



# Analysis on Readers' Acceptance of English Translation for the Chinese Internet Novel *Dragon Prince Yuan*

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**Abstract.** In recent decade, Chinese Internet novels have been popular, attracting readers all over the world. Taking the novel *Dragon Prince Yuan (DPY)* selected on the most popular Internet novel list in 2020 (Overseas) as an example, this paper explores the reasons for the popularity of Chinese Internet novels and readers' acceptance. It is found that the novel *DPY* has been widely read and favored thanks to the presentation of typical Chinese elements, concise translation and the mature novel production system. The implications are expected to provide some reference for promoting and disseminating more Chinese Internet novels to go global.

**Keywords:** Chinese Internet novel · *Dragon Prince Yuan (DPY)* · fantasy · translation · readers' acceptance

## 1 Introduction

Internet novels, literally, refer to novels released on the Internet. Different from those traditional literature, this type of novels may represent a special style to attract its readers. According to the Chinawriter, there are five statements about the origination of Chinese Internet novels. It is considered firstly appeared in 1996 when an online forum, Jin Yong's inn, which belongs to the Lifang Online was established. This perspective seems to make the establishment of an online platform as the beginning of Internet novels, which is the same with another two viewpoints: the establishment of Under the Banian (the personal website of a Chinese American, Will) in 1997 and the Golden Library (a personal reading website) in 1998. Different from these three viewpoints, the other two points consider the launch of a certain novel as the beginning: the release of *Feng Zi Wu Yu* on BBS in 1997 and *The First Close Contactn* in 1998 [2].

Although the certain time couldn't be figured out, we could confirm that it is originated in the late 20th century. Later at the beginning of 21 century, Internet novels got well development and formed a mature market. Compared with its development inside China, Chinese Internet novels become popular in the western countries in a relatively short period. In 2004, Qidian Chinese Website began to sell its copyrights to foreign

countries, and 12 years later, it opened its writing function for readers to create their own stories. Among these years, more and more outstanding Chinese Internet novels have been translated into foreign languages, such as *Ghost Blows Out the Light* (*Gui Chui Deng*) and *Daomu* (*Dao Mu Bi Ji*) attracting readers from all over the world. Besides, a Chinese-American called RWX (Ren Wo Xing) established a website, WuxiaWorld, to release Chinese Internet novels in 2014. The novel *DPY* analyzed in this passage was also released on this website.

During the three years *DPY* serialized, it have been recommended over 1,019,600 times. Internet novel readers often vote their favorite novels with monthly tickets to give their support. And *DPY* had already got 80,000 monthly tickets and been enshrined over 300,000 times. Moreover, *DPY* showed its huge economic potential. On April 1st, 2019, *DPY* got more than 1,000,000 virtual coins of Qidian, namely more than 10,000 RMB, just in one day. When it terms to its performance, *DPY* got 7.9 scores from its readers, making it be selected as one of the most popular Internet novels as the King of Internet Novel in 2018. Since Internet novel has been developed in China for a long period and formed a mature system for its creation and promotion, the China Writers Association has set up a list for the most popular Chinese Internet novels, which would help to promote the outstanding values, literature features and aesthetic pursuit, thus promoting its development with high quality and enhancing its international influence. In 2020, *DPY*, together with *Lord of the Mysteries*, *Yao Shen Ji* and *Super Mechanic*, was selected on the list for the overseas part. This passage is expected to analyze the acceptance of *DPY* in overseas countries and the reasons for its prevalence. Experience of earlier Internet novels translation would be useful since Chinese Internet novel has attracted readers not only in Southeast Asia, but also in America, Europe and Africa. Therefore, based on the analysis of *DPY*, this passage is expected to figure out the affecting factors and typical features of popular Internet novels so that to give more experience for the following translation and localization projects of Chinese Internet novels.

## 2 Readers' Acceptance on Chinese Internet Novels

### 2.1 Development and Popularity of Chinese Internet Novels

Over the past decades, Chinese Internet novel had developed itself with more outstanding works. According to China Writers Association, the Internet novels users in 2019 had reached more than 455,000,000 with the netizen use rate of 52.3%. [9] Up to 2021, there are more than 2.5 million new Internet novels released over 45 reading websites [6]. According to the *Report on the Development of Chinese Internet Novel in 2019* released by China Audio-Video and Digital Publishing Association, China has spread more than 10,000 Internet novels and more than 3,000 translated Internet novels to the world in 2019, which contains more than 40 countries and regions under the Belt and Road Initiative. Based on the data presented by the *Report on the Going Out of Chinese Internet Novel in 2020* of iResearch, Chinese Internet novels have achieved a large overseas market scale of 460,000,000 yuan with more than 31,935,000 overseas Internet novel users. With the surge of readers, the Chinese Internet novel, together with Hollywood movies, Japanese anime and Korean soap operas, was called the four literature wonders

in modern society. In 2020, more physical books had been published since people began to focus on its quality instead of quantity. And up to 2021, there are more than 10 thousand Chinese Internet novels introduced to the international community, among which there are more than 4000 physical books and over 3000 had been translated. Internet novel has become a new type of cultural consumption and formed its specific business mode with more and more reading platform, such as Chapters, iReader and TapRead, had been set up.

Since the acceptance of a novel shows its prevalence in this area, the former researches mainly focused on the factors that may affect its acceptance. According to Tan Jingyi in her *A Brief Analysis of the Course, Characteristics and Trend of Internet Literature Going Abroad*, one objective factor is the technological advancement. [4] The information technology has broken the wall among countries and helped people to learn more about each other without spatial barriers, which is the foundation of Internet novel going out. In the passage *How Popular Chinese Internet Novel Is in the Foreign Country*, Han Wu and Feng Yue mentioned some special features of Chinese Internet novels: the appealing Chinese cultural elements, values that differ from the west and its theme that is more attracting for the young generation [1].

## 2.2 Framework for Assessing Readers' Acceptance

Since the process of Internet novel translation and localization often contains plenty of factors, such as the author and the original passage, the translator, the readers and the translated passage, and even the spread methods and platforms, the analysis in this passage would be complicated. On the one hand, the author himself would affect the acceptance since he already got some fans for his creation. The literature value and writing style he left in the novel would help the novel to attract readers to read more. The analysis for this part would give an introduction to the author of *DPY* and his other famous novels. On the other hand, a good translation of the passage is the foundation for the readers' reading experience. The analysis in this passage would mainly focus on its translation instead of the translator since the information of the translator is unavailable. In order to assess its quality, a few specific sentences would be picked out. Besides, the spread platform and method of *DPY* would be important since Chinese Internet novels had formed a relatively mature business mode. The comments and readers' willingness to pay would show their attitude towards *DPY*.

## 3 Analysis on Readers' Acceptance of English Translation for the Chinese Internet Novel *DPY*

### 3.1 Analysis on the Author and Theme

The author of *DPY* is Lu Hu, who is also called Heavenly Silkworm Potato as his pseudonym. Born in Sichuan Province on December 28, 1989, he is one of the ten Internet fantasy novel writers in 2020 and the third on the Chinese rich list for Internet writers.

In 2009, Li Hu began to write his fantasy novel, *Battle Through the Heaven*, and got a click rate of 140 million times, making him the most famous writer during that time.

In the following years, Li Hu wrote more fantasy novels, such as *Wu Dong Qian Kun*, *The Great Ruler (Da Zhu Zai)*, *Absolute Resonance (Wan Xiang Zhi Wang)*. *DPY* is his fourth fantasy novel.

*DPY* was firstly released on September 14, 2017 on Qidian Chinese Website and later being released on WuxiaWorld in 2018. It was classified as fantasy, Xuanhuan (a special tab on WuxiaWorld to show Chinese fantasy novels) and action novel, which are the most favorable themes in China. Chinese fantasy novels, which are different from those western ones, often tell stories based on the history of the ancient dynasties and contain some Chinese features. *DPY* tells a story about Zhou Yuan, the prince of Great Zhou Empire. Zhou Yuan was born with a special power, which has been robbed away by the Great Wu Empire. With the help of an old man and a mysterious girl, Zhou Yuan began to search his power and save his country. It contains a large number of Chinese elements, such as Qiyun, Niepan and Qiankun etc. The way that Zhou Yuan chose to save his country is also unheard for the foreign readers since he had to cultivate so that to recapture his dragon power.

Since Li Hu has written a series of fantasy novels, he really knows how to create an attracting one. The completed and independent fantasy system in *DPY* he created would help readers dip themselves into the story, giving them a better experience.

### 3.2 Analysis on the Platform of WuxiaWorld

The famous novel, *Coiling Dragon*, written by I Eat Tomatoes was finished on June 12, 2009. This novel can be considered as the direct reason for the establishment of WuxiaWorld. Lai Jingping, the founder of WuxiaWorld, is an American diplomat before he established WuxiaWorld. After been attracted by *Coiling Dragon*, Lai Jingping tried to translate this novel for the western readers. Translating Internet novels was just his hobby at the beginning of his translation. However, his translation attracted thousands of readers who urge him to translate more. Moreover, he once received tips of more than 200 dollars only one day. In order to give a better reading environment for the readers, Lai Jingping established WuxiaWorld on December 20, 2014 to release the novels. In the early days, there was only Lai Jingping himself who was operated the website, but there are more than 30 translating teams now. Nowadays, the visiting rate of WuxiaWorld reached more than 5 million and ranked 1536 in the world.

Novels on this website are mainly from China and South Korea, among which the Chinese Internet novel is the dominating part. The word wuxia in Chinese refers to a special Chinese value, showing a kind of social responsibility.

At the beginning of the establishment of WuxiaWorld, it's free for the readers to follow their love novels. In order to pay more attention to the website, Lai Jingping even quit his job as a diplomat and translate novels with no payment. Fortunately, WuxiaWorld began to be in black with the readers' tips and advertisement payment. Nowadays, readers could also read novels on WuxiaWorld for free since they can get chapters by waiting or buying it. On December 16, 2021, Kakao, the South Korean Internet company, announced its acquisition of WuxiaWorld. Since South Korean Internet novel began to develop and step into the international stage these years, there may be more and more South Korean Internet novels on WuxiaWorld in the future.

### 3.3 Analysis on the Readers

From 2019 to 2021, there are more and more young writers who were born in 1990s or even later, injecting more vitality to Chinese Internet novel. The young writers could understand the buzzwords better, and therefore making their novels more attractive for the readers. Up to 2021, the average age of writer members in Internet novel association on provincial level is 35. [6] The young writers work as the mainstay of Chinese Internet novels.

The overseas readers structure of Chinese Internet novel is complicated with relatively better education background. Female readers often favor romantic novels while male readers often favor fantasy novels. The most attractive part for them is Chinese kung fu with 43.2% of readers love it, and the following ones are Chinese food and traditional Chinese medicine with the rate of 40.5% and 38%. Besides, there are 20% to 25% of readers being interested in traditional Chinese literature and Chinese calligraphy. [6] According to The Blue Book of Chinese Internet Novel in 2021, 81% of overseas readers come from countries such as India, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, etc. and 67.8% of them are female readers.

According to the different favor of different groups of people, the readers of *DPY* are mainly young men. Besides, some readers' comments could be found on WuxiaWorld: "It's a classic Heavenly Silkworm Potato novel and readers of BTTH, WDQK and TGR will find many similar elements, not to mention references to the shared universe all these novels are set in..." "If you like WDQK, BTTH, and TGR, then you'll like this." "Reminds me of WDQK and BTTH." These comments show that most of them may have read the works of Heavenly Silkworm Potato or other fantasy novels before since many of them mentioned *Battle Through the Heaven* or other novels in their comments.

### 3.4 Analysis on the Translation

Since the novel contains many Chinese cultural elements, which are unfamiliar for oversea readers, the language of translated version is required to be easily understood. In order to attract readers to read more, the beginning of a story must be wonderful enough. Therefore, the analysis on the translation of *DPY* on WuxiaWorld is mainly focused on the former chapters. Here are some examples:

TT: *DPY*

According to the *DPY*, the protagonist in this story, Zhou Yuan, is the prince of the Great Zhou Empire. Besides, he was born with a special dragon power which had been stolen. This translation shows not only the special identity of Zhou Yuan, but also his special power.

TT: This was the Channel Opening stage, and was where all cultivation began.

The translator translated Xiulian as cultivation instead of practice or other similar words. Cultivation means the deliberate development of a particular relationship, quality or skill, showing the purpose and difficulties that Zhou Yuan must experience.

TT: "Now that your eight meridian channels have emerged, I will teach you a Qi drawing method."

Mai refers to human vessels and later was used to refer to human heartbeats. Bamai is an important element in this novel, which is the key part for Zhou Yuan to recapture

his dragon power. The translator translated it as eight meridian channels, showing its distribution on human body since meridian refers to a line from the north to the south. This method would help the readers without Chinese culture background to understand the novel better.

TT: "Only those who possess powerful Spirits will be able to draw high tier Genesis Runes. Your Spirit talent is not bad, but it is not even at the Illusory stage."

Shenhun in Chinese fantasy novels actually not only refers to the soul, but the spirit and power for the character to cultivate. In this sentence, the translator underlines the word "spirit" to show that it is not the normal meaning that we used to understand. Besides, Yuanwen is also a unique concept in this novel. In order to help readers to understand what Yuanwen is, the translator explains its meaning in the translation instead of translating literally. Yuanwen can be considered as the special power people could possess in the world, and the word "rune" often refers to ancient letters, showing a mystery power which is the same as Yuanwen.

TT: "Now that he had entered the A class, he could no longer frequently miss classes like before."

There are two classes in the Great Zhou Institute. In Chinese they are called Jia and Yi, an ancient counting system in the old days. However, the western people without Chinese culture background won't understand what it is. The translator replaces Jia and Yi with A and B since the occidentals also apply letters as a ranking method, helping the readers to understand better.

As a matter of fact, translation is another life of literature. The translation project is not only the activity for the translator, but also involves the author and the reader. Only when we consider the readers' needs while being faithful to the author can we create an excellent localization works.

### 3.5 Analysis on the Dissemination and Development

Over the past decades, the cultural industry in China developed with more cultural consumption and new forms of entertainment. According to *The Blue Book of Chinese Internet Novel in 2020* of China Writer Association, high quality capital was invested in the entertainment industry. [10] On the basis of Internet technology and Internet novel, intellectual property (IP) became the new concept in cultural industry. IP refers to the combination among different cultural forms, which often presented as a TV program or anime adapted from a novel. According to the report in 2021, anime is the main types of IP adapted program of Internet novel with more than 30 anime launched in 2021, accounting 50 percent of the launched anime in the whole year. [6] The novel *DPY* analyzed in this passage also been adapted into an anime. Besides, with the prevalence of live acting role-playing game, more Internet novels were adapted into the script for LARP.

With the tendency of IP adapted programs, *DPY* also became a top IP for adaption. The *DPY* caricature was launched on December 5, 2017 adapted by Dr. Dj. There are 1,214,297 people subscribed *DPY* on Tencent caricature website, and 14,279 readers left their scores with an average of 8.5. The main comments for the caricature are about the beautiful drawing, the lovely characters and the brilliant plots. There are 469 chapters and still uncompleted. In 2021, *DPY* was adapted into an anime and launched on Tencent

Video. Now fans could also enjoy this anime on Bilibili. According to the data on Bilibili, *DPY* got an average score of 8.5 with 3 seasons, 39 episodes in total. The cumulative visit rate reached 11,912,000, and subscribers had reached more than 130,000 people.

Since *DPY* had been adapted into caricature and anime, its story and cultural factors contained have been spread in a large extent, working as an important example for Chinese cultural products going out.

## 4 Conclusion

After reading too many cartoons from Japan and Korea, the western readers began to focus on Chinese cultural products, a new field that they haven't noticed before. The Chinese Internet novel, indeed, meets their needs. Compared with those traditional novels, Chinese Internet novels got much imagination and adventure stories, leaving the readers more affluent experiences in the fictive world.

It's easy to figure out that the Chinese Internet novel appears by no accident. Over the past decades, China has experienced a highly developed period with high economic and population growth. The young generation was forced to face huge pressure with both daily life and work, and they began to search some amusement for relaxing. However, the classic literature is too abstruse to read after the hardworking for a whole day. Therefore, some people with their own stories began to share their thoughts with others on the Internet. Generally, there are more and more people began to love this kind of literature. It is also the mental experience of the author of *DPY*. The appearance of Chinese Internet novel determined its prevalence.

A good story structure is the foundation of a novel. Internet novels, with relaxing atmosphere, often tell stories about normal people, leaving a certain space for readers' imagination. After developing for years, a mature Internet novel system had been established in China. With a great number of outstanding Internet novels released, Chinese Internet novels began to attract readers all over the world.

In this essay, three main reasons were emphasized to show why the western readers love Chinese Internet so much: The first one is the ancient Chinese elements. For the foreign readers who are not familiar with Chinese culture, the ancient Chinese elements would increase their curiosity and attract them to read more. And second one is the concise and easy-to-read translation. The translator didn't translate Internet novels with too many literary words. On the contrary, the translation is easy to read and understand on the basis of being faithful to the original text, leaving enough space for the readers to enjoy the story. The last but not least one is the writing-friendly environment. Since Internet novel has been prevailing in China for a long time, there is a mature Internet novel system and relatively friendly environment for writers to learn know how to create attracting themes and plots.

Above all, some suggestions were summarized for the following Internet novel development. Firstly, to encourage cultural innovation. Since literature is a mirror of the times, it's required to keep in pace with the socioeconomic development. Although there are various genres and content, the Internet novels need to develop with more modern elements. Secondly, to enhance the copyright awareness. Limited by the international backgrounds, there isn't a developed online payment channel for fiction reading, and the readers don't want to pay for the novels, causing difficulties for overseas copyrights safeguarding.

Although we've opened our market in the western, we still need to work hard to improve the quality of our Internet novel. Nowadays, facing with problems such as different values, cultural backgrounds or copyrights, there is still a long way to go for Chinese Internet novels.

**Acknowledgements.** This work was supported by the National Social Science Fund Under Grant 19BYY121.

This work was supported by the National Social Science Fund Under Grant 19BYY121 and Jiangxi Provincial Humanity and Social Science Key Research Base Project Under Grant JD20017.

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