

Chinese online literature enters its golden era

中国网络文学迎来繁华盛世

■ Chen Lin, Lu Yun

In 2017, with the continuous IPO listing of companies like China Literature, iReader and Baidu Literature, the Chinese online literature market has leapt into a new era. The application and blend of online fictions in cross-border fields such as film and television and games have been deeply integrated. The entire pan-entertainment industry chain with net text as the core source has shown the characteristics of cross-linkage. The online fictions have expanded the map of Chinese digital reading to the whole world, marking that online literature has officially entered the prosperous era of the tens of billions of markets.

Subscription revenue represent nearly 90% of online novels

According to the data of 2017 China Internet Literature Development Report released at the 2nd China Network Literature + Convention on September 14, the revenue of China's online literature market revenue in 2017 (which refers to the income subtotal of subscription, copyright operation, electronic hardware and advertisements obtained by network literature enterprises) has increased from 9.56 billion yuan in 2016 to 12.92 billion yuan, and the number of online fictional authors reached 14 million. The total number of online literary works reached 16.47 million and the number of works under contract reaches 1.327 million. As of June 2018, the number of Chinese online fiction readers has exceeded 406 million. The total revenue of online fiction comes mainly from subscription revenue which reaches 11.32 billion yuan, accounting for 87.6%; then is followed by copyright operating income which is 840 million yuan, accounting for 6.5%. In addition, electronic hardware revenue reached 168 million yuan, accounting for 1.3%.

According to the 2017 Network Literature Annual Report released by the Sootoo Research Institute, in 2017, China's online literature market increased from 2.62 billion in 2012 to 13 billion yuan. In the past five years, behind the growth of the online literature market of 10 billion yuan, it is the persistence of excavating high-quality content and user value. This is also inseparable from the leading role brought by the leading listed companies like China Literature. Especially after 2015, with the implementation of measures against piracy and author incentives, the growth rate of the online literature market has increased significantly.

The total number of online fictions has increased from approximately 14.73 million in 2016 to 16.47 million in 2017, with an increase of 11.8%. It is estimated that in 2019, the scale of the works will exceed 20 million. In addition, there are data showing that among tens of millions of online literary works, 72% are reserved by China Literature. Except for its qidian.com, chuanguoshi.qq.com, yunqi.qq.com and other leading original literary web portals, QQ reading is taking the responsibility of distributing the content for mobiles, forming a perfect blend of huge traffic and rich content.

Online literature writers widely recognized

It can be seen from the 2017 Chinese online Literature Development Report which was researched and produced by the China Press and Publication Research Institute that, in terms of trends, the development of online literature still has a long way to go, as there are still some obvious problems. First, the insufficient supply of high-quality content; second, the frequent infringement;

It's been 20 years since 1997, when marked the beginning of the development of Chinese online literature. With favorable policies, boom in readers, works and writers, over the years the growth rate of the online fiction industry has been higher than the average growth rate of digital content. The Chinese online fiction is about to have its best time.

third, the unreasonable high price for IP; fourth, the imperfect and unprofessional evaluation system; fifth, the lack of network literature talents, especially the particularly prominent editorial team gap. The report believes that China's online fiction should also improve copyright evaluation in the future, highlighting the content value, combining virtual and real interaction; building a guarantee system, strengthening personnel training, and thus building a more stable foundation. "Online Literature+" attaches importance to the construction of a professional talent system on aspects such as category selection and operation, online publishing, etc.

From the distribution of the literary themes, in addition to the common hit themes like fantasy and Xianxia, urban, military, science fiction and game-based novels have gradually entered the mainstream; real-life works have also begun to focus on online fiction area. On the domestic literary platforms, realistic works occupy 52.5%. At the same time, online fictions empowered the entertainment industry. As of December 2017, the number of Chinese online literature works reached 6,942, and the total number of adapted films, TV plays, games, and animation was relatively 1,195, 1232, 605, and 712.

In terms of writers, the creators have grown much and the number of contractors has soared. In 2017, the number of online literary creators reached 14 million, and the number of contracts reached 680,000, 47% of which are full-time writers. It is worth noting that a new generation of creators under the age of 20 has risen, accounting for more than 10%. Looking from the preferences of creators in 2017, the proportion of real-world themes is growing. On the list of new members of the Chinese Writers Association announced in August, there are 51 online literary writers, meaning that the industry has further recognized the status of online literary works and writers. Chinese online literature is reaching the turning point of development with dazzling achievements.

As for readers, as of June 2018, the number of Chinese online literature readers has exceeded 406 million. The scale of users has accounted for 46.9% of the total number of Internet users. Among them, readers under the age of 30 accounted for 73.1%, 18.2% of readers were under 18 years old; in terms of geographical distribution, 20.3% of readers lived in first-tier cities. The report also shows that readers have an average reading age of 4.9 years and their reading time has grown steadily. In terms of payment habits, single order is more popular, with an average monthly sales of 30 yuan.

From the age of readers, readers over the age of 30 prefer real-life works, and readers under the age of 30 prefer fantasy works. Male readers prefer fantasy and Wuxia themes, women prefer romance. Urban readers prefer fantasy, and rural readers prefer urban romance.

Looking for global expansion

Chinese online literature is also looking forward to opening up to the international market. The interna-

tional platform for the China Literature has been highly sought ever since its launch on May 15, 2017. Among the 38 works published online, platinum writer Fengling Tianxia's fantasy *I Am the Supreme* became the first online novel to be serialized both on the Chinese and the international website. Nowadays, the number of overseas online literary users is close to 8 million, and the charm of Chinese online literature is spreading worldwide.

2017 is regarded as the golden era for book-based adaptation into TV plays. According to statistics, there were a total of 1,232 TV plays in the whole year, and the Top 10 TV series were mainly adapted from online novels. In addition to the large numbers, the breakthrough in quality has brought extraordinary influence to the adapted TV plays, continuously presenting hits. For example, *Princess Agents*, *Fighter of the Destiny* and *Eternal Love* have maintained high popularity in discussion for a long time in addition to breaking many broadcast records during on-show. The views of many online fiction adapted TV plays have exceeded 10 billion times, and the playback views of *Princess Agents* on iQiyi, Sohu, LeTV, Mango TV and Tencent are high as 38.58 billion.

In 2018, there are more and more adaptations of ancient themed and realistic TV plays, which invite well-known actors to star in the series. For example, the actress Yang Mi was casted by the TV series *Legend of Fuyao*, which was adapted from the novel written by Tianxia Guiyuan. In addition, another work by the same author *The Rise of Phoenixes* was also adapted into TV series. *Ashes of Love* by Dian Xian, *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace* by Liu Lan Zi and *The Story of Minglan* all have been well received.

In recent years, the long journey of fictional adaptation has been gradually diverted from historical and Xianxia drama to themes like urban and romance. Continuing the momentum of the past year, realistic TV series like *Our Glamorous Time* and *All Out of Love* keep on streaming. Besides, *Martial Universe*, curated by China Literature, Azure Media Corporation and Youku, is adapted from the same name novel of Tiancan Tudou's hit IP, following the mobile game, animation, the appearance of TV series will further extend the IP's vitality and the economic value.

The adaptation of an online fiction into a game has higher requirements than that in sector of the film and television, such as technical problems, the conversion of the content and the plot, and the overall game experience. The game is more expensive to produce and has a longer cycle to be done. Only the finest polishing offers the game its independent charm, which enables the value of the adapted game to stay longer.

As of 2017, China's online literary works have been adapted into other entertainment content: 6,942 print books, 1,195 modified films, 122 TV plays, 605 games, 72 animations. Online fiction adaptation has become an important source of power for the entertainment industry.

In the past few years, Internet literature has completed the content development and the extension of the industry chain, as the influence of IP whose core is online fictions is expanding. In the future, all the components that are condensed in the industry chain will achieve more sophisticated effects, meeting the needs of more audiences with high-quality content. The in-depth layout of the Internet giants will also become a powerhouse for the whole IP industry chain.

(translated by Chen Huiyi)