



AJSS

Asian Journal of Social Studies

AJSS, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2026, pp.138-146.

Print ISSN: 3106-6836; Online ISSN: 3106-6844

Journal homepage: <https://www.assjournal.com>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64058/AJSS260116dcrt>



Digitization, Communication, and Coopetition: A Review of *Transcending Digital Civilization: A Tutorial on the International Communication of Chinese Online Genre Literature*

Zhao Jiaqi, Wang Xiaying

Abstract: Against the global backdrop of the accelerating evolution of digital civilization, Chinese online genre literature—a product of the deep integration of digital technology and literary creation—has become a force to be reckoned with in the field of international communication and a vital vehicle for the “going global” of Chinese culture. The book, *Transcending Digital Civilization: A Tutorial on the International Communication of Chinese Online Genre Literature*, systematically elucidates the operational mechanisms and impact pathways of Chinese online genre literature, from theoretical construction to industrial practice, and explores these themes through the lens of digital ontology, diverse dissemination practices, and global cultural competition and cooperation. It not only broadens the theoretical horizons of online literature research in the digital age but also provides a new paradigm grounded in the digital context for understanding the international dissemination of Chinese online genre literature.

Keywords: digital civilization; Chinese online genre literature; international Communication; *Transcending Digital Civilization: A Tutorial on the International Communication of Chinese Online Genre Literature*

Author Biography: **Zhao Jiaqi**, Ph.D. candidate, at the College of Liberal Arts, Jinan University. Research Interests: Comparative Literature and World Literature, Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Online Literature. E-mail: 2476845448@qq.com. **Wang Xiaoying** (Corresponding Author), Professor and Ph.D. Supervisor, at the College of Liberal Arts, Jinan University. Research Interests: Comparative Literature and World Literature, Semiotics of Online Literature, Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Online Literature. E-mail: wangxiaoaying19820@163.com.

标题：数字、传播与竞合：评《跨越数字文明：中国网络类型文学国际传播教程》

摘要：在数字文明加速演进的全球背景下，中国网络类型文学作为数字技术与文学创作深度融合的产物，已成为国际传播领域中不可忽视的力量和“中国文化”走出去”的重要载体。《跨越数字文明：中国网络类型文学国际传播教程》一书系统地阐释了中国网络类型文学从理论建构到产业实践的运作机制与影响路径，并围绕数字本体属性、多样态传播实践与全球文化竞合这一逻辑展开探讨。不仅拓宽了数字时代网络文学研究的理论视野，也为理解中国网络类型文学国际传播提供了基于数字语境的新范式。

关键词：数字文明；中国网络类型文学；国际传播；《跨越数字文明：中国网络类型文学国际传播教程》

作者简介：赵嘉琦，暨南大学文学院博士研究生，研究方向：比较文学与世界文学，中国网络文学的海外传播。电邮：2476845448@qq.com。王小英（通讯作者），暨南大学文学院教授、博士生导师，研究方向：比较文学与世界文学，网络文学符号学，中国网络文学的海外传播。电邮：Wangxiaoaying19820@163.com。

Introduction

The world today has become deeply immersed in the digital wave; humanity is approaching a state of “digital existence” as never before and has entered a new era of digital civilization. Based on a profound insight into these epochal changes, since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party and the country have positioned digital civilization as “an important engine for advancing Chinese-style modernization in the digital age”^a and have formulated major strategic plans to build “Digital China”^① (China Society for Administrative System Reform, 2025, p.5-6). In this context, Chinese online literature—a new cultural form born of digital technology—has been incorporated into the “Digital China” initiative^② due to its dual economic and cultural attributes, becoming an indispensable component of the national cultural strategy. The book *Transcending Digital Civilization: A Tutorial on the International Communication of Chinese Online Genre Literature* (World Publishing Guangdong Corporation, 2025) (hereinafter referred to as *Transcending Digital Civilization*) is a significant work that responds to this contemporary imperative. Professor Wu Changqing, Editor-in-Chief, collaborating with multiple scholars, the book adopts a digital cultural perspective to deeply explore the ontological characteristics, dissemination practices, and international competitive-cooperative relationships of Chinese online genre literature within the context of digital civilization. Grounded in national strategy, the book features a broad perspective and detailed case studies, combining theoretical depth with practical concerns. It not only provides a new paradigm for the study of Chinese online literature but also demonstrates

^a Bai Q.P.(2024,January 4).*Meeting the People's Ever-Growing Needs for a Better Life by Vigorously Enhancing the Capacity of Digital Cultural Services*.People's Daily Online.http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2024-01/04/nw.D110000renmrb_20240104_1-09.htm

the editors' academic ambition to construct a new theoretical framework for international dissemination suited to digital civilization.

1. Dispositif and Genre: Ontological Reconstruction in the Context of Digital Culture

Rooted in the global digital wave, the emergence and development of Chinese online genre literature inherently carry profound digital cultural genes. In the core thesis of *Transcending Digital Civilization*, “digital civilization” not only signifies “a new form of human civilization characterized by digitization and dominated by the digital economy” (Wang, 2023, p.2), but also points to the digital cultural perspective that coexists with this civilizational form and serves as its integral component. Based on this perspective, *Digital Culture and Chinese Online Genre Literature*, the first part of the book, approaches the subject from the ontology of digital culture. It views digitization itself as a “dispositif” (Michel Foucault) with powerful traction that fundamentally defines and shapes the category of online literature. Digital technology and digital media are thereby elevated from mere tools or carriers to intrinsic, constitutive ontological elements of genre fiction online.

In this section, the editors put forward a core argument: the analytical focus of online writing in the digital age should shift. It should no longer merely concentrate on the specific content created by the works, but instead examine the existential form of existence of this writing labor itself, namely “a form of existence that fully utilizes fragmented spare time” (Wu, 2025, p.32). Compared to traditional paper-based writing, this temporal mode of existence in online writing “transforms the philosophical questions of time and existence into economic questions of how to achieve value appreciation through the continuous increment of text” (Wu, 2025, p.33). Thus, it possesses unique transcendent significance: the incremental growth of text directly correlates with the appreciation of realized value. This distinctive heterogeneity is a microcosm of the modern individual's digital existence, embodying a new model rooted in the fusion of commodity logic and the realization of individual value—the relentless pursuit of the valorization of individual value. The editors further explain that this value appreciation “formalizes it into history and, through the creation of wealth, achieves a modern existence centered on the self” (Wu, 2025, p.35). Consequently, the essence of online literature as a special form of writing is revealed: “Online literature is the embodiment of its own essence” (Wu, 2025, p.38); its form of existence (digital labor and value appreciation) directly defines its ontology.

Taking a closer look from the perspective of digital ontology, online literature has become a commodity in digital form. Additionally, through the connections between texts, it has also emerged as a novel avenue for individuals to imagine and construct their identities. In Chapter 2, “Reconstructing ‘Digital Literature’: Chinese Online Genre Literature,” the writer systematically demonstrates how digitality profoundly shapes the essence and characteristics of online literature across multiple dimensions. First, the digitization of communication media and space: it relies on digital technology for dissemination and circulates within virtual digital spaces. Second, the digitization of creation and publication methods: creation, publication, and the entire

ecosystem are founded on electronic technology. Third, the digital quantification of economic models: authors' creative output is quantified and valued through digital metrics (such as word count, readership, and subscriber numbers). Fourth, the digitization of international dissemination: its global spread relies heavily on digital channels and platforms (Wu, 2025, p.40-41). The "digitality" revealed here carries a dual meaning. On the one hand, it refers to the foundational level of digital technology. On the other hand, it refers to the operational level of digital quantification, which emphasizes quantifiable data metrics. Based on a systematic analysis of these characteristics, the writer forcefully argues that online literature should be explicitly classified as "Digital Literature." It is evident that, drawing on the value framework of digital culture and integrating multi-dimensional intellectual resources such as phenomenology, existentialism, and Marx's theory of surplus value, the writer has successfully constructed a unique critical paradigm for digital online literature. The innovative nature of this paradigm lies in the fact that it rejects the traditional approach of objectifying online literature—that is, highlighting its uniqueness through comparison with elite literature. Instead, it restores online literature to the interior of the specific "Dispositif" of digitalization to reveal its authentic visage and presets new possibilities for future digital globalization practices (Wu, 2025, p.1).

It is crucial to emphasize that the core subject of this book is not a generalized and conceptual "online literature," but rather "online genre literature" specifically represented by online xuanhuan(玄幻) and science fiction novels. The term "online literature" used in this book essentially serves as a umbrella term for "online genre fiction." Genre is paramount because the formation and evolution of the genres themselves in online fiction have specific social implications. In the internet ecosystem, literary websites function as core production units, operating much like modern factories—each literary genre serves as a production line, specialized in churning out genre-specific products tailored to the desires and tastes of specific readers. Subsequently, these genre-based products retain their core narrative paradigms through repeated cross-media adaptations (e.g., films, TV series, and video games). Meanwhile, through interaction with audiences, the aesthetic forms generated by these adaptations in turn nourish, consolidate, and expand the influence of the upstream genre literature. Thus, the evolution of online literary genres and the internet production system co-evolve synchronously and resonate in the same dimension. It is precisely within this complex interactive mechanism—comprising multiple forces such as websites, writers, readers, audiences, and critics—that online genre fiction has been able to continuously permeate every stage of literary production, circulation, and reception. Behind this phenomenon of genre formation lies the highly commercialized operation of literary production mechanisms, pointing to the shifting trends in mass aesthetic tastes and cultural values over time, while also implying "a profound transformation in modes of thinking and cognitive structures adapted to the digital age" (Chang, 2018, p.51).

We place online genre fiction within the shared research framework of digital civilization and digital culture. This broadens the inquiry. Its expandable horizon includes traditional literary issues defined by perspectives like "technology" and "aesthetics." More importantly, it leads to

a forward-looking systemic question: “Can digital literature, as a new art form, be seen as the origin of a ‘new form of civilization’?” (Wu, 2025, p.1) Whether it is online genre fiction itself or the various digital cultural products derived from it—such as short dramas and short videos—their means and tools of dissemination exist, in terms of artistic essence, as a foundational construct of mass culture (i.e., “grounding”). Their differences lie mainly in the forms of expression. Therefore, the middle section of this book not only analyzes cases of international dissemination of fantasy and science fiction novels. It also brings adapted web genre literature (C-Drama)—a derivative form—into the discussion. This reveals the inherent potential of online genre literature and its derivative digital cultural products to develop into a new form of global civilization.

In recent years, a diverse cultural industry chain has gradually matured. It is formed through the deep integration of online genre fiction with audiobooks, webcomics, films/TV series, short dramas, and video games. This chain powerfully demonstrates that the Chinese digital cultural industry system—backed by Chinese online literature enterprises—has taken shape and exhibits strong vitality and integration capacity.

2.Multimodal Dissemination and Copyright Reconstruction: Multidimensional International Practices

The vigorous development of globally interconnected digital technologies and media has provided strong momentum and a broad platform for Chinese digital cultural products to expand overseas. On May 15, 2017, China Literature Group (阅文集团) officially launched its overseas portal, WebNovel (起点国际), marking the entry of Chinese online genre literature into overseas markets in the form of a mature digital cultural industry. Over eight years, China’s digital cultural industry has successfully transcended the relatively monolithic digital reading model of its early days, achieving a significant leap in form and industrial integration. It has gradually built a multi-form cultural industrial chain featuring the synergistic development of multiple media, including audiobooks, webcomics, films and TV series, short dramas, and video games. This integrated and innovative industrial ecology has greatly enriched the dimensions of cultural product presentation and dissemination.

Against this backdrop of profound industrial transformation, the book's middle section, *Diverse Forms in the Overseas Dissemination of Online Literature* extends its research perspective from the ontological level to the dynamic global practice of Chinese online genre literature. Specifically, the overseas dissemination of online xuanhua literature and science fiction, as well as the phenomenal success of the big hit series *The King’s Avatar* (《全职高手》) in the Vietnamese market, vividly demonstrate the powerful cultural influence and market penetration of Chinese genre fiction in the digital age. At the same time, TV adaptations of Chinese online genre fiction (C-Dramas)—represented by costume romance dramas, historical palace intrigue dramas, urban life dramas, and youth campus idol dramas—continue to integrate

into the global market, constantly expanding their audience reach. As noted in the **2024 China Online Literature Blue Book**, “TV dramas adapted from online literature IPs, known as C-Dramas, have swept the globe... The elements of traditional Chinese culture presented in C-Dramas have sparked a new wave of ‘Chinese Aesthetics’ overseas” (Online Literature Center of the Chinese Writers Association, 2025). These adaptations are gradually establishing a unique new landscape for the international communication of Chinese online novels. The diverse, multi-channel overseas dissemination practices mentioned above powerfully demonstrate the extraordinary efficacy of the instant-sharing paradigm centered on genre-based storytelling. Relying on digital carriers on the internet, these practices can effectively overcome the natural barriers of physical space and dissolve potential obstacles at the level of cultural identity. In doing so, they achieve cross-cultural communication. Moreover, through innovative narrative models that integrate “locality” with digital ethnography, they have successfully opened up and expanded a brand-new discursive space for Chinese cultural narratives.

Building on the middle section’s discussion of diverse communication forms, the book’s lower part, *International Copyright, Communication, and Writing Strategies*, turns to a key dimension: comprehensive international copyright development. It uses this as an important reference framework. This part closely analyzes the relationship between international copyright mechanisms and writing/communication strategies. It systematically explains the integrated logic of “content production” and “dissemination and promotion,” as well as their mutually reinforcing positive dynamic. This deep integration of content and communication marks a systemic restructuring and upgrade of the traditional literary production chain under the digital wave. It successfully transforms the digital ontological proposition of online literature into a highly operable modern industrial order. To deepen understanding, this part selects two case studies: the “locality” in Lingnan(岭南) cultural writing, and Macau’s writing strategies from the perspective of external communication. These two cases prompt a question: in the surging digital era, how can China, drawing on its rich heritage, unique intellectual resources, and profound spiritual essence, actively build interactive dialogue with the world? The ultimate goal is to promote mutual learning among civilizations and advance a shared future for mankind—one of shared weal and woe and diverse beauty.

3.Digital Coopetition and Civilizational Exchange: China’s Path in the Global Landscape

The surging tide of digital civilization has triggered intense competition and restructuring within the global digital cultural industry, reshaping the global cultural ecosystem. In this grand context, Chinese online literature—as a rising star—has emerged as a powerful force thanks to the unique appeal of its content and its industrial ecosystem. It has successfully joined the ranks of the world’s leading digital cultural products and is widely recognized as “the world’s fourth-largest cultural phenomenon, following American Hollywood films, Japanese anime, and Korean TV

dramas”^[a]. Meanwhile, in the highly interconnected and resource-sharing global digital cultural market, Chinese online genre literature continues to deepen its international dissemination and localization. As it does so, more and more countries are drawn to this vibrant yet fiercely competitive arena. They actively join the market. Amid this intensifying overseas competition, Chinese online literature faces critical questions: How can it further consolidate and expand its global influence through deep interaction, collision, and integration with the world’s diverse digital cultures? How should we rationally assess new entrants like South Korea and Japan, which have shown strong momentum?

Further, is there potential for Chinese online literature to go beyond mere competition? Can it collaborate with other nations to explore a new global online literary ecosystem, and jointly advance the building of a shared future for mankind? The *2024 China Online Literature Blue Book* astutely identifies a key trend: “The popularity of Chinese online literature overseas has also stimulated the rapid development of local online literature platforms abroad. South Korea has fully adopted China’s operational mechanisms. Its market is now mature, and it has established a competitive stance against China” (Online Literature Center of the Chinese Writers Association, 2025). This important observation reveals a profound shift in the international competitive landscape. However, a notable shortcoming in current overseas research on Chinese online literature is precisely the avoidance or neglect of this crucial competitive reality.

Encouragingly, this book makes a groundbreaking attempt to address this issue. In Chapter 9, “Chinese Elements in South Korean New Wuxia Novels: A Case Study of *Volcano Returns*,” the editor turns attention to South Korean online novel creation. Through a detailed analysis of New Martial Arts Fiction (Sinmuhyeop) — a South Korean online genre — and the transformation of its Chinese elements, the editor demonstrates two things. First, a broad-minded, globally oriented perspective rooted in China and a keen comparative literary vision. Second, a direct engagement with the objective reality of intensifying competition and deepening interaction in the global online literature market. The appendix includes an interview with Professor Michel Hockx, a renowned Dutch sinologist. The interview is titled “The Origins of Chinese Online Literature and Its Canonization.” It offers a valuable cross-cultural perspective for understanding Chinese online literature. Professor Hockx excels at examining Chinese online literature within a globalized context. He astutely notes: “The truly distinctive feature of internet literature in Mainland China (in my view) is not the phenomenon itself, but the academic evaluation of this phenomenon, as well as its business model” (Wang & Hockx, 2022, p.87).

In contrast, similar creative works abroad are often “amateur” and “non-commercial.” This sharp contrast provides a dual insight for research. One insight is that we must guard against potential “Western-centrism” presuppositions. We need to explore how China’s unique cultural industry mechanisms—such as the VIP paid subscription system and the vast IP full-industry-chain development system—have profoundly shaped online literature’s content and

[a] Guan, Z.X. (2018, March 5). *Tang Jia San Shao: Chinese Online Literature May Become a Cultural Phenomenon Surpassing Hollywood Films*. China News Service. <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/cul/shipin/cns/2018/03-05/news759254.shtml>

development. Another insight is that we must not absolutize local experiences. Instead, we should actively engage in transnational comparative studies. For example, compare China's online serialized paid model (e.g., Qidian Chinese Network) with the traditional publishing model of popular fiction like Mills & Boon in the UK. This will reveal the diversity and multiple pathways of literary development in the digital age.

Conclusion

Chinese online genre literature has grown and flourished by riding the powerful wave of the digital revolution. It reflects both the crystallization of the interplay between technological revolution and cultural innovation, and a microcosm of our era—one where intensified competition and shared aspirations for co-construction coexist in the global digital cultural sphere. Overall, the book *Transcending Digital Civilization* affirms, at a theoretical level, the ontological significance of online literature as “digital literature.” It makes it clear that its legitimacy does not rest on conforming to past, traditional literary criteria. Rather, it lies in the profound literary paradigm shift that online literature has sparked as a boundary-crossing force in the digital age. At the same time, by systematically tracing its sweeping international dissemination, the book highlights the unique value and immense potential of Chinese online genre literature. This potential serves to enhance national cultural soft power and to promote cross-civilizational dialogue. Most importantly, the book demonstrates a broad global vision and a comparative perspective.

Now, China's online literature faces competitive pressure and challenges from emerging markets like South Korea and Japan. Its future development must build on the steadfast preservation of its unique domestic strengths. Meanwhile, it should embrace a more open and inclusive attitude. This means actively promoting cross-border, cross-cultural genre fusion and the co-construction of theoretical discourse. The digital cultural criticism framework adopted in this book also offers profound insights. Future-oriented research must urgently bridge the generational gap in lived experience. It must strive to construct a critical paradigm suited to the new forms of digital civilization. Furthermore, research should consciously align itself with the strategic vision of “Digital China.” It needs to explore new pathways for the deep mutual shaping and reciprocal empowerment between online literature and digital civilization. The ultimate goal is to transform “Chinese stories”—which carry the essence of Chinese culture—into a “lingua franca” within the shared global digital cultural landscape. In this way, we can continuously infuse the grand construction of a community with a shared future for mankind with indispensable literary warmth and profound spiritual strength.

Notes

- ① In December 2015, President Xi Jinping first proposed the concept of “Digital China” at the opening ceremony of the Second World Internet Conference. In October 2017, the report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly called for building a cyber power, a Digital China, and a smart society, marking the first time “Digital

China” was included in the Party’s programmatic documents. In February 2023, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the *Overall Plan for the Construction of Digital China*, outlining the comprehensive framework for building Digital China in the new era. This plan clarifies the timeline, roadmap, and tasks for the initiative, serving as a crucial action plan for China’s transition from a major digital nation to a digital powerhouse.

- ② The *Overall Plan for the Construction of Digital China* outlines the “2522” framework for the development of Digital China. The “5” represents the deep integration of digital technology with the “five-in-one” (economy, politics, culture, society, and ecological civilization). The five priorities are: expanding the digital economy, developing efficient digital government services, fostering a confident digital culture, building an inclusive digital society, and constructing a green digital ecological civilization.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ORCID

Zhao Jiaqi ^{ID} <http://orcid.org/0009-0006-4597-1056>

Wang Xiaoying ^{ID} <http://orcid.org/0009-0009-6632-1644>

References

- Bai, Q.P. (2024, January 4). *Meeting the People's Ever-Growing Needs for a Better Life by Vigorously Enhancing the Capacity of Digital Cultural Services*. People’s Daily Online. http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2024-01/04/nw.D110000renmrb_20240104_1-09.htm
- Chang, F.Z. (2018). “A Study on the Typology of Online Literature.” *Shanghai C-culture*(06)47-58+124+126.
- China Writers Association Network Literature Center. (2025, June 30). *2024 China Online Literature Blue Book*. Literary Gazette. <http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/n1/2025/0630/c404023-40511500.html>
- Chinese Society of Administrative System Reform. (2025). *Digital China Strategy*. CITIC Publishing Group.
- Guan, Z.X. (2018, March 5). *Tang Jia San Shao: Chinese Online Literature May Become a Cultural Phenomenon Surpassing Hollywood Films*. China News Service. <https://www.chinane ws.com.cn/cul/shipin/cns/2018/03-05/news759254.shtml>
- Wang, Q.T. (2023). *Digital Civilization*. China Social Sciences Press.
- Wang, W.B. & Hockx, M. (2022). “The Origins and Canonization of Chinese On-line Literature.” *Yangtze River Academic* (04):86-96. <https://doi.org/10.19866/j.cnki.cjxs.2022.04.010>.
- Wu, C.Q. (Ed.). (2025). *Transcending Digital Civilization: A Tutorial on the Inter-national Dissemination of Chinese Online Genre Literature*. World Publishing Guangdong Corporation.