary realism, the genre commonly and loosely recognised as fantasy literature has remained popular until the present day. Yet it can be the most ambiguous and elusive narrative to define, not only because of its instability over time, but also because of its close but ‘uneasy’ ties with its neighbouring genres – science fiction and horror fiction.

345 Monleón, A Specter is Haunting Europe, 7.
346 Armitt, Fantasy Fiction, 1-2.
347 Sandler, Fantastic Literature, 10. The neighbouring genres are also part of the Qidian Shanda fiction genre spectrum.
Fantasy literature experienced a surge in production and consumption in Western Europe after the eighteenth century, closely associated with the change in the Era. The Industrial Revolution gave birth to the rise of urbanism and the middle class. On top of that, the revolution attested to the alteration of the economic social system and materialistic culture in Western Europe through fast-developing industrialisation. The formation and production of modern fantasy, as well as its study, boomed from that point onwards. To define modern fantasy literature is a genuinely broad topic yet one thing to be assured of is its conspicuous application of the literary fantastic embedded in the underlying structure of modern fantasy narratives. The literary fantastic is an essential mode of fantasy narratives (which can be thought of as langue in Saussur’\'s term) from which various fiction genres are derived (analogous to paroles).

6.6.2: What is Literary Fantastic?

Freud, in his 1908 essay Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming, provided a prototype later associated with the notion of the literary fantastic. While comparing children’s day-dreaming with creative writing, Freud argued that:

[…] the creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously – that is, which he invests with large amounts of emotion – while separating it sharply from reality.

Not necessarily setting out to interpret the literary fantastic, Freud’s statement merely demonstrates his observation on the similarity between children and creative writers in using fantasy as their measures by which day-dreaming is

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348 British writer Horace Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto, published in 1764, is putatively agreed to be the origin of the Gothic tale, and “of fantastic narrative in general.” Monleón, A Specter is Haunting Europe, 5.
349 Jackson, Fantasy, 7. Jackson applied Saussur’\'s notion of langue and parole to the literary fantastic.
350 Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” 36.
351 I am aware of arguments for/against equating Freud’\'s ‘phantasy’ and fantasy of literary fantastic, see Armitt, Fantasy Fiction, 3; Laplanche and Pontalis, “Phantasy (or Fantasy),” 314-19;
implemented. However, Freud’s essay not only helps to “[…] set the norm for the structure of a fantasy text”, but also establishes a preliminary yet influential observation on what constitutes the endless charisma of fantasy.

Jackson pointed out that some classical criticisms of literary fantasy such as W.H. Auden’s ‘transcending reality’, C.S. Lewis’s ‘escaping the human condition and constructing superior alternate’, and J.R.R. Tolkien’s ‘secondary world’ are well-cited for their elucidation of literary fantastic as a genre. Nevertheless, Tzvetan Todorov’s watershed discourse argued that literary fantastic works as a mode, not a genre. Drawing a line between the marvellous and the uncanny, Todorov’s approach concentrated on categorising works operating in a literary fantastic mode to detect the similarities which group different works together. To approach fantasy as a genre does not fully explain its elusiveness and permeation into other genres. Rather, fantasy should be regarded as a mode which is spelt out in different genres and which meanwhile resists being categorised as a genre.

Following Todorov’s notion of seeing literary fantastic as a mode, Jackson saw literary fantastic to be “unreal” in the sense that “it takes the real and breaks it” so that “it reveals reason and reality to be arbitrary, shifting constructs, and thereby scrutinizes the category of the ‘real’”. The ‘unreal’ is featured by being ‘free’ from many of the conventions and restraints of more realistic texts: they have refused to observe unities of times, space and character, doing away with chronology, three-dimensionality and with rigid

and Segal, *Phantasy*. But for the purpose of this thesis, I see Freud’s notion of ‘phantasy’ and the ‘fantasy’ in literary fantastic as exchangeable terms to see the former as a transferrable mechanism of unconscious wish fulfilled and desire realised into literary fantastic mode, which the notion of desire being formulated and spelt out by fantasy in the previous chapter is associated with.

353 Jackson, *Fantasy*, 2.
355 *Ibid*.
distinctions between animate and inanimate objects, self and other, life and death.\textsuperscript{357}

Nevertheless, fantasy is “not to do with inventing another non-human world […] It has to do with inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relationships to produce something strange, unfamiliar and apparently ‘new’, absolutely ‘other’ and different”.\textsuperscript{358} Frequently regarded as the opposite to mimesis, \textsuperscript{359} fantasy enters a binary opposite relationship to deconstruct literary realism by disturbing, even violating, the world with which readers are familiar to constitute a world of ‘Otherness’.

More than simply continuing Todorov’s notion of literary fantasy as a mode, Jackson also engaged psychoanalysis with literary fantasy, which she argued Todorov failed to achieve. To her, literary fantasy should be approached as

\begin{quote}
[A] literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss […] In expressing desire, fantasy can operate in two ways: it can tell of, manifest or show desire, or it can expel desire, when this desire is a disturbing element which threatens cultural order and continuity.\textsuperscript{360}
\end{quote}

Having done so, the literary fantasy “[…] tells of the impossible attempt to realize desire […]”\textsuperscript{361} for readers to fulfil their impossible dreams through consuming the literary fantasy.

Two crucial elements of literary fantastic are pinpointed. First, the definition of fantasy cannot escape the notion of positioning fantasy against the ‘real’ because it “re-combines and inverts the real […] it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real. The fantastic cannot exist independently of that

\textsuperscript{357} Jackson, \textit{Fantasy}, 1-2.
\textsuperscript{358} \textit{Ibid.}, 8.
\textsuperscript{359} Literary mimesis is often positioned against fantasy in literature. See the following for various aspects of literary mimesis. \textit{See Hume, \textit{Fantasy and Mimesis}.}
\textsuperscript{360} Jackson, \textit{Fantasy}, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{361} \textit{Ibid.}, 3.
‘real’ world which it seems to find so frustratingly finite”. Only through a (re)position of relativity between fantasy and real/reality can literary fantastic be unobstructedly defined. Second, literary fantasy is a mechanism by which desires are manifested or expelled. Either way, literary fantasy is tightly engaged with desires. It articulates the ‘unspoken’ and illuminates the ‘invisible’ in our dominant culture, thereby revealing a world of Otherness. Fantastic has been employed as a mode in which people use imagination to inwardly subvert the dominant institutions and discourses practised in reality. On the other hand, however, the world of Otherness is operated on the notion of ‘absence’ because the world does not exist at all. The absence, I suggest, can be associated with Lacan’s notion of absence as a desire motivator within human subjects.

Sharing a somewhat similar view to literary fantasy in terms of reading fantasy literature as reading desire, Armitt proposed that literary fantasy, built on Freud’s phantasy, provides a space in which those who engage in the texts can ‘play’ because they begin with “[…] the concept of game-playing that structures our assumptions about its pleasures”. The notion of the spatial, which Armitt asserted is what “[…] determines the realm of textual dynamics particularly in the context of fantasy forms” is crucial to understand the very essence of literary fantastic. The mode of the fantastic, which “concerns itself with the world of the ‘beyond’”, re-defines spatial dimensions and negotiates borders of territories in the texts to make different layers of worlds, borders, frontiers and territories overlap and interplay with one another. The sense of the world of Otherness, contrary to the law of nature, derives from the overlapping and interplaying to generate an impact of ‘phantasy’ on readers collectively.

6.6.3: The Literary Fantastic from a Western European Perspective

Incorporating Jackson’s features of literary fantasy and Armitt’s emphasis on the notion of spatial dimension, I propose to define the literary fantastic in

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362 Jackson, Fantasy, 20.
363 For the definition of Freud’s phantasy, see footnote 351.
364 Armitt, Theorising the Fantastic, 4.
365 Ibid., 5.
366 Ibid., 4.
terms of two ‘re-’ : the re-configuration of temporal-spatial dimensions, and the re-association of the relation between signified/signifier and its attributes. Together, the re-configuration and re-association imply a world of Otherness for readers to digest the estrangement to enter a subverted world order. The reconfigured temporal-spatial perspective should be perceived from the contrast between literary fantastic and literary mimetic. The literary mimetic of the ‘real’ world which readers/authors are accustomed to is principally governed by the notion of the linear chronology of time. Contrarily, the narrative embarking on literary fantasy seeks to de-construct the very notion of the temporal-spatial axis in reality so that time is dissolved and space is stretched to infinity. In the frame of the timelessness is situated a space where a world of Otherness is constructed. The sense of Otherness is mainly generated from attributes associating the signified/signifier to form a meaning sign in ‘reality’ being re-associated for a new order/establishment, such as the Caterpillar who smokes a water-pipe in *Alice in Wonderland*. In ‘reality’, smoking a water pipe is not among the attributes associated with the English word (signifier) ‘caterpillar’ and the concept of a worm-like larva which turns into a butterfly or a moth. In this regard, the literary fantastic mode, intentionally or not, de-constructs the association between signified/signifiers and its attributes in ‘reality’ in its essence.

In the re-configuration of the temporal-spatial dimension, the infinite temporality is often pushed into the background for a sense of the ‘unreal’ to derive from (to create a faraway land which existed long ago, for instance), while the infinite spatiality becomes the foreground to invite a world of Otherness. The spatiality also serves as a playground where authors use the literary fantastic to exercise their imagination in writing. The notion of space favoured by the literary fantastic can be further elaborated as a process of displacement, the experiences in the world of Otherness, and the return.

The first phase takes derivative forms. The displacement can mean either an intrusion into, or from, the world of Otherness. An intrusion into the world of Otherness leads readers away from the world of mimesis to create a distance between the Otherness and mimesis. In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy was displaced
into the Land of Oz by a tornado. She was befriended by a scarecrow, a lion and a tin man. In Peter Pan, Wendy was invited to Neverland, a wonderland occupied by a band of lost boys led by Peter. On the contrary, an intrusion from the world of Otherness exerts tension while the ‘unreal’ and ‘real’ overlap, the closing proximity between the Otherness and mimesis easily causes conflicts or disturbance. In Dracula, the arrival of Count Dracula in Victorian England stirs up panic and terror.

Following the displacement, the protagonists often help to restore or reconstruct the order of the world. In The Chronicles of Narnia, the Pevensie children were brought to the magic land of Narnia to restore the order of the kingdom. In the Inkworld Trilogy, Maggie and her father Mortimer entered into the inkworld to save the world from being further intimidated by the evil power. On the other hand, an intrusion into the world of mimesis usually brings with it uneasiness, and the protagonists, with their lives disturbed by the intrusion, incline to restore the order of mimesis by eliminating the source of anxiety. In Dracula, the monster must be destroyed to restore order.

After their experiences, protagonists return to their origins, in the form of going home, of restoring peace, or even of death (which is the ultimate ‘going home’, a return to the very origin of life, figuratively speaking). In the Neverending Story, Bastian Balthazar Bux returned to his father for reconciliation. In Harry Potter, Harry returned to a normal family life after defeating Voldemort. In Metamorphosis, Gregore Samsa died from starvation in order to restore peace to his family.

6.6.4: The Literary Fantastic from a Contemporary Chinese Perspective

Whilst the process of displacement, of experiencing the world of Otherness, and of final return serve as the foundations of the literary fantastic in the West, I would further argue that the on-line contemporary Chinese literary fantastic can be defined similarly; yet the contemporary Chinese notion of spatial dimension digresses gradually from the western notion in the second phase of the process as the former grows both horizontally and vertically whereas the latter
remains, mostly, horizontal.\textsuperscript{367} Also, instead of a return, the contemporary Chinese literary fantastic emphasises staying within the world of Otherness, in the form of an elevation, both physically and psychologically. In some cases, the elevation is promoted to an apotheosis. In other words, protagonists in internet fiction where the Chinese literary fantastic is applied usually do not return to where they originally came from; contrarily, they stay in the world of Otherness to enjoy the ultimate socio-political status and wealth (elevation) bestowed upon them after having restored/reconstructed the order. The elevation corresponds to Chinese individualisation as Chinese netizens aspire collectively to the golden triangle where the exterior elevation represented by material success, and the interior exaltation symbolised by elevated socio-political status are combined. With material success and high socio-political status comes the desire for sex. The Chinese literary fantastic provides a basic structure around which various genres of fiction on Qidian Shanda develop differently. Some genres, such as Eastern Fantasy and Chinese Immortal Swordsman, clearly follow the Chinese literary fantastic and its process; other genres, such as Military and Romance, have their narratives focused on different segments of the process of the literary fantastic. Nevertheless, each genre, in the end, uses the literary fantastic to signal towards the message of Chinese individualisation.\textsuperscript{368}

\textsuperscript{367} This does not mean that verticality is totally absent from the fantasy narratives composed in the western world. Classic works such as Homer’s \textit{Odyssey} and Virgil’s \textit{Aeneid} depict, among other adventures, the heroes’ experiences with the gods above and below the world. Dante’s \textit{Divine Comedy} delineates the author’s imaginary journeys down to the Inferno and up to Paradiso. In addition, the range of literary fantasy I discuss here is from the eighteenth century onwards. How the notion of spatial dimension is different between the Chinese and the western one, and in what ways the notion of spatial dimension is played out differently from genre to genre, will be illustrated in the section on textual analysis below.

\textsuperscript{368} Even though the fantastic mode I propose here is based on the works from Qidian, I believe this mode can be regarded to be a Chinese fantastic mode on the grounds that a large number of popular works from other well-known literary portal websites follow the fantastic mode. Other popular literary portal websites such as 17k <www.17k.com>, Zhulang Xiaoshuo Wang 逐浪小說網 <www.zhulang.com>, Huanjian Sumon 幻劍書盟 <hjsm.tom.com>, Yuedu Xiaoshuo Wang 閱讀小說网 <www.readnovel.com> share much similarity with Chinese Qidian Net in terms of their homepage layout and the fiction genres they offer. Popular works at the top of the rankings are usually from fiction genres such as Eastern Fantasy, Urban, or Chinese Immortal Swordsman. Whilst reading the synopsis of those works, a similar fantastic mode is constantly detected. Consequently, I believe that the fantastic mode is not only confined to Qidian, but is also found on other literary portal websites, although due to length restrictions I have not examined these here.
Various works of fiction on Qidian Shanda, in a Lacanian sense, could arguably be understood as an *Objet petit a* in the symbolic system, with which human beings attempt to objectify the amorphous, elusive desire via imagination – which is a representation of fantasy as such – permeate fiction texts. Each popular work of fiction works like an *Objet petit a* to be momentarily fantasised by netizens. The seemingly never-ceasing serialisation of popular works of fiction is operated as the postponement of the satisfaction. Producing/consuming chapters one after another, Chinese netizens fantasise their desire by gazing upon the work of fiction and imagining. Eventually when the serialisation reaches its end, Chinese netizens’ desire, being detained and postponed, has been realised. As discussed previously, the satisfaction evaporates soon after the realisation. Subsequently, Chinese netizens swim in an ocean of works of fiction eagerly searching for the next *Objet petit a* to reiterate the desire-seeking process. By identifying with the protagonists who, in whichever narrative, earn ultimate success at the end, Chinese netizens fantasise the desire of a dream collectively aspired to and actualised. This dream I describe as ‘The Golden Triangle’ – composed by the yearning for wealth, high socio-political status and sex – because this is the type of person and life they imagine themselves to be, subconsciously, knowing that this type will be admired by others.

In a dynamic yet enclosed cycle of desire being constituted, postponed, repeated and finally realised by fantasy, Chinese netizens engage with fiction texts attempting to project their Gaze of desire towards their preferred texts. By following the storyline, which helps them to actualise an imagined scenario in a dynamic, streaming series, Chinese netizens fix their Gaze of desire along the stream of the storyline until they are taken to the imaginary place where their desire can be realised and satisfied. As a result, it is crucial to examine what is commonly produced/consumed as a whole. In the case of Chinese internet fiction, the stream of imagined scenario is presented through unlimited imagination to construct make-believe worlds where what is impossible in the real world
becomes possible. Nevertheless, the imagination presented in fiction texts is monotonously barren to a point where the main protagonists, patterns and storylines are highly predictable and similar to one another in the Chinese on-line literary sphere. The abundant resemblance, travelling from one text to another, points to a strong sense of collectiveness among fiction prosumers.

Eagleton suggested that “[s]omething must be lost or absent in any narrative for it to unfold; if everything stayed in place there would be no story to tell”.\textsuperscript{369} This ‘something’ could be anything: absent father, lost childhood. In Chinese internet fiction, there are three elements that constitute the ‘something’ that the majority of Chinese netizens produce/consume in various texts: wealth, high socio-political status and sex. These three symbols of status are, inevitably, highlighted and reprised at the end, regardless of what fiction narrative it is. These three unavoidable statuses formulate what I propose as ‘the Golden Triangle of Chinese Individualisation’ – they are where desire becomes clearly objectified through fantasy, reflecting the collective desire of Chinese netizens in the Chinese on-line literary sphere.

6.8: The Constitution and Realisation of Desire in Internet Fiction –
Production/Consumption on the Element of Literary Fantastic

In the Chinese on-line literary sphere, fantasy plays its role of constituting and realising desire faithfully. Chinese netizens fantasise to fabricate an imaginary world of extra-ordinariness and mystical exaltation. In their imagined fictional worlds, anything could and does happen. An individual could travel through time to change the history of a dynasty, to manipulate the future of a nation; an individual could transcend the status of Daoist gods and goddess to enslave them; an individual could acquire X-men-like superpowers effortlessly, to name just a few scenarios.

However, the fantasisation of fantasy does not cease here. To augment the extent to which fantasy could be spelt out, Chinese netizens demolish the invisible barriers conventionally separating fiction genres and the subgenres from one to

\textsuperscript{369} Eagleton, “Psychoanalysis,” 161.
another for the sake of receiving higher inspiration with which they could reinforce the volume of fantasy involved in fiction texts for a fuller satisfaction of desire. This intertextual approach to new inspiration for Chinese netizens can be argued as a way for them to intensify the sense of fantasy in internet fiction as a whole; however, conversely, it can also be argued that fantasy, in this regard, pushes prosumers toward fantasising more intensely because fantasy, in the sense of intense imagination, impossibility and mystical exaltation, has become hype to promote fiction narratives, regardless of which kinds, on the internet.

Having been comprehensively incorporated into fiction narratives, fantasy definitely plays a pivotal role in constituting the putative ‘reality’ in the fiction texts for prosumers to enjoy and imagine. From this perspective, fantasy does not play a passive role waiting to be fantasised; it assumes an active role to invite Chinese netizens to step into its world, teaching them that it is essential to fantasise more and in diverse directions so that they might incessantly gravitate towards the texts where fantasy is dominant. Therefore, authors intermingle various fiction genre features into one narrative to stimulate more fantasy; in return, readers are exhilarated by the intertextual literary mélange to expect more fantasy to be involved within their preferred works. In this reciprocally sustained dynamic cycle, prosumers push one another to a more intensified demand for fantasy to make the literary world exciting and invigorating. Given the sense of excitement and invigoration achieved through fiction narrative texts, Chinese netizens cumulatively arrive at their collective desire of realising ‘the golden triangle of Chinese individualisation’ through profound fantasisation which takes the form of varied interpretations of the element of the literary fantastic.

Whilst the collective desire toward the golden triangle of Chinese individualisation is often realised at the end of most of the fiction narratives on Qidian Shanda, fantasy, in return, teaches numerous Chinese netizens how to desire. For instance, it is not enough for a male protagonist to be merely satisfied with being a king in the human realm; he will want to transcend that status to become an immortal ruler who commands heaven and the underworld. It is not enough for a male protagonist’s achievements to be locally or nationally
recognised; he will be internationally, even universally worshipped. By the same
token, neither is it enough for a male protagonist to be comfortable at becoming a
millionaire at a tender age, he will become an invincible mogul who merges
international business to outperform Google or Sony before turning thirty.
Moreover, it is also never enough for a male protagonist to have only one
beautiful, perfect female companion, he usually will end up with a group of
impeccable women — even though he does not originally plan to do so. The same
goes for Romance: female protagonists usually marry an emperor or a king to
enjoy the prestigious socio-political position and wealth. Taking on fantasy,
Chinese netizens are commonly transported to the next level for a more energised
imagination and exaltation, formulating a greater pinnacle arising from the golden
triangle but which would be achieved with relatively little effort. The secret to
the unprecedented success is not diligence and hard work; neither is it via
advanced professionalism; it is through preposterously good luck or incredibly
innate ability. If it is reckoned that the collective desire points to a wish for the
dream of the golden triangle, then fantasy is there to let Chinese netizens fantasise
to what extent this desire could be verbally realised, and teaches Chinese netizens
how to desire, illuminating various possible paths to their goal.

6.8.1: The Postponement and Reproduction of Desire in Internet Fiction

In addition to constituting and realising desire, fantasy postpones the
realisation of desire to generate enjoyment from the process of
producing/consumption. The postponement is engineered in two ways:
serialisation and multiplication of adventures. Serialising fiction to lure its
readers to be more engaged has been practised since the late-Qing period, when
the demand for newspapers and magazines increased rapidly.370 Either the climax
of the narration presented in one chapter abruptly stops without indicating a clear

370 The serialisation of fiction can be traced back to a Chinese oral tradition beginning as early as
the Song dynasty (960-1279) when a narrator known as Shuohua Ren 說話人 (Story Teller) or
Shuoshu Ren 說書人 (Book Narrator) told stories with historical or pseudo-historical themes in
public places. Their stories were transformed into Huaben Xiaoshuo 話本小說 (Storytelling
Fiction), which serves as the prototype of Zhanghui Xiaoshuo 章回小說 (Chaptered Fiction). For
more details, see Bordahl, Introduction, The Eternal Storyteller, 1-11.
outcome to the narration, keeping readers on their edge of the seats, wondering what will happen next; or one chapter has already concluded yet one imminent event is perceived to lead to the occurrence of another narration. Readers are trapped in this sense of expectation, which is a postponement itself, to imagine what will take place next; authors also go through a similar experience by laying out the storyline to decide where to stop, how to continue and what to narrate, until Chinese netizens arrive at the final destination of their commonly shared imagined world to realise the collective desire.

Thanks to the internet, the serialisation of fiction has become relatively easier (authors do not need to wait for their serialised chapter to be proofread, edited and printed; nor does the readership need to wait for picking up a copy); word count is not an issue any more because there is simply no limitation – authors, consequently, tend to write as much as they can. High volumes of words are transformed into multitudinous adventures (some of which are extremely detailed) for a practical purpose – the story must go on, and there has to be climax in between. These adventures, essentially, tell the same thing but they are metamorphosed by fantasy to undertake diverse facets – from taming a fire-spitting dragon to flying an alien-occupied spaceship – to stir up excitement. These seemingly endless and repetitive adventures, in a way, impede Chinese netizens from realising their ultimate desire too soon.

Even as the postponement is terminated when the final desire is realised at the end of each narrative, fantasy can always reproduce desire. The Chinese online literary sphere is like a closed circuit where fantasy is enlivened and operated to different extents in numerous narratives. Any narrative, regardless of its word count, will have to conclude one day, which means that the desire, however much it has been postponed and fantasised, will eventually be realised. No sooner has the desire been realised that it disappears. Most readers immediately hunt for the next narrative to consume, whereas most authors would begin a new serialisation, or intend to shift their readers’ focus to their other ongoing works of fiction on the
internet portal websites. On this point, both readers and authors are, unconsciously, eager to reproduce the desire, which will be doubtlessly imagined and spelt out by fantasy. The collective desire of the golden triangle will be reproduced and circulated in this circuit of internet literary portal websites for Chinese netizens to imagine perpetually.

6.8.2: The Golden Triangle – The Desire of ‘Others’

As the deep structure of most internet fiction is undeviatingly addressed to a common message of realising the dream of the golden triangle, a question arises: whose desire is it that conveys such a strong, common message? Based on what has been discussed previously, there is no desire which is purely ‘mine’. One human being’s Gaze onto one thing is not only the project of his/her desire, but also the desire of Others. At the same time when a human being desires, he/she is also asking the question ‘Che vuoi?’ – what do Others want from him/her. The common message can be interpreted more than just from the desire that is ‘mine’, it also implicates the desire of Others. It is not only a personal choice, but also a social pressure, to make deriving worldly success a common desire in contemporary Chinese society. To be powerful, wealthy and famous satisfies internet fiction producers/consumers, and it also fulfils their dreams of how others would look at them – others would envy them by their Gaze of desire so that whoever can make the golden triangle come true is under the spotlight of the collective Gaze of others. To be gazed upon, that person could re-establish his/her identity in the flowing Symbolic Order, generating the sense of superiority and ego-accentuation in the fiercely competitive contemporary Chinese society. This sense reverberates with the Chinese individualisation, which has been examined in Chapter 2, as a way to elaborate the rapid rise and non-comparatively

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371 Authors on Chinese literary portal websites are allowed to have several works of creation published simultaneously as long as they abide by the regulation of the website. See footnote 196 of Chapter 3.
372 The reproduction of desire would help to elucidate why many authors on Shanda Qidian are extremely productive. Either they have works of several million words coming out one after another, or they have several works to be serialised at the same time. Of course, from a practical perspective, the high productivity could bring decent, or even great income.
enormous popularity of internet fiction as a socio-cultural phenomenon, especially in China, a country newly embracing market economy over the last three decades.

The desire of realising the golden triangle is the desire of one individual, but also the desire of the majority of producers/consumers of internet fiction. This desire has been assiduously fantasised, reproduced, reverberated between ‘I’ and ‘Others’ to the point that there appears to be little differentiation between ‘I’ and ‘Others’, in the light of the uniformity of desire for ‘I’ and ‘Others’. The situation is analogous to someone entering a room decorated by mirrors which reflect endless mirror images of the person. My desire is actually reflected by the Gaze of Others; without the Gaze of Others there is no mirror, without which ‘I’ cannot see my own reflection, my desire. This ‘I’ and ‘Others’ have coalesced into a collective conglomerate who are convinced that material success and the effect it will likely cause is the only way out of the competitiveness of the society.

Superstition, easily associated with religious rituals, folklore and local mysticism, has been targeted for eradication in various political/cultural campaigns in order to promote the progress of Chinese society since the beginning of the CCP regime after 1949. For example, Chinese martial arts fiction, one popular Tongsu Xiaoshuo genre during the Republican era, was gradually banned due to the very reason of it promoting superstition and feudalism. Nevertheless, today what used to be condemned as the ‘old feudal social’ practices have been resuscitated in Chinese literary cyberspace to be broadly prosumed. Popular literature implementing the literary fantastic mode has found its new breeding ground on-line.

The mass media link Chinese popular literature closely with other parts of the world. Popular western fantasy fiction, such as The Lord of the Rings and the Harry Potter stories, broadens the horizon of the literary fantastic through fiction, along with the aid from their adaptations into Hollywood movies. This literary fantastic, travelling from the West, inspires a plethora of authors to try their hand at this genre.\textsuperscript{373} The literary fantastic has appealed to such a substantial

\textsuperscript{373} Qidian commenced from an on-line fan club commenced in 2003 known as Qidian Wenxue Yuanchuang Xiehu起點文学原創協會 (Chinese Magic and Fantasy Union) whose primary
readership that 2005 is tacitly agreed to be Zhongguo Qihuan Xiaoshuo Yuannian (The First Year of Modern Fantasy Fiction in China) when several internet fantasy works of fiction dominated the annual search ranking on Baidu and Sina in China. Until today, Eastern Fantasy still takes up steadily around one fifth of both the production rate and popularity rate.\(^{374}\)

Nonetheless, the literary fantastic is not only confined within Eastern Fantasy, or its sibling Western Fantasy, both of which are only one part of the whole fantastic landscape of internet fiction. It percolates through all major fiction genres, which, I believe, has been revealed through the textual analysis in chapter 4 and 5.

6.9: Conclusion

Based on the textual analysis I provide in Chapters 4 and 5, I establish that there is a repetitive story pattern which points to the realisation of desire through a complicated psychological process of fantasisation for Chinese netizens. Followed the two previous chapters I have explored psychoanalysis as the theoretical framework to interpret internet fiction, drawing upon Freud, Lacan and Žižek’s works to elaborate the relationship between fantasy reality, fantasy, Objet petit a, gaze and desire. Having examined the process in which human beings follow the Symbolic Order governed by language, I have argued that various works of fiction are analogous to Lacan’s notion of Objet petit a, upon which Chinese netizens gaze to fantasise their desire. The fantasy, taking the form of the literary fantastic, helps humans to formulate their desires to replenish the sense of hollowness within. Accordingly, the collective desire fantasised by Chinese netizens by voluminously producing/consuming internet fiction, arguably, can be revealed through psychoanalysis. In the next chapter, I shall come to my conclusion for this research.

\(^{374}\) See Appendix 3 for its production rate.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the previous six chapters, I have explored internet fiction as a socio-cultural phenomenon in China to answer my research questions regarding how, in a reconfigured literary production and consumption field where agents have been re-positioned, internet fiction has been used as a mirror to reflect the individual desires of Chinese netizens. Here, I shall show how my approach has allowed me to understand the socio-cultural phenomenon, and suggest aspects for further research in the field of internet literature.

In Chapter 2, in which I mapped internet fiction, I argued that internet fiction, a relatively neglected topic in academia, originated in fan-oriented sub-culture. I drew on Henry Jenkins’s pioneering studies on fan cultures, who in turn borrowed Michel de Certeau’s notion of grassroots appropriation. Fiction, owing to the prevalence of the internet, has become a fan-based activity in which the general public are given an equal chance to create and publish their own literary works which are easily accessed by the general public, any of whom can provide feedback, or adopt the role of an on-line reader, critic or author.

Although I commenced my research with fan studies, I argued that internet fiction should not be studied exclusively as fan culture. Internet fiction, in fact, is located at a crossroads of universal media evolution and an historical heritage for modern popular fiction tradition since the late Qing period when the notion of modernity was ushered into the genre of fiction as it was elevated to a high socio-political status as ‘New Literature’. The phrase ‘internet fiction’ thus indicates two pivotal elements. The first is a new platform established by the advancement of the mass/social media, the second is an older notion of consuming fiction produced by elites as a socio-cultural practice in the everyday life of ordinary people.

This is where my thesis is unique and valuable. Instead of concentrating on one research topic, this thesis examines in equal measure the two pivotal elements of the internet as a macrostructure and of the fictional texts as microstructures, dividing the thesis into two sections. The two pivotal elements
prove to be complementary to one another, making the understanding of this prevalent socio-cultural phenomenon more thorough, which helps to deliver a comprehensive analysis to my research question in regard to ‘internet fiction’.

7.1: The Macrostructure – The Making of a Digital Literary Field

From clay tablets in early Mesopotamian civilisation to today’s internet, humans have universally been searching for new methods and agents by which to produce and circulate various kinds of information, including scientific discovery, religious texts and literature. Today, the internet is gradually superseding paper, which has been the major agent of producing and circulating information for a millennium.

Because the internet has replaced both the dominant agent of the printing industry and the traditional methods of circulation, I believe in the necessity to examine internet fiction as a socio-cultural phenomenon, initially, from a macro-structure perspective to discuss the re-institutionalisation of the literary field. This is why I began this thesis with a study of the internet as a new space in which the literary field has been re-institutionalised. A migration from a traditional, paper-based printing industry and its relevant institutions based on Bourdieu’s notion of the literary field, to a virtual space-based industry and a digital literary field, the macrostructure of internet fiction was specified in its significance in Chapter 2 and thoroughly analysed in Chapter 3 to deliver an overall picture of a re-institutionalised and digital literary field where agents have been re-positioned.

Two crucial findings in a cause-and-effect sequence emerged in the first section of the research.

The first finding was a new notion of ‘prosumption’. The production and consumption of popular fiction has been reincarnated on the new circulation platform, which renders the birth of internet ‘prosumption’ of fiction where ordinary people are able to switch between the roles of producers (authors and book critics) and consumers (readers). Prosumption, in fact, points to a rising tendency of individualisation where the notion of ‘I’ has been relatively strengthened. This notion of ‘I’ is closely associated with a materialistic identity
in which materialistic satisfaction and wealth acquisition, arguably, define the meaning of success. The tendency of individualisation, discussed later in the second section of my thesis, helps to illuminate the reason why the texts of popular internet fiction, collectively speaking, point to a re-enactment of individual desire(s).

In Chapter 2, where internet fiction was mapped on a Chinese popular fiction landscape, the scope of internet fiction, which stays in the tradition of producing and consuming literature for leisure purposes, was also expanded to examining the internet as a new media platform and its impact. This media platform of the internet has largely taken over from the modern commercial print media that was initially introduced into China in 1876, replacing what Christopher Reed described as ‘print capitalism’ with ‘digital capitalism’. The boom of digital capitalism produces ‘prosumption’, which has been promoted by the rise of individualisation echoing an increasing practice of capitalism in everyday life as a consequence of the economic reform which has taken place since the late 1970s.

Nevertheless, without a newly regulated digital literary field, the prosumption of internet fiction might not have been such a large-scale socio-cultural behaviour, but might have just remained as de-centralised behaviour scattered across BBS, newsgroups or discussion forums. It is through a centralised regulative act of a newly-introduced digital literary field that prosumers are congregated together to perform ‘internet fiction prosumption.’ This perspective leads to the second finding, which is the establishment of a transnational digital literary field. This digital literary field is regulated through the evolution of various literary portal websites across the transnational Chinese on-line literary sphere. Literary portal websites become a congregation ground where the roles of various agents in the traditional literary field are re-positioned, regulating a new model by which the digital literary field is operated. In this thesis, I selected Qidian Shanda, the literary portal website which has the highest market penetration rate in China, as my case study. Qidian Shanda’s business model, which has been emulated by many other literary portal websites

375 Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai.*
throughout the greater Chinese area, reveals the ways in which a digital literary field has been re-institutionalised and the agents re-positioned.

Consequently, in Chapter 3, I endeavoured to shed light on a re-institutionalised literary field in Chinese cyberspace by ‘appropriating’ Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the ‘literary field’, arguing that agents have been reallocated and the commercial printing environment has been reconfigured in virtual space. During this re-institutionalisation, general internet users turn the internet to their own benefit by changing the power hierarchy in the commercial printing business which has flourished since the Ming dynasty. Whereas the publishers (later joined by editors) once dominated the top of the power hierarchy in a commercial printing business to determine whose works would be published so that readers would be attracted to their commercial products, today the role of publishers and editors has been minimised. Instead, internet users, who adopt the roles of both authors and readers, have their say to determine which works should receive more popularity. On Qidian Shanda, theoretically, any internet user could publish his/her work, engage in various voting systems to generate rankings of ‘best sellers’ based on a series of complicated variables, consume works of fiction via different media platforms, and post comments/feedbacks on any other works they like or dislike. The active internet users – prosumers, in other words – mark the repositioning of agents in a literary field.

Qidian Shanda’s answer to the tendency of prosumption is to make full use of it by setting up a new business model. The managers (also publishers) of the Qidian model have made way for prosumers to decide what is to be created and circulated. They have surrendered the power traditionally held by publishers and editors. Instead, the managers mainly focus on profit-making by two strategies, one external and one internal. Externally speaking, the managers of Qidian Shanda incorporate the notion of franchise so that popular works prosumed by internet users on Qidian Shanda can be further extended into different entertainment formats to generate greater profits; internally speaking, the managers devise a complicated system to encourage more participation of prosumers by engaging them with a membership and a Qidian virtual currency
system whereby the consumption of works of fiction requires virtual currency, whilst producing works or providing feedbacks reward prosumers with virtual currency. In sum, the roles of the publisher and the editor has been reconfigured into that of a business marketer, while the publisher’s and editor’s roles are now outsourced to general internet prosumers, who can also be authors, commentators and readers at the same time.

Having outsourced their traditional roles to prosumers, Qidian Shanda marketers depend on prosumers to guide them through an ocean of fiction texts to know what is popular so that the best opportunities for profit generation can be taken. With the newly outsourced roles of editor and publisher, prosumers on Qidian Shanda, in return, engage with the prosumption of internet fiction with enthusiasm by massively producing and consuming works of fiction, in the process of which, participation in the form of hits, recommendations, collection and feedback-giving to popular works is rendered. These forms are translated into a complicated set of best-seller lists, which serves as the guidelines for Qidian Shanda managers as well as for other prosumers to realise what kind of texts are highly desired by general internet users.

With an overall re-institutionalisation of a literary field associated with commercial printing being demonstrated, the reallocation of agents within this literary field enables a reversal of the power hierarchy, which helps us to understand why internet fiction has been developing into a significant socio-cultural phenomenon. The two ‘re-s’ – re-institutionalisation of a literary field and the re-positioning of agents – initiate prosumption. Prosumption, in return, sustains the new digital literary field and is sustained by the internet.

On the one hand, prosumption and the digital literary field, the macrostructure of internet fiction, thrive on reciprocal terms over the interactivity of the internet; yet on the other hand, the macrostructure could not have flourished so much in only thirteen years if the microstructure of the internet fiction – works of fiction – were not sufficiently attractive for prosumers, most of whom are ordinary people in everyday life, to gravitate towards.
7.2: The Microstructure – Internet Fiction as a Digital Literary Product of Digital Capitalism

The rapid growth of internet fiction since 1998 has proved that the macrostructure and the microstructure are also strongly reciprocal in the formation of a prolific cycle. Netizens take advantage of the prosumption extensively exercised in the digital literary field to have their say since they can easily assume the role of authors, and at the same time identify with other netizens’ works as readers. In the Chinese on-line literary sphere where works of fiction are created by and for the general netizens, they use fiction as a way to converse with others without much interference and regulation from editors/publishers. The prolific cycle is operated in the sense that the general netizens create popular works for more people to gravitate towards the prosumption model and the literary products produced in the model. The digital literary field develops further, being supported by the growing engagement of more netizens over the internet. This operation promotes the digital capitalism previously discussed.

It is therefore imperative that the microstructure be analysed to know what works are popularly produced and consumed. Identifying which works are popular helps to address why the microstructure can, in return, sustain the stability of the macrostructure. Whilst examining the popular works, my textual analysis points to a notion which I describe as the Golden Triangle formula - wealth, high socio-political status, and sex - extensively and collectively practised in the majority of the popular works on Qidian Chinese Net and Qidian Female Net for Chinese netizens to produce and to consume. The selected popular works used in this thesis exemplify the notion to substantiate my argument in regard to the microstructure of internet fiction that the theme of the Golden Triangle has permeated the Chinese on-line literary sphere.

In Chapter 4, the Golden Triangle formula is repetitively produced and consumed. The textual analysis of the selected popular works of fiction from each major fiction genre on Qidian Chinese Net substantiated this statement. The analysis shows that Golden Triangle formula is largely present to delineate a
recurrent story pattern in which an underdog protagonist attains unprecedented socio-political status, acquires enormous wealth, and thereby attracts beautiful female companions to serve him. Only by going through the three stages can an underdog be entitled to the golden triangle to have the same story re-told to, mainly, male Chinese netizens.

But it is not just the male Chinese netizens gravitating towards the golden triangle through producing and consuming the popular works on Qidian Chinese Net, which I analysed in great detail in Chapter 4, it is also the female Chinese netizens who are attracted to the golden triangle reprised in the popular works of Romance on Qidian Female Net, as examined in detail in Chapter 5. However, I have argued that the golden triangle is presented in a very different fashion in Romance in two regards. First, whereas male netizens fantasise a text in which wealth and high socio-political status are usually acquired first and female companions arrive later, female netizens fantasise a text in which a male companion, who is a Prince Charming, appears in the life of the female protagonist. The advent of the Prince Charming initiates a Cinderella style of romantic, perfect relationship. Nevertheless, the relationship generated by Prince Charming also serves as a mechanism whereby wealth and high socio-political status are guaranteed because he cannot, and will not, be an underdog. He is always from a prestigious background, to which the female protagonist is elevated. Unconditional love, at this point, is transformed into a conditional love.

Second, a heterosexual Romance type of narrative between a Prince Charming and a Cinderella is not the only type of work to be produced/consumed; a homoerotic Romance type of narrative between a Zeus and a Ganymede is prosumed as well. Jumping on the chance to produce/consume a globalised trend of female voyeurism on-line, female prosumers exploit the trend to explore a traditionally forbidden area of female sexuality. Hence, in a homoerotic narrative, the golden triangle is still present to render a story in which a relationship between a Zeus and a Ganymede develops in an unusual and extremely erotic way. However at the end Zeus’s love not only satisfies Ganymede’s emotional needs but also provides him with wealth and high socio-political status. Unconditional
love, once more, is turned into a conditional one serving as a mechanism by which the golden triangle can be achieved.

The repetition of the theme of wealth, high socio-political status, and sex intensively exercised in order to produce a recurrent story pattern which always culminates in achieving the golden triangle is so collectively produced/consumed through the popular works that it can only be explained, I have argued, by applying to the notion of fantasy using a psychoanalytical approach. Judging from the fact that virtually all popular works exemplified in this thesis achieved the golden triangle, I am convinced that internet fiction, textually speaking, is produced/consumed in the sense of having a repetitive mass fantasy played out.

Accordingly, the theoretical framework under which the textual analysis is carried out is the psychoanalytical approach, which I elucidated in Chapter 6. In dissecting desires of human psychology, psychoanalysis provides a close-ranged analysis. According to psychoanalysis, fantasy plays a crucial role in pursuing, realising but simultaneously postponing desires. This approach leads my research to emphasise fantasy in order to dissect the desire(s) of Chinese netizens and also to argue that fantasy, in the form of the literary fantastic, is pervasively practised throughout all of the fiction genres and sub-genres to carry out its mission of pursuit, postponement and realisation of desire(s).

By incorporating Freud’s notion of ‘phantasy’ with Žižek’s discussion of fantasy and Lacan’s linguistic notion of desire in Chapter 6, I argued that the major desire-fantasy dichotomy is applicable to the dissection of desire presented in texts of fiction on Qidian Chinese Net and Qidian Female Net. In satisfying ‘the desire which is difficult to be pinpointed’, Chinese netizens fully participate in prosuming fiction in the digital literary field (which is represented by the Qidian Shanda business model) to write out and take in desires replicated from one text to another along a chain of signification. Numerous works of fiction are exercised as Objet Petit a for netizens to project their Gaze upon. Projecting their Gaze on internet fiction, netizens attempt to have their desires achieved through the assistance of fantasy. Internet fiction, basically a linguistically-comprised Objet Petit a, tends to involve endless serialisation, which corresponds to the
mechanism which fantasy uses to delay the fulfilment of desire. As one piece of work, after being serialised with millions of words, finally comes to end, netizens have their desire temporally satiated but experience hollowness afterwards. This hollowness leads them to look for the next *Objet Petit a* to repeat the desire-searching cycle. Whilst netizens repeat the desire-searching cycle by producing/consuming internet fiction, I also argued that the fantasy examined by both Freud and Žižek can be considered analogous to the notion which I propose as ‘Chinese Literary Fantastic Mode’ heavily exercised throughout internet fiction on Qidian Chinese Net and Qidian Female Net.

The ‘Chinese literary fantastic mode’ is extensively and collectively practised in the majority of the popular works on Qidian Chinese Net and Qidian Female Net. The selected popular works used in this thesis exemplify the notion to substantiate my argument in regard to the microstructure of internet fiction that the Chinese literary fantastic mode has permeated the Chinese on-line literary sphere.

In Chapter 6, the notion of the Chinese literary fantastic mode is discerned by a juxtaposition between the literary fantastic mode in Western literary practice since the Industrial Revolution and the Chinese literary fantastic mode to illuminate the similarities and the differences. Whereas the Western literary fantastic mode consists of three stages of displacement/intrusion, the experience of the world of Otherness, and a return as the ending, the Chinese literary fantastic mode is usually composed by three stages of displacement/intrusion, the experience of the world of Otherness, and dominance in the world of Otherness. This is where the Chinese literary fantastic mode is distinguished from the Western literary fantastic mode.

Furthermore, this Chinese literary fantastic mode is repetitively produce/consumed to give internet fiction a characteristic of ‘intertextuality’, which I have argued is ascribed to two features pervasively presented in Chinese cyberspace. The first feature is the transgression of generic boundaries. In spite of having as many as thirteen major fiction genres and 67 fiction sub-genres all together on Qidian Chinese Net and Qidian Female Net, the genre and sub-genre
variety is not equally translated into a spectrum of fiction texts. Despite each fiction genre having its own features traditionally associated with that specific genre, these features are not necessarily confined within this designated specific genre in Chinese cyberspace. Many features traditionally pertaining to fantasy fiction, for instance, can also be found frequently in romance or history narratives. The second feature is a recurrent story pattern commonly reprised in most popular works of fiction, understood as ‘deep structure’, to borrow Chomsky’s notion. The deep structure refers to the story pattern which, without exception, delineates the ways in which an underdog protagonist ascends the ladder of success. Success always comprises three crucial factors: wealth, high socio-political status, and sex. The three factors appear so prevalently and ubiquitously in internet fiction on Qidian Chinese Net that I have already frequently associated with the notion of ‘the golden triangle’, which was closely examined in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 through tracking the repetition of the story patterns of popular works on Qidian Chinese Net and Qidian Female Net. The ways in which the golden triangle resonates with Chinese individualisation was discussed in Chapter 2.

As far as the deep structure is concerned, it can only be rendered by the Chinese literary fantastic mode due to the fact that the mode provides the ways in which an underdog protagonist achieves the golden triangle. The textual analysis of the selected popular works of fiction from each major fiction genre on Qidian Chinese Net substantiated this statement. The analysis shows that the Chinese literary fantastic mode is always present to delineate a recurrent story pattern in which an underdog protagonist attains unprecedented socio-political status, acquires enormous wealth, and thereby attracts beautiful female companions to serve him after he has undertaken the three stages of the Chinese literary fantastic mode. Only by going through the three stages can an underdog be entitled to the golden triangle. In this regard, the Chinese literary fantastic mode serves as a means, and the golden triangle fulfils the ultimate goal, in virtually all popular fiction on Qidian Chinese Net and on Qidian Female Net.

Notwithstanding the (inter)textual substance and a repetitive story pattern spelt out differently by the Chinese literary fantastic mode across various fiction
genres, each fiction genre still expresses the ways in which Chinese netizens deliver their understanding of the socio-cultural and historical consciousness by transcending individual desire(s) collectively reflected through the mirror. In this regard, Benedict Anderson’s notion of *Imagined Communities* comes into play. Although focusing on the constitution of a shared sense of nation-ness through cultural formation in a community, I argued that Anderson’s notion can be expanded into the constitution of a collective sense through cultural formation – including literary practice in this thesis – in a virtual community. Therefore, in Chapter 4, we can see that in Eastern Fantasy a sense of globalisation and Chinese diaspora is indicated; in Urban a sense of anxiety and anticipation toward urbanisation is expressed; in Chinese Immortal Swordsman a revisit to religion, folklore and mysticism is displayed; in On-line Game a sense of the accession of a network virtual society is illustrated; in History a sense of Chinese nationalism and cultural chauvinism is imbued; in Western Fantasy a sense of curiosity admixed with admiration towards foreignness is demonstrated; in Science Fiction a sense of pride in scientific and technological achievement is manifested. In Chapter 5, whilst repeating the story pattern of a ‘conditional love’ with an optimal ending, female prosumers speak out their pressure of a ‘normal’ life for women (and for men) and of female sexuality through the genre. The transcendence, I argue, explicates and reflects Chinese netizens’ common discernment of their socio-cultural and historical consciousness variably delivered through the literary practice of fiction genres discussed previously. The discernment constituted in an ‘imagined virtual community’ produces a re-delivery of the condition of today’s China.

Hence, putting together the six chapters, we can see that internet fiction has been used collectively as a mirror to reflect individual desire(s) to be different, in the sense of being successful. This success is unanimously defined by wealth, high socio-political status and sex for male netizens, and love/sex, wealth, high socio-political status by female netizens. In this regard, male netizens’ version of ‘success’ and female netizens’ version of ‘success’ are complementary to one another. This definition of success has a heavy emphasis on materiality and sex,
which were previously propagandised by the CCP regime in Mao China as a backward heritage from the ‘decadent’ West. This, I believe, is a call to market economy ushered into China since the economic reform. The ‘capitalistic’ desire(s) yearned for by ordinary Chinese people are so intense that most works of internet fiction are employed as a mirror to reflect and to fantasise those desire(s), making most of the texts of the works read like infantile, cheap fantasy so that internet fiction, to a certain extent, is generally nicknamed Yiying Xiaoshuo 意淫小說 (also popularly known as ‘YY fiction’ on-line; Fiction which makes oneself feel good) in Chinese cyberspace. In this regard, China, at present, is at a point of no return away from communism, regardless of the socialist system which the CCP regime claims to hold on to.

Nonetheless, the economic reform path which China has been following is not smooth. China is caught in a cultural dilemma between acceptance (adoption/adaptation) of and resistance to various ideas flowing into China from the outside world since the post-Mao era during which the search for the lost Chinese cultural values after the Cultural Revolution commenced. The search has continued until today when China faces a globalised, mostly capitalist community.

The search, on the other hand, can be associated with a stronger message delivered by each popular fiction genre to be linked with a broader socio-political-economical concern because each fiction seems to express certain concern over China in its international or domestic conditions. This puts China in a delicate position between its domestic concerns and its international status. For instance, Eastern Fantasy presents its readers with a repetitive story pattern where a Chinese protagonist travels through time and dimension to face Otherness in a fantasy land. This story pattern echoes with the growing Chinese diaspora in

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376 See footnote 106. A recent example demonstrates that the search for Chinese cultural/ideological values is still ongoing. A 9.5 metre-tall statue of Confucius previously erected in front of the Communist National Museum off Triananmen Square, not far from the gaze of Mao’s portrait, was removed on 21 April 2011. Anonymous, “Controversial Confucius Statue Vanishes from Triananmen.” The erection of the statue had instigated controversies, which could be interpreted by the way that China at present is still in the predicament between returning to Confucianism or remaining with Marxism-Leninism. The search for Chinese-ness, in this regard, will continue in the future.
recent years as the number of overseas Chinese students booms and as the Chinese investment in different continents increases. In Urban, a mixture of anxiety and anticipation towards urbanisation in China is read between the lines where the protagonists in popular fiction from this genre initially feel repressed in a metropolitan area usually gain their success in metropolitan cities at the end. In Chinese Immortal Swordsman, the genre suggests a re-visit to religion, folklore, and mythicism, which is contradictory to the political ideology of the CCP regime. In On-line Game, the accession to a networked, virtual society is manifested through the popular production and consumption of the genre, which corresponds to China currently being the largest wired nation and its ambition to be as virtually prevalent as possible in the future. In History, an intense sense of nationalism is glorified. The glory of the nation is always extrapolated by the story pattern where the protagonists ascend to a high socio-political position within the central government of a certain Chinese dynasty. The ascendency secures the protagonist the power to tame barbarians around the world, who commonly esteem the Middle Kingdom as the ultimate power on earth. In Western Fantasy, it can be speculated that a sense of admiration and curiosity of foreignness is felt. This sense coincides with the fact that many Chinese netizens seem to find imported foreign goods appealing such as expensive brands like Louis Vuitton or BMW, and contributing an impressive role to the shopping tourism around the world. In Science Fiction, the theme of a Chinese protagonist who equips himself with the advanced technology to take over the world is reprised, which echoes with the recent science and technology breakthrough in China. In Romance, the issue of sexuality, as well as the concern about love and marriage, is largely incorporated into the popular texts of Romance for its readers to imagine an ideal condition, which is not equally reflected in reality.

Arjun Appadurai’s notion of ‘global ethnoscapes’ calls for anthropologists’ attention towards the “intimacy between global/local interactions in the formation of cultural imaginations”. Nonetheless, tension also arises to

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377 Appadurai, “Global Ethnoscapes.”
378 Rofel, Desiring China, 34.
create a cultural dilemma between acceptance and resistance during the global/local exchange. In the case of internet fiction, the dilemma is variously expressed via fiction genres whilst internet fiction’s ‘mirror’ status to reflect and fantasise collective individual desire(s) of netizens is transcended to address the dilemma. The dilemma not only operates between acceptance and resistance; it is also operated on the notion of the differentiation between ‘we Chinese’ and ‘Otherness’.

On the one hand, China has been adapting to the expanding globalised community, during which process new ideas of ‘Otherness’ are adopted. Recently, China has experienced a growing Chinese diaspora, in the form of immigration or studying abroad, especially to the West. Apart from the expanding diaspora, many Chinese people subscribe to the notion of ‘purchasing foreignness’ either by becoming an international traveller/shopper, or by purchasing expensive imported foreign products locally, or simply straightforwardly expressing their admiration/curiosity towards the West. The accelerated urbanisation (despite the ambivalence it produces) and a wholehearted welcome to the rise of a virtual society in everyday life helps to convert Chinese people to adaptation as contact with a globalised community (a world of Otherness) becomes more frequent. In exploring the geographical ‘Otherness’, purchasing ‘Otherness’ or adopting new notions from the world of ‘Otherness’, China increases her socio-cultural proximity towards a globalised ‘Otherness’.

Yet on the other hand, China has been resisting the notion of Otherness in some ways. China resists a comprehensive adoption of Otherness given the fact that China should have its own national characteristics, especially at the present time when China is on par with, or soon will outgrow ‘foreign imperialism’, an evil embodiment of ‘Otherness’. Consequently, China is gradually revisiting its religious, mythical past and, most importantly, Chinese history, to reconstruct a unique and allegedly superior Chinese culture. The sense of ‘falling behind the West’ has been substituted by a widespread, rising Chinese nationalism which is read between the lines across various fiction genres. Chinese nationalism reverberates with a pride in the advancement in technology and science to
overtake the West, a dream which modern China has had since Mao’s Great Leap Forward. The accentuation of ‘Chinese-ness’ attempts to create a cultural Great Wall of China to block the types of Otherness regarded as incompatible with ‘China’s condition’.

It is well-known that four of the most universally popular websites have been denied access in China by its GFW (the Great Fire Wall of China): YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Google (users within China are only allowed access to google.com.hk with filtered contents). The Chinese government refuses the circulation of any politically sensitive messages from those websites. Whilst these websites have been blocked, China still manages to keep abreast of the globalised community by setting up Chinese counterparts of the banned websites operating on the same notion. In China, there are video streaming sites such as Tudou Wang 土豆網 (Potato Net; www.tudou.com), a Chinese version of YouTube; social networking Renren Wang 人人網 (People Net; www.renren.com), a Chinese version of Facebook; microblogging Xinlang Weibo 新浪微博 (Sina Microblogging; http://weibo.com), a Chinese version of Twitter; and a search engine Baidu 百度 (Baidu; www.baidu.com), a Chinese version of Google. By doing this, China is stranding herself between coping with a globalised community (acceptance in the form of adoption and adaptation) and establishing a sense of ‘Chinese-ness’ (resistance in the sense of searching for a Chinese characteristic to apply to importation from foreign lands). It is the same notion addressed by internet fiction as we examine various messages delivered by fiction genres when internet fiction transcends its ‘mirror’ status to be used as a mechanism whereby Chinese prosumers endeavour to address their understanding of the world.

Chinese netizens, whilst using internet fiction to speak for their individual desire(s), also express their discernment towards the struggle China is situated in since an economically new China has resurged. Facing a global community

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379 Wikipedia is not constantly blocked. Therefore, it is not mentioned here as an example. Nevertheless, there is also a Chinese counterpart of Wikipedia known as Baidu Encyclopaedia, of which the content strictly follows the guidance of government censorship and avoids politically sensitive issues.
where ‘Otherness’ infiltrates, and where the internet reconfigures the everyday life practice of internet users to the point where a butterfly effect can be aggrandised into a mass movement such as the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, serving as an impetus for a series of Arab world political protests, China’s constant struggle between acceptance of a globalised ‘Otherness’ and resistance to the very same globalised community by highlighting ‘Chinese-ness’, or special Chinese characteristics, will persist in the future. The internet, in this regard, has become a wrestling ground for power where discourses of ‘Otherness’ and those of ‘Chinese-ness’ continue to clash, compromise and contend. Internet fiction, as one of the most popular forms of internet activity in Chinese cyberspace (a virtual imagined community), will always be engaged in this game of clash, compromise and contention in the global/local interaction.

7.3: Suggestions for Future Research

The internet fiction phenomenon is only in an incipient stage. The monitoring of any changes from the Chinese literary fantastic mode and the golden triangle in the textual substance would be an interesting topic for further research. In spite of the mainstream tendency observed in today’s popular fiction where a stereotyped fantasy of desiring worldly success is replicated across various works, there might be changes to and improvements on the literary values and aesthetics in the future. More variety might be introduced into internet fiction as more established writers are willing to participate in ‘digital capitalism’.

The literary net, which was recently added to Qidian Shanda, is excluded from the present study due to the length and the focus of this research. Nevertheless, setting up a net actually named ‘Literature’ suggests that Qidian Shanda is attempting to be upgraded from a public image of ‘popular literature’ to ‘more serious literature’. For this reason, works permitted to be published on this net deserve academic attention to examine whether the net has indeed begun to integrate more literary values and aesthetics.

Internet fiction, being the most popular literary genre in Chinese cyberspace, is only one genre of internet literature. Other genres such as poetry,
drama scripts, Manga and essays also deserve academic attention. Questions such as how works of those genres prosumed on the internet reformulate the generic tradition would be an interesting topic for academic research.

‘Digital capitalism’ is created by the advent of a new communication platform. The internet, being the most convenient platform for prosumption, also engages other platforms as part of ‘media convergence’. This includes mobile phones and e-readers. In Japan, mobile phone literature has become a sub-culture, and China has also started to take part in this new literary tendency. To what extent does mobile phone literature reconfigure the production and consumption of literature? In what ways does mobile phone literature interact with internet literature?

The impact of the Qidian Shanda business model, in the sense of repositioning various agents from the traditional literary field, is another interesting topic. Will the Qidian Shanda model be replicated in Chinese cyberspace, making this model a new dominant ‘digital capitalism’ site? Or will the model incorporate more features which further contribute to defining a brand new digital literary field, which brings about changes to the production of internet fiction? A close and long-term academic observation and analysis of the future tendency of the Qidian Shanda model, as well as any new features causing further change to the production of popular literature, will be an area worthwhile for research.

Internet fiction is a phenomenon of a transnational Chinese on-line literary sphere, although so far it seems that the centre is in China. Nevertheless, will different thoughts from ‘peripheral’ areas, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong or overseas Chinese communities, have an impact on the textual substance, even to the point of changing and subverting the dominant Chinese-ness in the ‘central’ area? To what extent is there an interchange of thoughts between the ‘periphery’ and the ‘centre’ and what are the ways in which the interchange reformulates the textual substances and concepts of Chinese-ness? Research into this would be a large-scale and challenging project.

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380 This term is borrowed from Jenkins in his Media Convergence.
The present thesis presents a comprehensive and original study of internet fiction as a new socio-cultural phenomenon in the Greater Chinese area epitomised by Qidian Shanda, the most popular literary portal website in China. Whilst the areas indicated above raise potential topics for further research, the present thesis, for the first time, broadens the spectrum of examining internet fiction beyond pure textual analysis by also integrating the study of a new digital literary field in a booming digital capitalism. Furthermore, the phenomenon of internet fiction is located in the broader socio-cultural landscape of modern China. In this regard, this thesis shows that despite the relatively low literary aesthetics/values which internet fiction appears to demonstrate, its prosumption model represents important socio-cultural and economic dynamics emerging in Chinese society today.
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### Appendix 1: List of Fiction Genres and Their Subgenres on Qidian Chinese Net
(The guidelines of fiction genre and sub-genres on Qidian Chinese net remain consistent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qihuan (奇幻)</th>
<th>Western Fantasy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>西方奇幻 (Western Style Fantasy)</td>
<td>以西方奇幻体系為参照，带有濃重劍與魔法系列風格的幻想作品. (This subgenre is set to emulate western style fantasy, with emphasis on imagery elements of sword-fighting and magic.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>領主貴族 (Feudal Lords and Aristocrats)</td>
<td>帶有濃重的世襲西方領主貴族體系背景，講述領主貴族奮鬥歷程的作品. (This subgenre has its background setting in traditional western feudal society and aristocracy system, mainly narrating the adventures during which feudal lords and aristocrats ascend to their success.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>亡靈骷髏 (Spirits and Skeletons)</td>
<td>在異世界中，西方背景下以死靈、亡靈法師為主角的作品. (This subgenre has its background setting in a world of western style of otherness, in which a story surrounding aspirations, spirits, and dark wizards is majorly featured.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>異類獸族 (Alien Races and Animal Species)</td>
<td>在異世界中，西方背景下以非人類的智慧生命為主角的作品. (This subgenre has its background setting in a world of western style of otherness, in which a story surrounding non-human races and alien species is majorly featured.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>魔法校園 (Magic Campus)</td>
<td>在異世界中，西方背景下以描寫教授魔法、騎士知識等校園生活的作品. (This subgenre has its background setting in a world of western style of otherness, in which a story surrounding wizard academies and knight schools is mainly featured.)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Xuanhuan (玄幻)</th>
<th>Eastern Fantasy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>東方玄幻 (Eastern Style Fantasy)</td>
<td>在東方化主角的背景下，描寫基於魔法、法術或異世界環境的幻想作品. (This subgenre features stories centering a Chinese protagonist to narrate an imaginary work delineating magic, wizardry and an environment of otherness.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>異界征戰 (Warfare in)</td>
<td>在東方化主角的背景下，以與現實不同的神奇異世界裡的爭霸戰爭為主題的作品.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary World</strong></td>
<td>(This subgenre features stories centering a Chinese protagonist to narrate an imaginary work delineating warfare and battles in a magical secondary world.)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>異界大陸</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Continents of Secondary World)</td>
<td>在與現實完全不同的一個包含西方中古世紀背景的神奇異世界裡所展開的作品. (This subgenre features stories centering a Chinese protagonist to narrate an imaginary work delineating a magical secondary world which emulates the western medieval world.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>遠古神話</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Ancient Mythology)</td>
<td>根據各種神話故事演繹而出的帶有西方、東方特色的上古傳奇故事. (Based on the re-interpretation of ancient mythologies from various sources, this subgenre sets to procreate legendary stories which, inspired by the re-interpretation, have their background in ancient worlds.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wuxia (武俠)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chinese Martial Arts</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>傳統武俠</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Traditional Chinese Martial Arts Practitioners)</td>
<td>承襲新派武俠一脈，講述仗劍天下、行俠仗義等傳統武俠世界的佳作. (This subgenre sets to feature protagonists who, after having inherited unprecedented martial arts skills from a new martial art sect, seek to perform chivalric deeds and serve justice for his communities.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>浪子異俠</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Wanderer and Lonely Rangers)</td>
<td>主角在武俠世界中，為追求自己的夢想與天道而不斷攀登的作品. (Protagonists, in a martial arts world, pursue their dreams and ascend to their ultimate success in life.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>國術武技</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Chinese Martial Arts)</td>
<td>講述現代都市中獲得國術傳承的武者修行過程的作品. (This subgenre sets to feature protagonists who acquire traditional Chinese martial arts skills in urban areas today.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Xianxia (仙俠)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chinese Immortal Swordsman</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>古典仙俠</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Chinese Martial Arts Stories with a Daoist and Buddhist Element)</td>
<td>以中國風情為背景，描寫追求仙道、仙界爭鬥內容的作品. (This subgenre sets to narrate a story taking place in China, describing either the pursuit of immortality or status of Daoist gods, or the wars between those immortals and deities.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>奇幻修真</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Acquisition of Superhuman)</td>
<td>運用修煉之法，在宇宙中、不同星球中，力圖突破天人之境，飛升虛空的作品.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daoist/Buddhist Inner Energy and Martial Arts in an ancient, faraway land</td>
<td>(This subgenre sets to narrate a story in which protagonists, after having acquired the Daoist magical power through intensive practice, break away the laws of the universe to travel to different universes and planets to reach an ultimate apotheosis).</td>
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<tr>
<td>現代修真 ( Acquisition of Superhuman Daoist/Buddhist Inner Energy and Martial Arts in a present-day world)</td>
<td>在現在都市裡，承襲上古修仙之術，並不斷突破的作品. (This subgenre sets to narrate a story in which protagonists, in today’s urban areas, happen to inherit the ancient Daoist secret of becoming deity.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>洪荒封神 (Creation of Deities in ancient China)</td>
<td>以中國上古神話為背景，重繪盤古洪荒、三教封神、西遊取經等內容的作品. (This subgenre sets to narrate a story emulating ancient Chinese mythological style. Myth of creation such as Pangu, myth of creation of Daoist, Buddhist and Confucian deities, or stories of the Monkey King are the inspiration of the stories in this subgenre.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dushi (都市)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Urban</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>都市生活 (Urban Life)</td>
<td>現代大都市中發生的感情、生活、事業碰撞的作品 (This subgenre sets to describe stories in which daily urban lives and romantic relationship are featured.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>商戰風雲 (Business Wars)</td>
<td>當代商場、創業、股市、金融等領域生活、衝突等的作品 (This subgenre sets to describe stories in which areas of business, stock markets, finances are featured.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>職場勵志 (Job and Career)</td>
<td>在職場中的白領男女通過奮鬥、生活、感慨人生的作品 (This subgenre sets to describe stories in which themes of white collar daily lives are featured.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>官場浮沉 (Officialdom)</td>
<td>時代變遷中官場沉浮、為官為民的作品 (This subgenre sets to describe stories in which government officialdom is featured.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>娛樂明星 (Show Business and Celebrities)</td>
<td>真實或虛擬的娛樂圈歷史變遷、娛樂事業沉浮、明星鏡頭前後故事的作品 (This subgenre sets to describe stories in which entertainment business and mass media celebrities are featured.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subgenre</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Espionage</td>
<td>A subgenre that describes stories in which espionage and intelligence agencies are featured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underground Organisation and Assassination</td>
<td>A subgenre that describes stories in which competition of social upper class, underground organisation, and lives of assassins are featured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality</td>
<td>A subgenre that describes stories in which the changes initiated by economic reform and the privatisation of state-run corporations, and the changes of ordinary peoples' lives are featured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Life</td>
<td>A subgenre that describes stories in which modern or contemporary rural lives are featured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Life</td>
<td>A subgenre that describes stories in which contemporary students' lives are featured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Rental</td>
<td>A subgenre that describes stories in which romantic relations occur between young male and female when they become flatmates or housemates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love and Marriage</td>
<td>A subgenre that describes stories in which marriages, family lives and relations between in-laws in present-day societies are revealed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supernatural Ability</td>
<td>A subgenre that describes stories in which protagonists acquire supernatural abilities by accident, which averts their destinies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabricated History</td>
<td>A subgenre that describes a story in which protagonists avert their own destinies as well as other people's fates in a fabricated time or a fabricated dynasty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prehistoric China, Ancient Spring and Autumn period, The Warring States period</td>
<td>A subgenre that describes stories setting in pre-historical China, ancient Spring and Autumn period, and the Warring States period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subgenre</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>秦漢三國 (Qin, Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms)</td>
<td>以古代秦朝、漢朝、三國為背景的虛構類作品。 (This subgenre sets to fabricate stories setting in the Qin dynasty, the Han dynasty and the Three Kingdoms period.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>魏晉隋唐 (Jin, Sui, and Tang Dynasty)</td>
<td>以古代晉朝、隋朝、唐朝為背景的虛構類作品。 (This subgenre sets to fabricate stories setting in the Jin dynasty, the Sui dynasty, and the Tang dynasty.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>五代十國 (Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms)</td>
<td>以古代五代十國為背景的虛構類作品。 (This subgenre sets to fabricate stories setting in Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>十宋元明 (Song, Yuan, and Ming Dynasty)</td>
<td>以古代宋朝、元朝、明朝為背景的虛構類作品。 (This subgenre sets to fabricate stories setting in the Song dynasty, the Yuan dynasty and the Ming dynasty.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>清代民國 (Qing Dynasty and Republic of China)</td>
<td>以古代清朝、近代民國為背景的虛構類作品。 (This subgenre sets to fabricate stories setting in the Qing dynasty and the Chinese Republican era.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>外國歷史 (Foreign History)</td>
<td>以外國歷史為背景的虛構類作品。 (This subgenre sets to fabricate stories setting in non-Chinese histories.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>歷史傳記 (Historical Biography)</td>
<td>以史實方式, 紀述朝代歷史、歷史人物的傳紀類作品。 (This subgenre sets to truthfully re-act historical events or historical figures in a biographical fashion.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junshi (軍事)</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>軍事戰爭 (Military and Wars)</td>
<td>以現實為主，近代、當代為背景的軍事戰爭作品。 (This subgenre sets to re-interpret war events that actually took place in modern times.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>抗戰烽火 (Second Sino-Japanese War)</td>
<td>以抗日戰爭為主要背景，寫實或虛構的作品。 (This subgenre sets to re-interpret the Second Sino-Japanese wars.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>戰爭幻想 (Fabricated Warfare)</td>
<td>以虛擬時空為主，模擬現代、當代背景發生軍事戰爭的作品。 (This subgenre sets to re-enact modern war events of which background have been re-allocated in a futuristic time.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>軍旅生活 (Military Life)</td>
<td>講述現代或當代各軍種軍人生活、訓練的作品。 (This subgenre sets to re-enact the present-day soldiers’ lives and their training.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youxi (遊戲)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Online Game</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>遊戲生涯 (Game Life)</td>
<td>描寫職業玩家的真實電子遊戲、網絡遊戲生活的作品  \n(This subgenre sets to delineate professional game players’ gaming lives and the game they engage with.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>虛幻網遊 (Virtual Online Game)</td>
<td>描寫頭盔式虛擬現實遊戲、未來世界網遊生活的作品  \n(This subgenre sets to delineate the simulated game experience of protagonists who play virtual games wearing the virtual reality helmet in a futuristic world.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>電子競技 (Game Competition)</td>
<td>講述職業玩家團隊或個人，征戰電子競技比賽的作品  \n(This subgenre sets to delineate online game competition between professional individuals or between teams of professional players.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>遊戲異界 (Games and Secondary World)</td>
<td>將遊戲中的裝備或技能帶入現實世界或其它遊戲中，或者主角進入遊戲世界中的作品  \n(This subgenre sets to delineate a ‘transverse-ness’ between protagonists’ physical world and the virtual world they seek out for their second lives. Protagonists usually can physically enter a virtual world, or they can actualise the skills/equipments previously gained only in a virtual world into their physical reality.)</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Jingji (競技)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sports</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>體育競技 (Sports Competition)</td>
<td>講述傳統體育競技、比賽以及運動員成長的作品  \n(This subgenre sets to depict a story characterising the advancement of skills of a sport player and the competition the player takes part in.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>籃球運動 (Basketball)</td>
<td>講述以籃球比賽為背景下籃球運動員成長的作品.  \n(This subgenre sets to depict a story characterising the advancement of sport skills of basketball players and the competition they take part in.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>足球運動 (Soccer)</td>
<td>講述以足球比賽為背景下足球運動員成長，足球球隊經營的作品.  \n(This subgenre sets to depict a story characterising the advancement of sport skills of football players, the competition they take part in, and the management of football clubs.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>奕林生涯 (Go Competition)</td>
<td>講述以圍棋比賽為背景下棋手成長的作品.  \n(This subgenre sets to depict a story characterising the advancement of Go skills of a Go player and the competition the player take part in.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| <strong>Lingyi (靈異)</strong> | <strong>Horror</strong> |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>科技 (Scientific)</th>
<th>科幻 (Science Fiction)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>靈異奇談 (Supernatural and Local Legend)</td>
<td>魅魅精怪，深夜怪談，秘術達人，暢談民間異事。 (This subgenres sets to narrate stories containing ghouls, local folklores, Chinese sorcerers and supernatural events.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>恐怖驚悚 (Horror and Thriller)</td>
<td>刺激心跳的恐怖小說，吸引眼球的驚悚故事 (This subgenre sets to narrate haunted stories that bring forth an extreme sense of horror and thrill.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>推理偵探 (Detective Fiction)</td>
<td>福爾摩斯開拓視野，柯南引領潮流. (This subgenre sets to narrate detective stories emulating Sherlock Holmes or the Detective Conan.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>懸疑探險 (Suspension and Adventure)</td>
<td>謎一般的事件，玄學風水的揭秘，追尋真相的腳步，在人跡罕至處的艱辛. (This subgenre sets to narrate stories featuring secret sects of Daoist sorcery. Protagonists, having learned the Daoist sorcery, are engaged in a series of mysterious encounters with supernatural elements in a faraway or destitute location.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kehuan (科幻)</td>
<td>Science Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>未來世界 (Future World)</td>
<td>以未來世界為背景的作品. (This subgenre sets to narrate a story featuring a futuristic world.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>星際戰爭 (Star Wars)</td>
<td>星際時代，戰爭背景下演繹的傳奇. (This subgenre sets to narrate a story featuring battles in the galaxy.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>古武機甲 (Futuristic Chinese Martial Arts)</td>
<td>古代武學與機甲世界為背景的作品. (This subgenre sets to narrate a story featuring Chinese martial arts taking place in a futuristic world of robots and machines.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>數字生命 (Artificial Intelligence)</td>
<td>人工智能，講述科學虛擬生命的作品. (This subgenre sets to narrate a story featuring artificial intelligence and cyber-simulated lives.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>超級科技 (Surreal Technology)</td>
<td>未來科技，外星科技，以超現實科技為題材的作品. (This subgenre sets to narrate a story featuring futuristic or extraterrestrial technology.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>時空穿梭 (Time Travel)</td>
<td>在不同時空與位面間穿梭、旅行的作品. (This subgenre sets to narrate a story featuring time travel back and forth a present-day world and a futuristic world.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>進化變異</td>
<td>描述生命體因為某種人為或非人為因素而發生變異，並以此展開</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| (Evolution and Mutation) | 創劇情的作品
(This subgenre sets to narrate a story featuring mutation of human lives due to various man-made factors). |
|---|---|
| 末世危機
(Doomsday) | 因為戰爭或科技失控，或某種意外災難，人類文明被毀滅或即將毀滅，以此為背景的作品
(This subgenre sets to narrate a story featuring a doomsday where human civilisation is on the verge of total destruction due to a full-scale warfare or some technological disasters.) |
| **Tongren** (同人) | **Fan Fiction** |
| 動漫同人
(Manga and Anime Fan Fiction) | 以動漫作品的背景、劇情或人物為基礎，依托原著進行再創作的作品.
(This subgenre sets to appropriate and re-interpret original Japanese Manga and Animation to procreate a new story.) |
| 武俠同人
(Chinese Martial Arts Fan Fiction) | 以武俠小說的背景、劇情或人物為基礎，依托原著進行再創作的作品.
(This subgenre sets to appropriate and re-interpret established Chinese Martial Arts to procreate a new story.) |
| 小說同人
(Bestseller Fan Fiction) | 以他人小說的背景、劇情或人物為基礎，依托原著進行再創作的作品.
(This subgenre sets to appropriate and re-interpret other bestsellers to procreate a new story.) |
| 授權同人
(Authorised Fan Fiction) | 獲得原作者許可和授權的同人作品.
(This subgenre sets to appropriate and re-interpret a work of fiction authorised by the author to procreate a new story.) |
| 影視同人
(TV and Movie Fan Fiction) | 以影視作品的背景、劇情或人物為基礎，依托原著進行再創作的作品.
(This subgenre sets to appropriate and re-interpret movies and TV programmes to procreate a new story.) |
Appendix 2: List of the Subgenres of Romance on Qidian Female Net (The guidelines of Romance subgenres have been changed. New description was added on Qidian female net between September and December 2011, which does not fall into the time frame of this research).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgenre (Romance)</th>
<th>Old Description</th>
<th>New Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yangqing (言情)</td>
<td>描述現代男女生活、職場情愛的作品.</td>
<td>以現代都市作爲小說背景的言情作品.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>現代言情 (Romance in Modern Times)</td>
<td>(This subgenre sets to feature love story centering daily lives and careers of present-day people.)</td>
<td>(This subgenre sets to feature love story taking place in urban areas.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>古代言情 (Romance in Ancient Time)</td>
<td>描述現代男女生活、職場情愛的作品.</td>
<td>以中國古代或者架空古代作爲小說背景的言情作品.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(This subgenre sets to feature love story centering daily lives and careers of present-day people.)</td>
<td>(This subgenre sets to feature love story centering imperial courts or time-travel.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>豪門王爺 (Nobility and Aristocracy):</td>
<td>是以現代或古代為時間背景,或虐或感人或喜慶等類別的女性純言情小說作品.</td>
<td>(The subgenre sets to feature romantic stories which emphasise on pure love. The time frame is either in the ancient time or modern time.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available after 03/09/2011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>純愛耽美 (Homoerotic Romance):</td>
<td>純粹、鋒利、殘酷、浪漫、唯美的畸戀作品.</td>
<td>(This subgenre sets to feature love centering homoerotic relation.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unavailable after 03/09/2011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>歷史時空 (Time Travel Romance)</td>
<td>時空穿梭，歷史的輪迴，改變原人物命運的同時也開始自己的情感人生的作品.</td>
<td>(This subgenre sets to feature love that travels through time. By travelling through time, the featured female protagonist averts the due course of history as well as her attitude towards love.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Old Description</td>
<td>New Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>異界奇幻 (Western Fantasy Romance):</td>
<td>發生在虛幻空間的, 大多以西方劍與魔法世界作為創作背景的作品. (This subgenre sets to delineate romance taking place in a western fantasy world where magic, wizardry and knights are featured.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>玄幻奇幻 (Eastern and Western Fantasy Romance):</td>
<td>在異世大陸的光怪陸離魔法愛情生活的幻想作品. (This subgenre sets to delineate an imaginary work in a world of otherness where unusual love relation takes place.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>玄幻仙俠 (Eastern Fantasy Romance):</td>
<td>以東方玄幻仙魔神話為背景的幻想類作品. (This subgenre sets to describe an imaginary work in a world of otherness where eastern myth, Daoist/Buddhist deities, and eastern fantastic creatures are featured).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>武俠仙俠 (Chinese Martial Arts Romance):</td>
<td>講述江湖中的愛恨情仇, 或者仙凡戀、仙魔戀之類的作品. (This subgenre sets to delineate a love story assimilated with element of Chinese martial arts, or with elements of demigods and Chinese immortal swordsman.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>科幻網遊 (Online-Game and Science- Fiction Romance)</td>
<td>以超現實科技為題材的作品, 和描寫玩家網絡遊戲生活的作品. (This subgenre sets to delineate a love story assimilated with element of online game or with elements of science fiction.)</td>
<td>描寫想像未來科幻的虛構性作品及以網絡遊戲為背景的小說作品. (This subgenre sets to delineate a love story centering around futuristic theme and online game.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>靈異推理 (Horror and Detective)</td>
<td>描寫鬼怪等超現實現象的作品, 和以邏輯推理為賣點的作品.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subgenre</td>
<td>Old Description</td>
<td>New Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romance</td>
<td>(This subgenre sets to delineate a love story assimilated with element of thriller and horror, or with elements of detective fiction).</td>
<td>New Description: 以鬼怪幽靈，驚悚恐怖，奇譚志異，懸疑破案，刑偵推理，盜墓探險等為主要故事內容的小說作品.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(This subgenre sets to delineate a love story admixture with element of horror, gory, thriller, folklore, suspension, detectives, or tomb-raiding.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>同人地帶（Fan-fiction Romance）</td>
<td>以他人作品的背景、劇情或人物為基礎，依托原著進行再創作的作品.</td>
<td>(This subgenre sets to delineate a love story by appropriating and re-interpreting other authors’ works).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>青春校園（Young Love）</td>
<td>Old Description: 暫無.</td>
<td>New Description: 以校園生活為故事背景，展現青少年的純真情感為主旨，兼有青春期特有的煩惱與困惑的小說作品.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(This subgenre sets to delineate a love story taking place on school campus to feature pure, adolescent love.).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Production Rate

Figure 1: Number of Production from 03/03/2010 - 03/09/2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>03/06/2010</th>
<th>03/09/2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Fantasy</td>
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<td>95561</td>
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<tr>
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<td>18370</td>
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<td>15324</td>
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<td>30495</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>60520</td>
<td>62284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romance</td>
<td>83825</td>
<td>87948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>14369</td>
<td>14828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>3637</td>
<td>3738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Game</td>
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<td>21546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
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<td>2043</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scientific Fiction</td>
<td>11261</td>
<td>12095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horror</td>
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<td>6946</td>
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<td>10335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>55657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>416522</td>
<td>437170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2: Number of Production from 03/09/2010 - 03/03/2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<th>03/03/2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Eastern Fantasy</td>
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<td>111573</td>
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<td>Western Fantasy</td>
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<td>23285</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese Martial Arts</td>
<td>16901</td>
<td>17265</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese Immortal</td>
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<td>Urban</td>
<td>69297</td>
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<tr>
<td>Romance</td>
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<td>112196</td>
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<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>16599</td>
<td>16946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>4121</td>
<td>4293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Game</td>
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<td>24262</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scientic Fiction</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horror</td>
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<td>Fan Fiction</td>
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<td>13349</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>62058</td>
<td>72272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>497635</td>
<td>545620</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

其他 (Others): This refers to works of creation which are categorised under prose, poetry, drama script, comic strips, Manga, from both Qidian Chinese Channel and Qidian Female Channel.
Figure 3: Production Percentage of Fiction Genres on Qidian Chinese Channel and Qidian Female Channel on 03/06/2010

Figure 4: Production Percentage of Fiction Genres on Qidian Chinese Channel and Qidian Female Channel on 03/09/2010
Figure 5: Production Percentage of Fiction Genres on Qidian Chinese Channel and Qidian Female Channel on 09/12/2010

Figure 6: Production Percentage of Fiction Genres on Qidian Chinese Channel and Qidian Female Channel on 03/03/2011
Appendix 4: Consumption Rate (Popularity Rankings)

Figure 7.0: Top 500 Popularity Rankings 03/06/2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Hits</th>
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<th>Recommended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese Martial Arts</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Immortal Swordsman</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>67</td>
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<td>Urban</td>
<td>123</td>
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<td>History</td>
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<td>Online Game</td>
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<td>Sport</td>
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<td>Horror</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan Fiction</td>
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<td>5</td>
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Figure 8.0: Top 1000 Popularity Rankings 03/09/2010

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Chinese Martial Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese Immortal Swordsman</td>
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<td>Urban</td>
<td>222</td>
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<td>History</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>113</td>
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<td>Sport</td>
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<td>Horror</td>
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Figure 9.0: Top 1000 Popularity Rankings 09/12/2010

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<td>Chinese Martial Arts</td>
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<td>Sport</td>
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<td>Fan Fiction</td>
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Figure 10.0: Top 1000 Popularity Rankings 03/03/2011

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Fan Fiction</td>
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Legend:
- Eastern Fantasy
- Western Fantasy
- Chinese Martial Arts
- Chinese Immortal Swordsman
- Urban
- History
- Military
- Online Game
- Sport
- Scientific Fiction
- Horror
- Fan Fiction