

LOVE WITHOUT LIMIT: FAN PARTICIPATION ROLE IN SHAPING THE POPULARITY OF DANMEI WEB NOVEL THROUGH FAN LABOR

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ABSTRACT

This article examines on the culture of active fan participation that contributes to the success, popularity and worldwide dissemination of Chinese web novels within the danmei genre know as boys love genre. This article uses the Mo Dao Zu Shi web novel as a case study, which was analyzed through a qualitative method and netnography approach utilizing passive observation and primary data derived from fan base groups on X social media. This article finds that fan labor activities including fan-translated content, fan-created art content and fan generated content in the form of daily tweets on X social media, indirectly contribute to the globalization of the danmei genre and also the dissemination of Chinese popular culture and also culture in general.

Keywords: Fan Labor, Fan Participation Culture, Danmei, Web Novel, Creative Culture

1.0 INTRODUCTION

East Asia is a region that regularly develops and utilizes both high culture and popular culture (low culture) as products of the country's creative industry, which is currently known globally. The creative industry is based on individual creativity, skills, and talents that have the potential to create wealth and jobs through the creation and exploitation of intellectual property (DCMS Document, 2021). The scope of the creative industry is in various sectors including advertising, architecture, art and antiques market, handicrafts, design, fashion, film and video, interactive entertainment with software, music, performing arts, publishing, software, television, and radio (DCMS Document, 2021).

The idea of the creative industry was not immediately accepted by the Chinese government because "creative" was considered a Western product, and the meaning of creative itself was considered free and rebellious. Because of that, creative products have an image that seems difficult to control by the government. In contrast to the government's response, academics and businesspeople accepted the concept of creative culture because it was considered to have the potential to provide benefits and contribute to the development of the economic sector. Academics and businesspeople then urged the government to run a program regarding the Chinese creative industry. (Keane, 2009).

Among China's many creative cultural products, one of the products that has a huge popularity and reception globally is the web novel (wangluo xiaoshuo 网络小说) or sometimes referred as shuangwen (爽文), which are stories that provide a brief of dopamine effect. The reason of

that is because web novels usually only consist of stories with fewer chapters and word counts compared to a physical novel with long chapter and word counts. Web novels began to develop in the late 1990s in line with the growing trend of online fiction. Online fiction started to gain attention because it provided platform for writers by being anonymous. At that time, literature in China was tightly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and some of the published literature contained propaganda elements (Hockx, 2015).

The emergence of online fiction is considered to offer 'freedom' which is reflected in two aspects: 1) Fiction online fiction is outside the CCP-controlled system because unlike traditional print publications, there is no need for a "book number" issued by the state, 2) Authors can upload their works to the internet without going through the "checks" of editors as censors (Hockx, 2015). However, in the development of online fiction has been fallen under the radar of government censorship, so in the end online fiction writers never truly become anonymous. The revival of web novels continued with the establishment of websites dedicated to the publication of web novels such as separti Qidian (起点), Jinjiang Wenxue Cheng (晋江文学城) Jinjiang Literature City, etc.

The danmei (耽美) genre, which meaning 'indulgence in beauty; addiction to beauty' (Zheng, 2014; Hockx, 2015 in Wang, 2021), is the most well-known transgressive genre in Chinese digital literature that has achieved global recognition and appeal. The genre of danmei is associated with homoeroticism and same-sex relationships among young males (Yang and Xu 2016). The genre has been influenced by shounen ai (少年愛); Boys Love; Yaoi (やおい, a Japanese genre that refers to love between males, which emerged in China in the early 1990s as one of the underdog genres as Japanese popular culture extended to East Asian nations.

The danmei genre, which carries the theme of same-sex romance between men, has not escaped the supervision of the Chinese government through censorship. Censorship is common in Chinese media and cultural industry products, including censorship of television, print, radio, film, theatre, video games, literature and the internet content. In the China's cultural and media industry, there are strong laws on pornography in the media sector and has banned pornography for years (Yan, 2014), because the content is closely related to homosexuality and is also considered obscene (McLelland, 2005), danmei is often considered as a form of pornography, making it vulnerable to censorship.

Despite the constraints of government censorship, the danmei genre has managed to attract a sizable of fan base and audience, particularly among heterosexual female fans from among teenagers and mature women who are referred to as funü (腐女) or 'rotten girl' (Chao, 2016). One of the most well-known danmei web novels on a worldwide is Mo Dao Zu Shi (will be referred as MDZS), authored by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu. MDZS's popularity has led to its adaptation into a variety of media, such as the drama The Untamed, which starred renowned actors Xiao Zhang and Wang Yibo, the manhua (comics) and donghua series (animation) The Founder of Diabolism. Originally only available to Chinese readers as web novels, MDZS novels are now published all over the world, including in Indonesia. Additionally, MDZS dramas and donghua are broadcast via accessible streaming media. Furthermore, MDZS has a fan base on multiple social media platforms that shares a variety of MDZS-related information and content.

As a well-known cultural and creative product, several studies on danmei have been conducted before. Wang, A (2024) examines the phenomenon of danmei's popularity and fan bases. According to this study, the phenomena was deemed as a 'popularity bubble' which does not imply the acceptance of danmei as a literary genre and its subculture nor homosexuality as a minority sexual orientation in China. Furthermore, due to some danmei fans unfavorable fan attitudes such as online harassment and abuse, this 'popularity bubble' has a negative impact on danmei reputation as a literature genre.

Aside from that, Liang Ge (2021) examine on how female danmei authors continually challenge the hierarchical and heteronormative system of the A/B/O universe, a popular danmei subgenre, by introducing three additional gender types—alpha, beta, and omega—along with the male-female binary. The authors also explore gender identity, sexuality, and social class by imagining love, sex, and intimacy between male protagonists. This study revealed that relationships between men and the characteristics presented in A/B/O danmei fiction continue to evoke egalitarian reciprocity.

Furthermore, since danmei is considered pornographic content and vulnerable to government censorship, Tian Xi (2020) conducted a study that explains the strategies and tactics employed by cautious danmei fans on social media, in this case, Weibo, when consuming danmei products. The anti-pornography campaign initiated by the Chinese government has made danmei content vulnerable to censorship, which indirectly also threatens the sustainability of the danmei subgenre. Therefore, fans often use implicit terms when creating content as a form of self-censorship.

According to prior research, the active fan participation, which indirectly contributes to the rising global popularity of Chinese danmei web novels, has not been examined. Thus, using the novel *Mo Dao Zu Shi* as an example, this paper raises the following research question: How does fan participation, through the fan-labor, influence the popularization of danmei web novels? Then, this article's goal is to examine the culture of fan participation by examining how fans actively contribute to the globalization of danmei web novels.

2.0 THEORY FRAMEWORK

2.1 Globalization and New Media

The global popularity of danmei web novels is inseparable from globalization. Appadurai (1990) describes globalization as a "movement" through the concept of "scapes," which encompass the dimensions of human movement (ethnographic landscapes), technology (technological landscapes), money (financial landscapes), media (mediascapes), and ideas (ideological landscapes), highlighting the movement and circulation of these elements across these landscapes. Appadurai emphasizes that globalization is not a homogenization of culture; that is, with the movement and transfer of culture, it will become homogenized under the dominant culture. On the contrary, through cultural movement that transcends borders and time, a flow of cultural diversity will be created, allowing for the interrelationship of not just one, but several cultures.

Furthermore, this article will focus on two landscapes: ideoscapes and mediascapes. Ideoscapes are ideological or thought movements related to ideas in the process of globalization. The

concept of ideological landscapes is related to mediascapes, which allow ideas to be constructed and disseminated through their distribution via media such as newspapers, magazines, television, and the internet, achieving widespread exposure. It can be said that globalization has transformed the concept of space and time, giving rise to the phenomenon of space-time compression.

This concept of mediascape also relates to the concept of "New Media" that explains the evolution of media, from conventional media to media based on digital technology. The new media are media in the form of the WWW (World Wide Web), known as the Internet. According to Flew (2005), new media focuses on the format of media content, such as text, sound, images, and others, which are combined into a digital format and distributed through the Internet. They are characterized by a combination of the three Cs: computing and information technology, communication networks, digitized media and information content (Flew, 2005).

2.2 Participation Culture and Fan Labor

The creative sector is closely related to fans since it creates the materials that enable fans and fandoms to emerge through drama, music, movies, idols, and other media. Participatory culture is defined as an individual or community, in this context (the fans), playing an active role in the creation, dissemination, interpretation and distribution of culture. One form of participatory culture is expression in which fans express themselves through the creation of various creative products, including fan fiction, fan edits, fan art, fan videos, fan translations, etc. (Jenkins et al., 2009).

On the other hand, fan participation (create fan fiction, fan art, etc.) is viewed as a form of fan labor. Lazzarato (1996) defines labor as "someone that produces information and cultural content from commodities". When viewed in the context of labor as workers, usually labor gets paid when doing work. However, in the case of fan-labor, fans participate and engage in activities that are meant to make money; hence, they engage in work willingly or without compensation for their own pleasure and enjoyment. Because of that, fan pleasure and industry exploitation occur simultaneously in fan-labor (Stanfill & Condis, 2014). Fans spontaneously produce cultural products based on their intrinsic passion and pleasure, while the results of this production are often exploited by the internet users or the said media where the content are produced (Terranova, 2000).

3.0 RESEARCH METODOLOGY

This article uses a qualitative method, a method that explores and understands a group of individuals related to social problems, so this method is often used to research community life, history, behaviour, concepts or phenomena, and other social problems (Creswell, 2013). The approach used in this study is a passive netnography approach through non-participant observation. The netnographic approach or sometimes also called digital ethnography is ethnographic research that is digitally mediated through the use of digital technology (Hudayana et al. 2019). While non-participant observation means that researchers observe digital spaces without being involved in the internet community. In other words, netnographic research is ethnographic research used to research communities and cultures on the internet. When conducting ethnographic research on the internet, it is necessary to change some aspects

of traditional ethnography to study the culture and cultural practices that emerge in text communication mediated by computer media (Kozinets, 2010).

This article will focus on the Mo Dao Zu Shi web novel, and the primary data of this article is a group of MDZS fans who utilize online media such as novel web pages, fan translation pages, and personal fan blogs to carry out fan activities, namely translating or creating content related to MDZS. In addition to these media, the author will also observe the social media account X (Twitter) of Mo Dao Zu Shi fans who actively share tweets and content related to various activities as danmei fans. Data is limited to 2020-2021, namely when novels and dramas from MDZS began to be widely discussed on social media. Research data is presented in the form of screenshots during the author's observations on social media. Screenshots are taken with the aim of being able to show observations or appearances of the virtual world being studied and to prove the authenticity of the data analyzed by visiting the X account or page (Twitter) according to the data that has been presented.

Then the data will be analyzed using content analysis which will be re-described using supporting theories, namely using globalization theory with a focus on mediascapes and fan participation culture theory, especially fan labor. In addition, secondary data is also used in the form of interviews with an anonymous informant who is a fan of the danmei genre, particularly MDZS. The interview was conducted via telephone via Whatsapp on December 18, 2023. The questions asked include: 1) Since when did you start knowing and liking MDZS? 2) What makes MDZS different from other series? 3) Is it the first time in consuming media that carries a theme like danmei? 4) Does watching MDZS make you more interested in exploring Chinese popular and creative culture further? 5) Is there a role for fans in the popularity of MDZS? The answers to these questions are then summarized and used in this article as additional data.

3.1 Synopsis of the Novel Mo Dao Zu Shi

Mo Dao Zu Shi tells the story of Wei Wuxian's life, who experimented with demonic cultivation to gain strength and power. However, those power led him to destruction and death instead. Long story short, Wei Wuxian reincarnated in the body of another person who was abandoned by their clan and met again with Lan Wangji, a demonic cultivator and also his long-time arch enemy. Their meeting marked the beginning of their adventure to cultivate demons together and during that journey Wei Wuxian also realized that Lan Wangji who seemed arrogant and cold actually had more feelings for Wei Wuxian.

4.0 FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Emergence and Challenges of Danmei Web Novels

The emergence of the danmei genre in the modern literature scene and Chinese popular culture is inseparable from the influence of the shounen ai genre originating from Japan in the 1990s. Danmei developed significantly through the medium of web novels in line with the development of online fiction in the late 1990s. The prominent themes of web novels include wǔxiá (武侠) and xiānxiá (仙侠), which are based on Chinese history as well as Buddhist and Taoist mythology with a royal setting. One of the themes frequently raised is demon cultivation. Similar to shounen ai, danmei also has characteristics such as the role of seme (top: insertive) and uke (bottom: receptive), which in danmei are known as 攻 gong (top: insertive)

and 受 shou (bottom: receptive). However, while shounen ai often emphasizes romance between young men (young as in underage), danmei tends to emphasize romance between young men who are mature in terms of age (Yang and Xu 2017b in Wang, 2021).

Upon its emergence, the danmei genre was seen as an underground rather than a mainstream category. Its audience was restricted to young ladies possessing extensive knowledge of popular culture. This genre also exclusively published in online fiction format on certain websites, such as Jinjiang Literature City (JJWXC: <https://www.jjwxc.net/>). Besides JJWXC, various platforms such as <https://www.webnovel.com/> are available to a global audience. In contrast to JJWXC, a subscription-based platform, the web novel website is complimentary, featuring translations conducted by fans. This indicates that there has been a shift in the way fiction stories are published. Fictions no longer have to be published through publishing houses and printed in physical books formats. Instead, fiction can be published through more adaptable platform like the internet, which also facilitates reciprocal engagement between authors and audiences.

Through this online medium, danmei genre web novels have emerged as one of the most popular genres. In February 2012, approximately 199,000 danmei fictions were published on JJWXC, of which 145,000 were original works (non-fanfiction), while the remainder were fanfictions, which featured main characters derived from pre-existing popular figures or celebrities within a fan-created universe. The official JJWXC website indicates that it has over 5.89 million novels published online. The prevalence of web novels is attributed to their accessibility, which also promotes the dissemination of danmei literature. This enables danmei fiction to engage a broader readership and fan base. Feng, 2009; Xu and Yang, 2013, in Wang, 2020).

Furthermore, platforms such as JJWXC implement anonymity and privacy protection measures for both authors and readers, fostering a sense of security that subsequently enhances user engagement on the site. In recent years, web novel publication has emerged as a booming industry, yielding profits of over 25 billion yuan (\$4 billion) and attracting around 460 million readers in China. Moreover, certain danmei fiction has been converted into diverse media, including manhua (comic), donghua (animation), live-action drama series, movies, and audio dramas, indicating that danmei has effectively grown as a mainstream and popular genre. (thechinaproject, 2022).

However, in its development, danmei faces challenges due to stigma surrounding homosexuality that have not been fully accepted, particularly by the general local readers (Feng, 2009), so this genre is primarily accepted and appreciated by specific groups. Another challenge is the censorship imposed by the Chinese Government in the form of an anti-pornography movement for internet content known as Jingwang Xindong or the Internet Cleanup Movement, which was launched in 2014. This movement began in mid-April and continued until November, aiming to eliminate pornographic content including text, images, videos and others, as well as to dismantle sites that are considered involved in the production or distribution of such content. One of the consequences applied by the Chinese government on content categorized as pornography including the deletion of works and the closure of websites (Ji and Long 2014, Ning 2014, Yang and Xu 2017 in Wang, 2020). Furthermore, in May 2020 the government initiated an internet cleanup movement known as Qinglang (bright

and clear) implemented by the Cyberspace Administration of China, aimed at promoting and maintain a healthy online environment.

To avoid the consequences of censorship, platforms such as JJXWC implement various regulation regarding the publication of stories, one of which mandates that authors have to carry out self-censorship. Censored content includes materials that featuring sexual scenes, which may not be describe explicitly; however, the context will allow readers to recognize and comprehend the nature of the scene as sexual. It can be said that sexual content in danmei is like 'between being and not being' or existing in a state of ambiguity. JJWXC also enforces a policy allowing individuals to report content that violates self-censorship regulations (Tian, 2020). Beside of that, the author also uses a lot of metaphorical words and code-switching language, which indirectly enhances the poetic quality of the fiction. In the context of romantic relationships, authors may not explicitly indicate that the couple is in a relationship; instead, they may present it as a bromance which refer to a brotherly relationship between males.

Fan Participation Role in Shaping the Worldwide Popularity of Danmei Web Novels: Mo Dao Zu Shi

1. Enganging with Others Chinese Popular Culture

Despite the challenges encountered, danmei fiction can sustain its existence among both local and global audiences. One of the danmei fictions that originated as a web novel and subsequently achieved global recognition is Mo Dao Zu Shi by Mo Xia Tong Shu. The popularity of danmei fiction, exemplified by MDZS, is closely linked to the active participation of fans engaging in voluntarily fan labor. Fan translation is a significant form of fan labor that influences the global distribution of danmei fiction. Fans of MDZS, both through fan communities and individually, purchase MDZS novels officially through the JJWXC site and subsequently translate the danmei fiction that was originally in Mandarin into English, thereby facilitating access for readers beyond China.

Fans then utilize media platform such as websites, to spread their translations; additionally, the important point is that the translations are accessible for free. A group of translators collaborated and published their translations on the website 'exiledrebelsscanlations.com' commonly referred to by fans as ExR. The group translated all 126 chapters of MDZS consisting of 113 chapters of the main story and 13 additional chapters. Alongside the translation of MDZS, ExR has also translated various other danmei fiction.

Mo Dao Zu Shi by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu

Alternative name : The Founder of Diabolism

Genres: Action, Adventure, Comedy, Mystery, Supernatural, Xianxia, WuxiaWorld, BL

Novel status: Finished, 126 chapters (113+13 extras)

Raws: Official raws bought on jjwxc (and smut chapters)

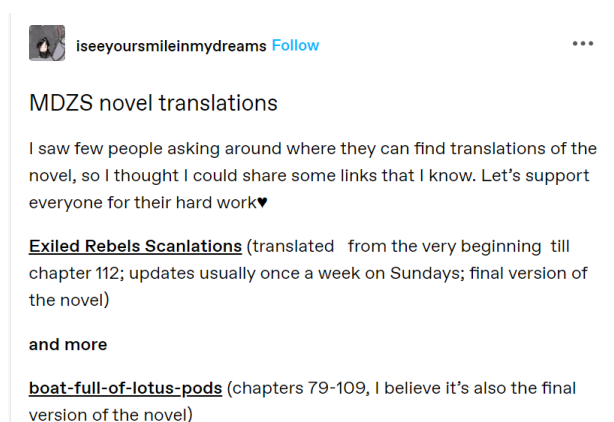
Translation status: Complete

Translator: K

Editor: Addis

Picture 1: Fan translation of MDZS (source: exiledrebelsscanlations.com)

Translations made by fans are also shared among MDZS fans through various platform, such as blogs and social media to expand the audience of MDZS beyond the danmei community. In Picture 2, the iseeyoursmileinmydreams account utilizing the Tumblr blog platform to response inquiries from netizens regarding free translation of MDZS novel. This aligns with the concepts of mediascapes and also ideoscapes which are characterized by the dissemination of ideas and culture through media. In this case, danmei fiction are more accessible not only to local readers and Mandarin-speaking netizens but also rapidly circulate through media platforms and blogs, allowing access to anyone with internet connectivity. This may also be interpreted as a manifestation of solidarity among fans who assist one another in disseminating MDZS content.

**Picture 2. Fans Spreading Information About MDZS (source: tumblr blog iseeyoursmileinyourdream)**

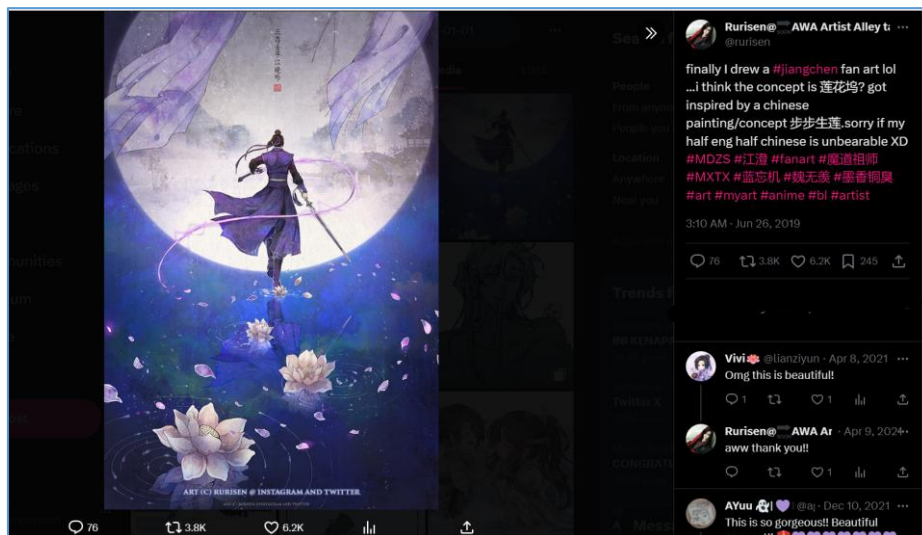
Although fan translations contributed significantly to the initial global success of MDZS, it also led to negative consequences, particularly the exploitation of fan works due to excessive open information. Fan translations are typically created by 'fans for fellow fans', undertaken voluntarily and available for free. Picture 3 illustrates that the translation team enforces a policy against profiting from their translations, as they discovered instances of individuals selling fan translations independently without authorization from the community. The translation team emphasized that translations would only be posted through fan sites and that printed translations are permitted solely for personal use, prohibiting any online publication. This indicates that, alongside its potential to facilitate cultural dissemination, fan labor is susceptible to exploitation, as any users other than the maker itself may commodify others fan labor products for profit.

We are not going to be releasing any translated novel in pdf/Mobi/epub as we have found them on sites where others are making money from our hard work. We hope you understand and stop asking us for these offline reading documents. If you would like to make your own, it's fine by us as long as they are for personal use and are not posted elsewhere. Please do not contact us about this.

Picture 3. Advisory Against the Commodification of Translation

(source: exiledrebelsscanlations.com)

In addition to translations, fans also produce various forms of content, including fan edits, fan videos, fan art, and fan fiction, which are disseminated via social media platforms such as X (Twitter) for free as long as the audience does not share nor commodify the content. An example is the fan art shared by a fan account in picture 4. The fan art received significant engagement, with 3.8k reposts and 6.2k likes, along with by numerous positive comments. This demonstrates the contributions of fans through fan labor, which indirectly spread content related to MDZS. Fans have inadvertently performed a task by making and disseminating artwork without seeking compensation, merely for the enjoyment of fellow enthusiasts. Of course, This indirectly impacts the said fan artist by generating significant participation, as many individuals are not only enthusiasts of specific popular cultures but also will become supporters of fan-artists, resulting in the commodification of artistic creations intended for profit, which until now is still in grey area since popular culture has their own copyright. However, the creation of this artwork begins with the basis of voluntary contribution and participation in the fan community.



Picture 4. Fan Art of MDZS (source: X, account is blurred for privacy)

In addition to the fans in online platform, an interview was conducted on December 18, 2023 at 19:00 WIB with an informant who is an MDZS fan named Melati (pseudonym). Melati said that they discovering about MDZS during the pandemic, while browsing the X homepage (Twitter) and encountering a fan edit in the form of a video. This made Melati curious and leading to further exploration of MDZS. Melati then subsequently discovered numerous positive reviews and decided to read MDZS and also watch the MDZS drama series. Melati's initial curiosity has evolved into an admiration for Chinese actors played in MDZS drama series and actively engage with others Chinese popular cultures, particularly Chinese dramas and danmei fiction.

"I've actually known about MDZS for a long time, a friend told me about it, but I only became curious about MDZS during the pandemic, at that time I was scrolling through Twitter, coincidentally there was a fan edit video that passed by on the timeline, so I got curious and

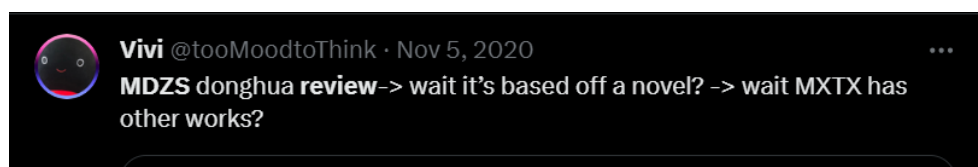
after searching for it, it turned out that many people said that MDZS was good, so I read the novel and then continued to watch the drama and manhua too, now I really like Xiao Zhan because of MDZS, I also looked into the author's work, and it turns out that their novels are good."

Melati -December 18, 2023.



Picture 5. Danmei fans testimony about the flow to becoming a fan (source: X, account blurred for privacy)

Moreover, Melati also stated that since knowing MDZS, Melati has frequently watched Chinese dramas and finding it more exciting due to the diverse in plot. What is interesting for Melati is many Chinese dramas explore historical or royal themes, but still presented in neatly and contemporary manner, making it more appealing despite occasional awkward scenes involving flight or specific movement. Melati also impressed that the homosexuality can be incorporated into those themes of stories, even it is not explicitly stated, enhancing engagement and representing a strategic approach to attract a broader audience, particularly general public. In addition to a brief interview with Melati, the fan account through their tweet in picture 5, stated that the beginning of someone journey into becoming a fan of danmei is often begins through positive reviews about MDZS. Following exposure to these reviews, individuals deciding to read or watch the MDZS series, after that subsequently exploring other works by MXTX (the author of MDZS), and discovering that there are other danmei works beyond MXTX's novels. This then made them to explore another danmei novels, leading to their development as fan and connoisseur of other Chinese novels.

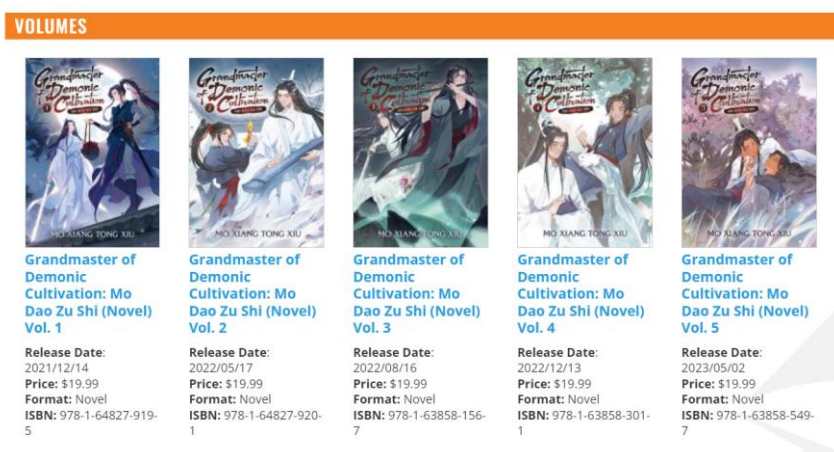


Picture 6. Danmei fans testimony about the flow to becoming a fan (source: X, account blurred for privacy)

The similar sentiment was also expressed by another account through its tweet indicating that the account's user started their exploration of danmei and web novels due to the positive reviews given to MDZS donghua. While the testimony cannot serve as the sole reference due to its reliance on a single informant and two social media tweets, it is evident that fan activities in the form of fan labor, positive reviews or concise tweets through social media, despite their

simplicity, exert a distinct influence. For example, the tweets may not have been driven by the purpose or intention to promote MDZS or danmei genre, but rather based from a spontaneous desire to share personal thought, art or even 'yapping' about personal interest on their personal social media. However, indirectly, this has a significantly influence netizens who are not fans, inciting their curiosity and prompting them to seek further information about MDZS. The outcome of the discovery may differ; some individuals subsequently become fans of other Chinese web novels and later about another Chinese popular culture, while others remain merely as casual fans. It is essential to emphasize that fans who engage with the fan community and produce 'something' inadvertently influence the objects of their admiration.

The popularity of the MDZS web novel subsequently led to its adaptation into numerous media, including the drama *The Untamed* and the manhua and donghua series titled *The Founder of Diabolism*. The modified version of MDZS achieved significant popularity, partly due to its publication on globally accessible platforms such as YouTube and Amazon, as well as its exclusive availability on Japanese platform including AbemaTV, WOWOW, and RakutenTV channels. The MDZS web novel, previously translated by fans, was formally translated and published by Seven Seas Publisher in Los Angeles, United States. This novel series is also noted as having gained the New York Times Best Seller designation (sevenseasentertainment.com). According to epicdope.com, on August 4, 2021, within 24 hours of the announcement of the English release of the three MDZS novels, pre-order sales for MDZS achieved the #8 position on Amazon, and on August 5, 2021, MDZS attained the #1 rank as a Barnes & Noble bestseller. The book also has been published in Indonesia via the Kinokuniya bookstore.



Picture 7. Mo Dao Zu Shi Novel (Source: sevenseasentertainment.com)

Through the explanation above, it can also be seen that new media also facilitates the spreading of MDZS content by transcending spatial and temporal limitations, as evidenced by the predominance of fans utilizing new media to share both official and fan-generated content related to MDZS and other danmei works. As of now, MDZS retains a substantial base of devoted fans who are enthusiastic and generous in engaging with its material, coinciding with the release of the fifth volume of its printed novel in 2023. The appeal of MDZS and other danmei literature can serve as an entry point for individuals to engage with and partake in Chinese popular culture, particularly web novels, encompassing both danmei and others genre.

2. Introducing Chinese Culture

Danmei web novels frequently take place during the imperial era, as seen by the characters' traditional attire, their conduct, and the prevailing social hierarchy, etc. Furthermore, the narrative frequently incorporates ideas associated with parts of Taoism. Furthermore, web novel can also reflects Chinese culture. While the depicted culture may not fully align with reality, the globalization and success of the danmei genre has indirectly served as a step in spreading Chinese culture and language to the global stage. This also indirectly affects the impact of China's soft power through its popular culture, particularly the danmei genre of web novels.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Web novels can be seen as one form of new media in the field of literature, allowing for access to books beyond traditional print but also can be accessed any time and place with internet connectivity. One of the web novel genres that has received global attention is danmei, which is a genre that emphasizes romanticization between male relationships. Danmei began to develop alongside the emergence of web novels through various platform, notably Jinjiang Literature City, or commonly referred to as JJWXC. The development of danmei has challenges that come from the stigma of society about homosexuality and censorship imposed by the Chinese government, as danmei is closely associated with pornography.

Despite the challenges, danmei can exist and develop on the international scene due to fan participation carried out through fan labor activities, particularly through fan translation efforts. These translations serve not only as a medium for fan self-expression but also enable netizens who are unable to read this fiction to access the content directly. Through this, it can be said that fan activities that are frequently stigmatized negatively and perceived by some as something that may be unimportant might indirectly contribute to the dissemination of cultural products, even though it is done without such intention. Nonetheless, it is essential to acknowledge that, in addition to fans, various factors contribute to the dissemination of popular culture, including the accessibility of web novels, the proficiency of authors who craft compelling narratives liked by many, the impact of appealing visual representations on web novel covers, and the role of JJWXC as an online publisher that promotes web novels across genres, including danmei fiction. Furthermore, web novels can be regarded as one of China's creative cultural products that have successfully entered the mainstream scene, both domestically and internationally.

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