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CHINESE-LANGUAGE INTERNET LITERATURE IN THAILAND: CHANGES

AND CONTINUITIES OF READERSHIP, ONLINE COMMUNITIES,

ADAPTATIONS AND CENSORSHIP

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Chinese-language Internet Literature in Thailand: Changes and continuities of

readership, online communities, adaptations and censorship

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

Doctoral of Philosophy

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Abstract

Chinese-language Internet Literature (CIL) has gradually gained reception outside greater China since the mid-2000s, especially in Southeast Asia. Previous research has concentrated on the global phenomenon of CIL in English-speaking countries. Many scholars have conducted research on English-language translation platforms— i.e., Wuxiaworld.com and GravityTales.com—thus, a study of CIL in Southeast Asia has been neglected in the scholarship on Chinese popular culture. This thesis is a preliminary study of the current situations and flows of media from mainland China to Southeast Asia (i.e., Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand). This research applies digital ethnography, in-depth interview methods, and case-study approaches, along with coding scheme and content analysis methods. Data were collected from web analytic tools such as SimilarWeb.com, the National Library of Thailand, CIL translation platforms, social media platforms, and discussion forums. The first chapter of this thesis examines continuities and changes in CIL and readership in Thailand as well as Singapore and Malaysia. The second chapter investigates three types of online community related to CIL: translation communities, writing communities, and fan communities. The third chapter explores the commercialisation and adaptation of CIL in Thailand. The fourth chapter discusses the circumvention of censorship and the subject of Chinese "Boys' Love" novels in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. This study hopes to raise awareness of the importance of popular cultural products from mainland China in Southeast Asia and to suggest alternative perspectives to contemporary cultural flows within countries in the Global South.

Keywords: Chinese-language Internet Literature, Southeast Asia, online fiction, Chinese popular culture.

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Introduction

"The rise of the Internet has completed the merger between literature,

entertainment and profit that began in the early 1990s, providing a direct

platform for publicising books through adverts, interviews, author blogs

and videos."

– Julia Lovell (2012, p. 11)

Background

Chinese-language Internet Literature (CIL) has been read by foreigners outside

greater China since the early 2000s. The rise of CIL in the non-Sinophone world is

evidenced by the number of visits to CIL translation platforms from outside mainland

China, while around 400,000 users visit Wuxiaworld.com daily. However, scant

research has addressed the emerging trend of CIL in Southeast Asia, focusing mainly

on the cultural flow from China to the West. Many studies examined the acceptance

and promotion of Chinese culture in the West fostered through English-language

translation websites for CIL such as Wuxiaworld.com and Gravitytales.com since

most CIL readers on these platforms are English speakers.

The popularity of CIL in Southeast Asia has grown significantly from the

mid-2010s, with numerous CIL novels translated into English, Thai and Vietnamese

to attract specific consumers (Mei, 2017). CIL novels such as *Nirvana in Fire*

(Chinese title: 瑯琊榜) and *Ever Night* (Chinese title: 將夜) were in high demand in

book stores across Southeast Asia (PRNewswire, 2019). Following increased demand

for CIL in Thailand, Thai publishers convened a meeting in 2017 to determine the

best response to the mushrooming appeal of translated CIL novels ("Zhongguo

wangluo wenxue guoji", 2017). Some, 33,000 daily visits to Wuxiaworld.com are made by Southeast Asian users, while Webnovel.com receives around 34,000 Southeast Asian hits per day. Furthermore, daily, about 380,000 users visit Thai-language translation sites for CIL such as Tunwalai.com and Fictionlog.co. The similar cultural backgrounds between China and Southeast Asia promote CIL export. Thailand was one of the first countries in Southeast Asia to import CIL novels—particularly historical and romance genres—starting in early 2005 (iResearch, 2019).

CIL enterprises have recognised the importance of the Southeast Asian market. China's largest online literature company, China Literature Group (Yue Wen Group), signed a joint-venture contract with Thailand's leading e-book firm, Ookbee, in 2017 (Balea, 2017). Under the terms of this joint venture, all licensed CIL novels were made available in the Thai language on Fictionlog.co and Tunwalai.com (Balea, 2017). Furthermore, Qidian International—a subunit of China Literature Group—seized the opportunity to expand its CIL revenue by launching Webnovel.com in 2017. This provides translations of online novels from Qidian.com (Jing, 2017; Mei, 2017; Meng, 2017). China Literature Group also announced a collaboration with Singapore Telecommunications Limited (Singtel) in June 2019, with the two parties working together to produce content, licensing and distribution, marketing and promotional activities and digital payment services (PRNewswire, 2019). This cooperation enabled Singtel users to subscribe to Webnovel.com, the English-language translation platform of Qidian.com, via a mobile payment application called Dash (He, 2019; PRNewswire, 2019).

This study mainly focuses on CIL in Thailand, with supplemental research on CIL in Malaysia and Singapore. Thailand has the highest consumption of CIL among the three countries with the largest CIL reader population. Between October and December 2019, Thai readers paid 3.12 million visits to seven English-language CIL

translation websites, Malaysian readers visited 2.68 million times and Singaporean readers made 1.94 million visits (see Table 4). Moreover, Thais are familiar with Chinese literature because secondary school students study Thai prose poetry as the translation of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. For example, *The Battle of Red Cliff* (Chinese title: 赤壁之战) was included in the 1961 Secondary 3 Thai language textbook and *Besieged In Tushan, Guan Yu Makes Three Conditions* (Chinese title: 屯土山关公约三事) was included in the Secondary 6 Thai language textbook. However, CIL in Singapore and Malaysia should not be neglected because many ethnic Chinese who are proficient in speaking and reading Chinese reside in these two countries.

The prevalence of CIL in Southeast Asia correlates with the ethnic Chinese population in each country. The number of Chinese people living abroad is estimated at 28 million, with most located in Southeast Asia (Minority Rights & Minority Rights Group, 1992). However, due to the assimilation process in some countries such as Thailand and Indonesia, many ethnic Chinese might not be counted as such in the census (DeBernardi, 1993). A 2011 report by Thailand's National Statistical Office recorded 8.94 million Thais of Chinese descent (NSO, 2011). Ethnic Chinese in Malaysia total about 6.69 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018), with almost 3 million in Singapore (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2018). Singapore is the only Southeast Asian nation where ethnic Chinese people are in the majority, accounting for more than 53% of the total population (Poston & Wong, 2016). Malaysia is also an Islamic state and ethnic Chinese people are in the minority. To preserve their customs and language, Malaysian Chinese parents often send their children to independent schools where Chinese is a medium of instruction; therefore, ethnic Chinese people in Malaysia are literate in Chinese. Singapore has the highest proportion of ethnic Chinese people but the government places importance on

English-language education, thus, Singaporean Chinese students take every subject in English at the expense of their mother tongue. Cavallaro and Ng (2014) noted a rapid increase in English speaking at home in the Chinese community in Singapore, including CIL readers in Singapore. However, the majority of people of Chinese descent in Thailand are not proficient in Chinese and most are consumers of CIL translated from Chinese or English into Thai, with very few as translators.

My research interest was kindled from observations of the number of "frequent-visit users" on ten major CIL websites regularly visited by Malaysians, Singaporeans and Thais. In Malaysia, ethnic Chinese users can be readers, writers and translators. Chinese literacy is moderately high among Malaysian-Chinese because there are 60 Chinese-language independent schools nationwide where students can learn every subject in Mandarin (Lim, 2017). These students usually speak Mandarin or other Chinese dialects at home and are fluent in Chinese. Data collected on 13 November 2018 via VisitorDetective.com showed 5,000 visits daily from Malaysian users to the top ten CIL sites. eManyan.com, a Chinese-language website for online novels was founded by Luo Shijun, a Malaysian-Chinese (Liu, Y., 2017). In Singapore, ethnic Chinese users are both translators and readers but many Singaporeans prefer reading CIL in English than in Chinese. Data collected on 13 November 2018 via VisitorDetective.com indicated that 17,000 Singaporean users visited English-language CIL translation sites daily, while less than 1,000 visited Chinese-language CIL websites.

Aims, Objectives, and Research Questions

The topic of CIL is worth exploring as an example of "media flow" from China into Southeast Asia. The four aims and objectives of this thesis were first to investigate how changes and continuities in Chinese popular fiction—such as Jin Yong's and Gu Long's martial arts novels—have impacted the circulation and popularity of CIL in

Southeast Asia by discovering which elements in Chinese popular fiction during 1950–1960 gave rise to the spread of CIL during the past two decades. The second was to examine the activities and roles of Internet users in three different CIL online communities as translation communities, writing communities and fan communities. The third was to explore the commercialisation of CIL, including CIL translation platforms and CIL adaptations. The sizable market for and readership of CIL in Southeast Asia has led several CIL translation and adaptation platforms to adopt a "freemium" business model. The fourth and final aim of this thesis was to investigate censorship regulations and discover how CIL novels that are prohibited in mainland China are circulated and distributed in Southeast Asia. China has stringent censorship and numerous authors in the "Boys' Love" genre have circumvented this restriction by publishing their novels in Taiwan or Hong Kong, generating a new flow of CIL publications into Southeast Asia. This study provides an in-depth understanding of the current situation of CIL in Southeast Asia through investigating these aspects.

This research answers four research questions. Firstly, which elements of CIL are most appreciated by Thai readers and which facets allow Thai and Southeast Asian readers to best relate to these novels? Secondly, how and why has the consumption of CIL in Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia grown and how do CIL online communities establish new forms of marketing? Thirdly, which business models do CIL translation platforms use and are they similar? CIL adaptations are one form of commercialisation, so how do these adaptations promote original literature? Fourthly, what CIL content is prohibited in mainland China and Southeast Asia and how do CIL writers and readers circumvent censorship?

Literature Review

The influx of Chinese literature into Southeast Asia coincided with the flood of Chinese immigrants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During

the last century, Chinese literature has flourished and declined as a result of various historical and political events in Southeast Asia. Currently, it is thriving. This review is divided into four parts as Chinese literature and Chinese-language Internet Literature (CIL), CIL translations and online communities, CIL commercialisation and the censorship of CIL that are discussed in more detail below.

Chinese Literature and Chinese-language Internet Literature (CIL)

The rapid growth of the newspaper industry from the 1920s to the 1940s provided a platform to introduce Chinese literature into Southeast Asia. Most previous research (e.g. Carstens, 1988; Chanmuang, 2006; Nian, 1993; Srisinthon, 2017; Suksai, 2011) focused on how newspapers presented a means of transmitting Chinese literature throughout Southeast Asia.

The History of Chinese Literature in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Carstens (1988) highlighted that the major Chinese-language publications in Singapore and Malaysia before World War II were newspapers (p. 75). Similarly, Nian (1993) found that the development of Chinese-language literature in Malaysia and Singapore between 1919 and 1942 strongly correlated with the influx of Chinese-language newspapers and magazines, while Carstens stated that Chinese publication enterprises in Malaysia and Singapore were often short-lived because of lack of funding and political issues (p. 79). By contrast, Chinese literature flourished in Thailand during the 1920s and the 1930s. Chanmuang (2006) discussed the rapid increase in serialisations of Chinese martial arts novels in Thai newspapers between 1922 and 1932. Sales volumes indicated the popularity of Chinese fiction during this decade (Chanmuang, 2006). Similarly, Srisinthon (2017) reported that Chinese literature was introduced into Southeast Asia through three channels as Chinese schools, Chinese newspapers and storytelling (p. 129), while Suksai (2011) discovered that translations of Chinese literature blossomed in newspapers from

1921 to 1932 but standards were poor since the translators were incentivised to produce copy as quickly as possible and many translations lacked aesthetic quality (p. 159). The core medium of Chinese literature transmission during the 1920s to the 1940s was through newspaper print.

Before the spread of Chinese fiction via newspapers, the central purpose of Chinese-language writing in Southeast Asia was not for entertainment. Nian (1993) highlighted that Chinese publications in Malaysia and Singapore between 1919 and 1942 were mainly associated with politics, particularly anti-Japanese sentiments and reflections of reality and social issues. Likewise, Suksai (2010) reported that Chinese literature was used as reference material for the arts of war during the reigns of kings Rama I (1737-1809) and Rama II (1809-1824) (p. 213), while the purpose of Chinese literature translation changed during the reigns of kings Rama V (1868-1910) and Rama VI (1910-1925) to become mainly for entertainment and educational purposes (p. 232).

After a decline during World War II, Chinese literature became popular again in the 1950s. Srisinthon (2017) highlighted that from 1950 to 1970 Chinese *wuxia* (martial arts) and fantasy fiction from Hong Kong and Taiwan gained popularity among Malaysian, Singaporean and other Southeast Asian readers because publications from mainland China were banned in the region (p. 144). Likewise, Suksai (2011) reported that Chinese martial arts novels—especially written by Jin Yong—became widely accepted again after the end of World War II as Thai readers yearned for entertainment and leisure (p. 172). Li (2010) found that translations of Chinese martial arts novels between 1960 and 1970 rapidly increased because of considerable demand by Thai readers. Numerous publications by Hong Kong and Taiwanese writers (e.g. Liang Yusheng, Jin Long, Gu Long, Huang Yi and Chen Qingyun) were translated into Thai (p. 66), while Huang (2014) discovered that three

titles by Jin Yong—*A Deadly Secret* (Chinese title: 連城訣), *Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils* (Chinese title: 天龍八部) and *The Deer and the Cauldron* (Chinese title: 鹿鼎記)—were serialised in *Southeast Asian Weekly* and *Nanyang Siang Pau* in Singapore between 1963 and 1972 (pp. 7-8). Ma (2019) also reported that during the Cold War period, Gu Long's martial arts novels were distributed through newspapers and magazines in Southeast Asia, particularly in Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam (p. 67). However, Chinese fiction in Thailand experienced another recession between 1982 and 2000 because Jin Yong ceased writing and Gu Long passed away, with few new novels on the market (Chanmuang, 2006). After 18 years of decline, Chinese-language fiction began to increase in 2000 when Huang Yi's time-travelling novel, *The Chronicles of Finding Qin* (Chinese title: 尋秦記) was published and admired by many Thai readers (Chanmuang, 2006).

The evidence presented suggested that Chinese literature was originally circulated in newspapers and magazines in Southeast Asia. The purpose of Chinese literature in Southeast Asia was initially for dissemination of military tactics and discussion of political subjects but eventually became recreational reading. Chinese martial arts fiction also attracted increasing interest in Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand and Singapore. The existing scholarly literature indicated the continuity of Chinese popular literature from Taiwan and Hong Kong in Southeast Asia through authors such as Jin Yong and Gu Long. However, with the advent of the digital era, the medium or channel for distributing Chinese-language popular fiction moved from newspapers and printed books to online platforms. As a result, literature from mainland China has now become more widely accepted in Southeast Asia. This research mainly focuses on the consumption of CIL in Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia. I argue that the popularity of CIL in Thailand has resulted from the continuity of Chinese popular literature.

Chinese-language Internet Literature (CIL) is a product of the new media available in the Internet era. Lovell (2012) defined internet literature as writings published on the internet before appearing in print (p. 13). Correspondingly, internet literature refers to all online literature published in Chinese as CIL, regardless of country of origin (Gong and Tse, 2012). However, the origins of CIL can be traced back not to mainland China but to the United States. Hockx (2015) discovered that the early Chinese web-serial novels were created on the bulletin-board system by a Taiwanese graduate student, Cai Zhiheng in the United States in 1998. His novel, *The First Intimate Contact* (Chinese title: 第一次的親密接觸), received considerable attention from mainland Chinese readers. Hockx (2015) noted that online writings began around the 2000s in mainland China.

Although still relatively new compared to other literary industries in China, the rise in importance of CIL has led to fundamental changes in Chinese culture that are evident in everyday speech (Zhuoma, 2018). CIL gained increasing attention in the Greater China Region (China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan) and Singapore after the publication of the seminal work *The First Intimate Contact* by Cai Zhiheng in 1998. After initial popularity on the Internet, *The First Intimate Contact* was published in printed version and also adapted into a film in 2000. The huge success of *The First Intimate Contact* motivated other authors to publish original literature via Internet communities and attracted the interest of the general public to the growing volume of CIL (Tse & Gong, 2012).

In *Internet Literature in China*, Michel Hockx (2015) discussed the history of Chinese Internet literature since the late 1980s and investigated Rongshu Xia (*Under the Banyan Tree*), the earliest literary space in China. Hockx (2015) explored diverse Internet literature genres including erotic fiction and examined one of China's largest CIL platforms, Qidian (Starting Point). His book also covered other aspects of CIL

(i.e., business model, author-reader interaction and censorship). Michel Hockx's *Internet Literature in China* provided insightful information as the methodological foundation for this doctoral thesis.

Several studies (e.g. Ji, 2011; Liu, 2006; Lovell, 2012) addressed how the Internet and other technologies have altered the nature of writing, reading and publication of Chinese literature in the digital era. Ji (2011) found that online writing techniques between 2003 and 2004 such as illusion, transcendence and imagination made online literature different from the printed copy (p. 167). One of the features of online literature is freedom of writing. CIL writers are not restricted to traditional formats and styles; they can write in their own way and explore new styles of writing (Ji, 2011). However, Liu (2006) argued that CIL presented a huge challenge for traditional Chinese writers because readers did not have to wait for printed literature and could simply access literature on the Internet with one click. Similarly, Lovell (2012) pointed out that media channels in China have become more commercialised since the 1980s, characterised by money-making agendas of younger authors such as Guo Jingming and Han Han.

The Internet has enabled a new form of Chinese literature but the quality of CIL is still questionable. According to Liu (2006), the large quantity of online literature has resulted in reduced quality compared to the wording and style of printed copy, while Li (2010, as cited in Lovell 2012) stated that "the rise of the Internet gave any ordinary person power over production – it did away with unilateral literary values." (p. 10). However, Inwood (2016) argued that the quality of CIL could be improved by the creation of China's Internet Literature University, the first of its kind. This online literature university offers massive open online courses (MOOCs) taught by famous writers; the president is the renowned author, Mo Yan.

What makes CIL different from printed Chinese literature is the backgrounds of the authors, the genres involved and the models of commercialisation. Gong and Tse (2012) found that while traditional print authors were and are professional writers, CIL authors are amateurs who attempt to express their ideas through CIL. These non-professional writers create new stories based on their perspectives, personal backgrounds and imagination. Moreover, Li (2015) discovered that CIL developed a reader-centred model that was divergent from printed literature. Several studies have examined the changes in Chinese literature as it became widely disseminated through the Internet, especially in the areas of writing style and quality.

Genres of Chinese Internet literature. Alternate history, modern fantasy and *xianxia* in particular are three well-known genres in CIL but not in traditional Chinese literature. The popularity of historical simulation games such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* as well as the *Taikou Risshiden* series in the Greater China region has promoted the growth of the alternate history genre in Chinese Internet fiction. In most Chinese Internet alternate history fiction novels, the point of divergence is the protagonists' appearance at a specific point in history rather than a change in the outcome of a specific historical event, according to the influence of individual roles in history in these types of games. Through their efforts, the protagonists, armed with knowledge of history, society and/or technology alter the course of history (Tse & Gong, 2012).

One example of Chinese Internet alternate history fiction is Ah Yue's *New Song*, published in 2005. The protagonist is a History Master student who also appeared in the Song Dynasty. He applies his knowledge of history, culture and society to establish a school of thought and becomes the royal family's favourite statesman (Tse & Gong, 2012).

The Commercialisation of CIL

Numerous published studies (e.g. Gong & Tse, 2012; Li, 2015; Shi, 2017) have described the commercial models of CIL platforms in China and overseas. Gong and Tse (2012) outlined a member-driven online business model that has been utilised by commercial CIL communities. A pay-for-content model or member-only VIP section is adopted in these commercial CIL communities. Members can read several chapters for free but for the newest chapters they have to subscribe on a pay-per-view basis (Gong & Tse, 2012). In the same vein, Li (2015) found that CIL in China was highly commercialised, with content providers adopting both free and paid business models to attract membership. Ren and Montgomery (2012) pointed out that Qidian.com adopts a "freemium" business model that allows users to read several free chapters before paying membership subscription fees. In the translation community context, Shi (2017) reported that Wuxiaworld.com adopts a model of "serialisation and crowdsourcing." Serialisation refers to how translators set the number of new chapters that are released or updated each week, while crowdsourcing is a fundraising method in which translators set the amount of money that they want to earn. After accumulating this funding from several donors they then release new chapters (Shi, 2017). Hsieh (2016) discovered that CIL marketplaces such as Qidian.com encourage Internet users to work for them as writers through the introduction of a ranking system that is broken down into tiers of "contract writers, advanced writers and platinum writers". Mid-level contract writers can earn 50,000 to 100,000 yuan annually, while platinum writers can make more than 10 million yuan (Hsieh, 2016).

The existing literature on CIL business models is extensive and focuses particularly on the pay-to-read and membership subscription models. CIL platforms like Qidian.com also adopt user-generated content methods to enable users to work

for them. This research investigated the influences of these commercial models on CIL translation communities in Thailand.

The Translation of CIL and its Online Communities

The reception of CIL has grown from translation into foreign languages. Nowadays, foreigners who live in China and read Chinese Internet literature have become commonplace. Chinese Internet literature has also spread worldwide. In March 2017, several articles reported that an American man read the Chinese Internet literature, *Coiling Dragon*, to battle his drug addiction. In December 2014, a Chinese-American, Lai Jingping, launched Wuxiaworld as a platform for publishing Internet literature. This platform has catapulted Chinese Internet writing to a new level of internationalisation. The website Wuxiaworld rose swiftly to position 954 on Alexa (as of April 7, 2017), with a daily average of 979,200 visits and 14.5 million daily page views. Around one third of all visitors are from the United States with the remaining readers hailing from many countries including India, Canada, Brazil, Australia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Wuxiaworld has attracted the interest of domestic firms to the phenomenon of the international spread of Chinese Internet literature. Simultaneously, numerous Chinese Internet literary translation sites have emerged (Zhuoma, 2018).

Zhuoma (2018) conducted research on how the cultural identity of Chinese Internet Literature readers influenced consumer behaviour, using a quantitative method and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression to test her hypotheses (p. 15). Results revealed a significant relationship between Thai readers' behaviours and their cultural identity, with family background a key factor that influenced cultural identity (p. 19). Zhuoma (2018) stated, "culture identity impacts consumer behaviour on Chinese Internet Literature and also influences consumer motivation." (p. 19).

The Reception of CIL Outside Mainland China. To date, a number of studies (e.g. Chan, 2017; Hsieh, 2016; Shi, 2017) have explored the translation of CIL in the English-speaking world. Shi (2017) conducted research on the translation mode on Wuxiaworld.com and found that 17 full-time translators were foreigners. Of these, 5 were Chinese-Americans and 3 were Singaporeans and they all lived in English-speaking countries. Shi (2017) also noted that while state-sponsored projects to translate Chinese classics rarely reached the mainstream outside China, CIL novels were spontaneously appreciated in foreign countries. Ji and Li (2017) also studied CIL in a global context through Wuxiaworld.com and Gravitytales.com. They concluded that if CIL was further industrialised it had the potential to compete with other popular culture superpowers like Hollywood, Japanese animation and Korean television, thereby acting as a representative of China's soft power. Similarly, by investigating Wuxiaworld.com, Wang, L. (2018) explored the possibility of disseminating Chinese online literature outside China. He concluded that CIL could quickly infiltrate the overseas market and further global understanding of Chinese culture by attracting foreign readers with popular, entertaining and universal content. Wang (2017) conducted a study on the consumption of *xuanhuan* (mysterious fantasy) novels on Wuxiaworld.com and concluded that mysterious fantasy novels have not yet found complete acceptance among Westerners as they are solely pleasure-oriented. Likewise, Chan (2017) concluded that fan translation is a form of cultural product development from the exchange of cultural goods.

These existing studies on online translation communities of CIL are relevant to this research, with a consistent reliance on case studies drawn from Wuxiaworld.com and GravityTales.com. Previous research concentrated on Western audiences and failed to investigate self-organised and non-professional individuals

who translate and publish literature on their web pages, blogs, discussion forums and Facebook pages. Many fan translations circulate on these platforms in Thailand.

The Roles of Internet Communities in the Evolution of CIL. Internet communities play an important role in the evolution of products. Some organisations collect ideas from Internet communities to develop new products (Füller et al., 2006, 2007). Rather than one-off operations, most CIL stories are created in a serial manner. Generally, the process of CIL evolution can be broken down into three steps as concept generation, publication and feedback collection (Tse & Gong, 2012). For concept generation, ideas for stories are produced. The personal expertise and experience of the writers as well as outside influences from classical and/or other CIL literature are used to generate most storyline concepts. For instance, some CIL novels are influenced by classical literature. Yoshiki Tanaka's *Legend of the Galactic Heroes*, a Japanese science fiction novel series ran from 1982 to 1987. Space fleet structures and space battle scenarios in CIL intimately simulated those described in *Legend of the Galactic Heroes*. In some circumstances, feedback from members of the internet communities is utilised to evolve new ideas. For instance, the protagonist of *Story of Eastern Cloud and Dream* was presented as a boy because of previous criticism received from *Tales of the Wind* (Tse & Gong, 2012).

Author-reader interaction in CIL communities. Another topic that should be addressed is the relationship between authors and readers in online fiction communities. To date, several studies (e.g. Liu, 2006; Tse & Gong, 2012; Shi, 2017) have indicated the dynamism of author-reader interrelation in CIL and CIL translation communities. Liu (2006) found that author-reader interaction was a key factor differentiating online literature from traditional printed copy. This view was supported by Skains (2010) who suggested that a two-way discourse between author and reader was found in CIL communities, while author-reader interactions on

forums have initiated the creation of stories, online games and fan fiction. Moreover, CIL international readers expect writers to update their copy on a regular basis. Anticipation by readers for the frequency of updates in various nations is different. Readers in China-based Internet forums expect updates once a day or possibly several times. Readers in Hong Kong and Taiwanese Internet communities on the other hand have lower expectations about the regularity of the updates. Therefore, the inability to provide regular updates might upset some readers, who then migrate to other authors (Tse & Gong, 2012). Similarly, Shi (2017) noted that CIL communities like Wuxiaworld.com developed from online forums. The reader-response relationship between translator and reader was well-established, giving readers a strong sense of participation. In the same vein, Tian and Adorjan (2016) concluded that CIL readers not only engaged in reading novels but also interacted with writers in three ways. First, readers always left feedback, second, readers financially supported writers via platform payment methods and third, both writers and readers became involved in a routine of giving and taking. The writers usually updated their novels daily or weekly and gradually developed a close relationship with their readers through positive feedback.

Feng and Literat (2017) investigated how the conventional connection between writers and their readers is being challenged and reinvented through new aspects of Chinese Internet literature. They found that by linking Internet spaces focusing on social interaction, writers and readers had more opportunities to communicate directly. Platform design was considered to be crucial to allow communication between users and writers and thereby determine the types and degrees of reader engagement in the creative process. A significant study result was that involvement in both the consumption and production of Chinese Internet literature was a social activity. Interaction between the writers and readers became

more direct and bi-directional as a result of acquiring critical degrees of social media assistance. The writers and readers, in particular, realised that social media platforms performed several important purposes within the context of CIL, enabling writers to update their audience on both professional and personal matters. Moreover, interaction allowed the readers to engage in informal dialogue with their favourite writers, fostering a two-way communication channel while developing reader communities around beloved writers, subjects and genres. Outstanding features of these social media platforms can be seen in the link between writers and readers and also in the connection among the readers. Feng and Literat (2017) demonstrated that writers had vibrant fan groups; fandom in this context was characterised by strong social relationships and active creative outputs, which led to a vast corpus of derivative works, frequently created collaboratively. However, Tian and Adorjan (2016) argued that in this online social interaction, readers seemingly praised or worshipped writers. These studies allowed a better understanding of writer-reader interaction that was utilised to conduct this study on translator-reader interaction in CIL translation communities in Southeast Asia. CIL and social media platforms allowed local translators to interact with local readers.

Copyright violation in CIL online communities. The mushrooming circulation of CIL has broadened the readership but also led to increased copyright violations. CIL has highlighted copyright and piracy issues for online publishing companies. Ren and Montgomery (2012) found that VIP sections were exported to profit-making websites that neglected copyright. These pirated websites created huge losses for authorised companies (although piracy can help to increase the popularity and readership of CIL). To prevent such violations, Hickey (2015) suggested that CIL providers should adopt digital fingerprinting to detect copyright and shut down pirate websites. Shengda Group is currently the only company that uses a digital

fingerprinting system. Piracy is often linked to commercial models. Choi and Perez (2007) argued that online pirates had the potential to advance the formation of new markets because communities founded on the unauthorised use of patented materials could transform into consumer bases of legitimate businesses.

Ren and Montgomery (2012) and Hickey (2015) raised concerns over copyright and piracy issues but neither suggested any path for their resolution. I agree with Ren and Montgomery (2012) that piracy can expand the readership of CIL. Many profit-making CIL websites in Thailand produce translations without authorisation or a license for publishing but these websites also spread the popularity of CIL. Digital fingerprinting as discussed by Hickey (2015) is not used in Southeast Asia but each country has anti-copyright regulations and practices that are investigated in this thesis.

Censorship

The Chinese Government enforces censorship regulations related to two major Internet issues. Schell (2014) briefly defined "internet censorship" as when governments attempt to restrain citizens' usage of the internet and limit the flood of information and online activities. Censorship is regarded as a national security matter by governments, so freedoms of online media cannot be fully achieved (Schell, 2014). Hockx (2015) stated that in China illegal content largely refers to obscene materials such as erotic books and the disappearance of certain online media is also politically motivated.

However, further research on censorship in China, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand should be conducted to better understand the regulations and how CIL writers, translators and consumers cope with these issues. This study attempts to fill this research gap and comprehend the circumvention of censorship of Boy's Love CIL in Thailand as well as in Malaysia and Singapore.

Significance and Research Gap

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of media flow from mainland China to Southeast Asia in the digital era. Southeast Asians have enjoyed Chinese literary products and television dramas from Hong Kong and Taiwan since the 1950s. However, alternative forms of Chinese popular culture, particularly CIL and dramatic adaptations of CIL, have only been accessible by Southeast Asian consumers from the mid-2000s and only become widely accepted by local readers and publishers since the 2010s. Existing research on CIL outside greater China has focused on the quality of literature and consumption of CIL in the West. CIL usage in Southeast Asia is worth examining in both Chinese-speaking communities such as Malaysia and Singapore and non-Sinophone communities such as Thailand.

The spread of CIL in Southeast Asia has resulted in greater recognition of cultural products from mainland China. Pop cultures from Japan and South Korea had overshadowed Chinese pop culture for three decades before the escalation of CIL in the 2010s. Japan is famous for its visual cultures such as anime and manga, while Korean popular culture is known for its music, dance and pop idol industries. Popular culture from Japan and Korea reached Southeast Asia in the 1980s and 1990s respectively. Meanwhile, Chinese popular culture—CIL and web drama adaptations—has become more appealing to Southeast Asian fans since 2010. The growth of a CIL readership and market in Southeast Asia is a phenomenon worthy of detailed investigation. Moreover, CIL has influenced changes in consumption, production, commercialisation and regulation in Southeast Asia. This thesis investigates the intersection of digital cultural products from China with consumers in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand by focusing on subcultural, non-institutional self-organised forms of cultural contact and information circulation. Findings will benefit researchers in the field of Chinese popular culture in Southeast Asia as well

as offer new insights into research on Chinese popular cultural products and consumerism in the "Web 2.0" era.

Methodology

This study primarily utilises qualitative approaches to answer the research questions. Qualitative research is a hypernym for diverse research approaches and methods that aim to investigate and comprehend social phenomenon (Saldaña, 2011). According to Leavy (2017), "the values underlying qualitative research include the importance of people's subjective experiences and meaning-making processes and acquiring a depth of understanding" (p. 9). Qualitative research is often used to explain, explore or describe the nature of social life (Leavy, 2017). Qualitative data such as customs and beliefs are also descriptive in nature (Walliman, 2018); therefore, data can be collected from textual materials, websites and interview scripts that contain human experiences (Saldaña, 2011). This thesis adopts three traditions in qualitative research as digital ethnography, case study and online content analysis.

This thesis uses digital ethnography, a research approach that combines a traditional ethnographic method with social media practices. Adopting digital ethnography allows exploration to obtain insights from CIL readers and translators in Thailand as well as gain a better understanding of CIL online translation communities and communisation of CIL on several platforms. Ethnography refers to the observation of natural social life such as human interaction and behaviours that take place in communities. The process of ethnography often involves field research and written work (Reeves et al., 2008; Saldaña, 2011). Traditionally, ethnographic research methods were limited to anthropologists who conducted community studies through extensive field observations and data collection; however, nowadays, ethnographic research is widely adopted by multidisciplinary researchers to gain insights into cultures in different settings (Reeves et al., 2008). Digital ethnography

involves observing research participants through their online communities such as forums and websites, gathering information from interviews and conducting data analysis (Pink, 2016).

Moreover, this research also adopts case studies to gain insights into the flow of Chinese Boys' Love Internet novels in Southeast Asia. A case study is an in-depth study that aims to answer research questions using multiple sources (Gillham, 2000). Case studies are excellent models for focused study. As noted by Saldaña (2011), "the case study is valued as a unit that permits in-depth examination." (p. 8).

Content analysis and coding schemes are also used in this thesis to acquire an in-depth understanding of preferred genres among Thai readers examine, the relationship between genders and genres and grasp what CIL fans in Thailand frequently comment when discussing their favourite novels or CIL adaptations. To obtain information through content analysis, the units of analysis must first be identified and a recording system must be created that reveals the frequency of particular words or themes in the determined materials (Krippendorff, 2018; Leavy, 2017). Hence, this research applies the "coding scheme method" to identify the tendency and frequency of specific data. Coding is a method of analysing qualitative data that are associated with a word or phrase. The data can be collected from documents, field notes and Internet sites (Saldaña, 2013). Simply speaking, Saldaña (2013) defined coding as "the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis." (p. 5).

In this dissertation, data and sources were collected from CIL websites, discussion boards, Facebook pages, the National Library of Thailand, web analytics tools and through both in-person and online interviews.

Theoretical Framework and Thesis Structure

This thesis employs three major concepts. The first, as Baudrillard's "simulacra" is used to determine the connotations of the themes and core values in the novels that promote good reception of CIL among Thai and Southeast Asian readers, Chapter 1 analyses data, with the concept of "simulacra" as a basis for the overall analysis of CIL. The second concept as "logic of consumption" is adopted to analyse how Chinese martial arts novels assisted in the rise of CIL in Thailand and also analyse the demographics and preferences of CIL readers. The third concept, used to analyse the roles of Internet users in Thai CIL communities, is "produser" and "prosumer". In Chapter 2, the ideas of "produser" and "prosumer" are presented to explore how these groups of people have circulated the popularity of CIL and also promoted Chinese culture to readers in Thailand. Further explanations of each concept are given below:

Simulacra. In Baudrillard's view, the postmodern is the era that has been completely separated from the modern era with the emergence of new technologies. New technology helps in reproducing goods with no limits of cultural production, creating a society that is full of "simulacra" and "simulation". In the modern era, oil painting masterpieces were created even though the paintings were screened on postcards. The original work still remained valuable with fewer chances of imitation (Baudrillard, 1981, 1998). Baudrillard (1994) stated, "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real." (p. 2). To put it simply, there are no originals but only duplicates in the postmodern society. People in the postmodern society are now able to separate virtual simulation and reality. The endless circulation of signs and models has caused the truth to disperse and the world we live in has become a virtual reality.

Logic of consumption. Baudrillard viewed consumption as more than just a frenzy of luxurious pleasure, fulfilment, wealth or materialistic value, as objects under "sign value" (Baudrillard, 1998). He stated that "[t]he truth of consumption is that it is not a function of enjoyment but *a function of production* and, hence, like all material production it is not an individual function but *an immediately and totally collective one.*" (p. 78). Baudrillard also believed that consumers tend to consume something to express their social status, identities and styles (Keller, 1989; Baudrillard, 1998).

Moreover, Baudrillard suggested that commodity analysis has shifted from economic to cultural. The concrete product of culture is important in several processes including production, distribution and consumption of goods that are related to the limitations of each culture and society (Keller, 1989; Baudrillard, 1981, 1998). If a product is a symbol of culture, then it will be related to both users and consumers. If consumption is related to consumers from the cultural perspective, the goods are also responsible for upholding cultural norms. This idea by Baudrillard showed that consumption expansion has been spread by culture as an important aspect in the postmodernism concept which can eliminate discrimination between low and high cultures (Keller, 1989; Baudrillard, 1981, 1998).

Prosumer and Produser. Jenkins and Bruns (as cited in Bird, 2011) defined produser as "representing the merging of the producer and consumer in an interactive environment . . . widely embraced as representing an entirely new way of seeing the media 'audience'" (p. 502). Moreover, media sectors are getting more masterful at controlling "produsage"; platforms enforce "terms of service" on fans contributing online, thus, everything they post on these platforms instantly becomes an asset of the proprietary company (Bird, 2011). According to Bruns (2009), produsage refers to a paradigm that is in opposition to traditional modes of industrial production: user-

led content is constructed on the joint creation and prolongation of knowledge and information, which often takes place in massive communities; Wikipedia, for example. Again, the idea of produsage exists at the intersection of several developments (e.g. social software and Web 2.0) and other areas such as culture and commerce. Bruns (2009) pointed out that users cannot engage in feedback or development in the industrial production value chain. However, Toffler's notion of "prosumption" described the advent of the professional consumer, in which consumer feedback to the producer can create changes in production (Bruns, 2009). Here, the word "user" signifies the role of an active consumer who engages in creating his/her ideal media and network use (Bruns, 2009). Moreover, Bruns (2009) stated, "the produsage process itself is fundamentally built on the affordances of the technosocial framework of the networked environment, both then and here, especially on the harnessing of user communities that are made possible by their networking through many-to-many communications media." (p. 21).

This thesis comprises four chapters that answer the different research questions. Chapter 1 demonstrates the changes and continuities of Chinese popular fiction in Thailand. To determine 'which elements of CIL make Thai readers appreciate this form of literature and what makes Thai and Southeast Asian readers relate to these novels?', Baudrillard's concepts of "simulacra" and "logic of consumption" are employed. The concept of "orders of simulacra" is used to describe the sequence of steps in the development of a simulation and the relationships between simulacra and 'the real' (Keller, 1989). Baudrillard proposed a historical and phenomenological hypothesis of how simulacra came to dominate social life (Keller, 1989). The developments in this simulation are as follows:

1. During the feudal era, signs that came to represent reality were formed by a hierarchy of signs of social ranks (Keller, 1989). The sign system was

organised in a hierarchical manner and constrained by various obligations. Signs at this stage were not independent and did not interfere but reflected reality. Social position was deduced by the clothes worn.

2. The first order of simulacra is defined as the "counterfeit" stage. During the pre-modern era, signs were free from obligations and spread to a new group of bourgeois who dreamed of creating their own worlds; they began to create simulacra of objects (Keller, 1989). Artworks in this period mimic life and represent natural rights (Keller, 1989).

3. The second order of simulacra connected to the modern period of the Industrial Revolution where the distinction between representation and reality was destroyed by the proliferation of mass-produced copies of objects that transformed them into commodities (Keller, 1989). The ability of products to imitate reality allows them to replace the power of the prototype because the copies become "real" like the prototype or as true as the prototype.

4. The third order of simulacra refers to the twentieth century, when science and technology spawned a wide range of techniques that were used to create simulacra (Keller, 1989). According to Baudrillard (1994), the third order of simulacra is "...beyond true and false, beyond equivalences, beyond rational distinctions upon which the whole of the social and power depend." (p. 21).

Postmodern society is the era of modern technology that has led to the emergence of communication processes and communication guidance in the era of computer information. The idea of "simulacra" assists my thesis research argument to understand the wide spread of CIL in Thailand and Southeast Asia.

This thesis also utilises the concept of "logic of consumption" to conceive the reasons why Thai and Southeast Asian readers are fond of CIL. Baudrillard viewed consumption as an outward structure that suppresses and drives individuals to become a part of the consumption system, similar to the method used for communicating with each party (Keller, 1989; Baudrillard, 1998). Baudrillard also employed the concept of object consumption, called "Logic of Consumption", consisting of four patterns including:

1. The Functional Logic of Usage Values relates to the practical way of employing objects to use as appliances that can be utilised to meet physical needs (Baudrillard, 1981). For example, people consume salad for healthy living and fulfil hunger as the main four factors of life.

The Economical Logic of Exchange Values relates to a market logic that objects can be traded with other objects. When an object is classified as a commodity, its value and price increase (Baudrillard, 1981). For example, consumers pay higher prices for organic food because of the increased costs of production, staff wages, services, raw materials and suppliers.

2. The Logic of Sign Values is a differentiation or social status logic, which works on the differences of objects regarding the signal states (Baudrillard, 1981). The objective helps to represent the value that limited the exact amount of consumption as well as the indication of societal structure.

3. The Logic of Symbolic Exchange is the given logic that refers to the state in which an object is exchanged between one code and another. They are viewed as having "codes" that indicate the product picture and psychological effect rather than the usages of the products (Baudrillard, 1981). For instance, iPhone users are middle-class people who express

their social status through the commodity. Modern consumption creates more identity or expressive feelings to imitate differentiations in building personal identity. Such concepts occur at the individual level as well as relating to collective identity.

The readership of CIL in Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries is a continuation of the readership of Chinese popular fiction from Hong Kong and Taiwan in 1950-1970, which established a solid foundation for contemporary CIL consumption. Chinese martial arts novels were popular in Southeast Asia from the 1950s to the 1970s and stimulated the current popularity of CIL in the region. The influence of the renowned Chinese novelists Jin Yong and Gu Long can be found in the characteristics and values of CIL. As a result, CIL has gained recognition among Southeast Asian readers, especially Thai readers. The two main sections in Chapter 1 are 1) changes in readership and 2) the continuity between Chinese popular fiction in print and CIL. The first section includes a historical background of CIL in Southeast Asia, genre preference changes and the readership in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, while the section explores similar characteristics between CIL and Chinese martial arts fiction. *The Little Li Flying Dagger Series* written by Gu Long and *The King's Avatar* written by Butterfly Blue are used as comparative examples. To show the continuity of CIL in Thailand and Southeast Asia in Chapter 1, both primary and secondary sources are used to discover the history, demographics and genre preferences of Thai readers. Data were acquired from web analytics tools (SimilarWeb.com), CIL platforms and the National Library of Thailand, while coding schemes and data analysis methods were adopted to understand readership demographics and genre preferences.

Chapter 2 explores the roles of Internet users in CIL online communities in the Web 2.0 era. The ideas of "produser" and "online community" are adopted to

determine answers to 'how and why the consumption of CIL in Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia has grown and how CIL online communities establish new forms of consumption'. Bird (2011) noted that produser originated from "prosumer," a term invented by Toffler to characterise the transition from a passive consumer to one who might produce autochthonous products and services to themselves and others, while producing and consuming in accordance with their personal interests and knowledge. While most audiences might enjoy consuming produced materials, with some engaging in fan activities, only a handful became produsers (Bird, 2011).

Three sections are presented in this chapter as 1) translation communities, 2) writing communities and 3) fan communities. This chapter argues that Internet users take various roles in CIL online communities in Thailand that can increase cultural consumption. Within translation communities, three distinct types of translators— professional translators paraprofessional translators and amateur translators—are explored and the roles of translators in promoting cultural consumption, the process and problems of translations, as well as produser–reader interaction are discussed. Infringements of copyright that occur in CIL translation communities in Thailand are also examined. The second section presents the influence of CIL on writing communities in Malaysia and Thailand. This research aims to understand the roles of produsers and how CIL has inspired local writers to produce literature works by imitating CIL. Furthermore, Thai fan communities on Facebook and Pantip.com are examined to comprehend their roles and interactions and investigate the violation of copyright. Chapter 2 uses digital ethnographic approaches through online participant observation and interviews. Data were gathered from secondary sources, direct interviews (online and in person), online materials (e.g., Facebook and Pantip.com), case studies and online content analysis.

Chapter 3 investigates the commercialisation and adaptation of CIL in Thailand and Southeast Asia and attempts to determine the business models uses by CIL translation platforms and whether they are similar. CIL adaptations are one form of commercialisation; how do these adaptations promote original literature?'. This chapter argues that the commercialisation and dramatic adaptations of CIL are interconnected; they both boost the reach of CIL in the region as well as improve understanding of Chinese culture and society. This study explains the "freemium" business model that is extensively used by CIL platforms and assesses this commercial model through analysis of Webnovel.com (English translations) and Tunwalai.com (Thai translations). The next section introduces dramatic adaptations of CIL on video-streaming platforms. CIL has been utilised in numerous dramas and animations; this research focuses on commercial models and dramatic adaptations of CIL on WeTV.vip, a Chinese video-streaming platform provided by Tencent Video. In Chapter 3, data were collected from Webnovel.com, Tunwalai.com and WeTV.vip. Total numbers of visits to CIL translation platforms were sourced via the web analytic tool SimilarWeb.com to grasp the spread of CIL through commercialisation. Coding schemes and content analysis were also applied to comprehend the tendency of genres of drama adaptations on WeTV.vip.

Chapter 4 explores censorship in mainland China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand and assesses how mainland Chinese "Boys' Love" novelists circumvent regulations. This chapter seeks an answer to the following two questions: 1) 'What CIL content is prohibited in mainland China and Southeast Asia? and 2) If the content is strictly prohibited, how do CIL writers and readers circumvent censorship?'. A summary of the laws that censor material content in particular countries is presented to identify similarities in the definition of forbidden articles. The practice of self-censorship in Thailand is also discussed, with an examination of

how restricted materials are allowed to be published in Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand. The case study of Chinese Boys' Love novels is used to understand the influence of censorship and the flow of CIL in Southeast Asia. Data were gathered from online bookstores in Malaysia (popularonline.com.my and malaysia.kinokuniya.com), Singapore (kinokuniya.com.sg) and Thailand (thailand.kinokuniya.com).

Chapter 1: Readership of Chinese-language Internet Literature in Thailand and

Southeast Asia

"Online publishers can provide a larger number of works to a larger

number of people, increasing the choice for the consumer and the

likelihood that those novels which most appeal to this taste culture will be

discovered by the readership. This occurs because stories must compete for

the attention of the readership group, and this attention is most easily

attracted by acceding to the demands of the taste public that forms it."

– Alexander Lugg (2011, p. 134)

Introduction

In this chapter, I would like to argue that the popularity of CIL is a result of its

continuity with Chinese-language popular fiction from Hong Kong and Taiwan,

which found a readership in Southeast Asia between the 1950s and the 1970s. It will

also be argued however that the arrival of CIL has changed the readership and the

consumption of Chinese-language literature in Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia.

This chapter provides a historical background of Chinese-language literature in

Southeast Asia and discusses the changes and continuities of readership and

consumption in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. The following section examines

common characteristics between CIL and Chinese martial arts novels by comparing

Gu Long's *The Little Li Flying Dagger Series* with Butterfly Blue's online novel *The*

King's Avatar.

Chinese-language Internet Literature and Changes of Readership in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asian consumers have been familiar with Chinese-language culture and media for many decades. However, due to political tensions relating to communism between the 1950s and the 1980s, many books from mainland China were prohibited in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. Nonetheless, Chinese popular fiction from Hong Kong and Taiwan found a solid reception in Southeast Asia since the 1950s. After World War II, Southeast Asian readers became fond of martial arts fiction from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Notable writers between the 1950s and 1970s were Jin Yong and Gu Long, whose novels are still popular at present. The works of Jin Yong and Gu Long are available in multiple Asian languages, for example, Thai, Malay, Vietnamese, and Korean (Mok, 2002). It should be noted that the martial arts novels of Jin Yong and Gu Long were translated most frequently in Thailand.

Furthermore, Southeast Asian audiences have consumed Chinese-language television dramas and music from Hong Kong and Taiwan since the 1970s. Taiwanese TV dramas such as *Judge Bao* (1974) and *China Armed Escort* (1976) were broadcast in various countries, including Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand (Chen, Y.-H., 2008; Hua, 1979). It is important to note that the majority of Chinese-language television dramas between the 1970s and the 1990s in Southeast Asia were historical and martial arts dramas ("Ershi shiji Huayu jingdian dianshiju," 2019). *Meteor Garden* (2001), a Taiwanese television drama, received much popularity; almost every teenager in Southeast Asia could sing its theme song. *Meteor Garden* was an adaptation of the *shōjo manga*, *Boys Over Flowers* (*Hana Yori Dango*) by Yoko Kamio, the drama portrays the life of a young middle-class girl who attends university for upper-class people where she meets four other main characters who are good looking, wealthy, and arrogant. Unlike Chinese historical television dramas,

Meteor Garden illustrates current social issues, love and relationships, and advanced technology in Taiwan. Beyond these elements presented in the drama, good-looking actors and actresses also attracted young audiences from Southeast Asia (Tan, 2016). Four main actors from the show later formed a famous boyband, F4; the members were Jerry Yan, Vanness Wu, Ken Chu, and Vic Chou. This boyband also boosted the trend of Mandarin pop music in Southeast Asian countries; they held concerts in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Hong Kong in 2003 ("F4 excited over Bukit Jalil show," 2003).

This section will discuss the history of CIL in Southeast Asia, the changes in genre preferences among readers of Chinese fiction in Thailand, and the demographics of CIL readership in Southeast Asia.

The History of CIL in Southeast Asia

It is worth giving a brief history of CIL in general before introducing the history of CIL in Southeast Asia. CIL began in the early 1990s when a group of Chinese students in the United States established several Chinese-language electronic journals such as *Huaxia wenzhai* (Chinese News Digest), the world's first Chinese online magazine, founded in 1991, and *Xin yusi* (New Spinners of Worlds), founded by Fang Zhouzi in 1994 (Hockx, 2015). These two electronic journals allowed U.S.-based Chinese students to express their creative writing. Notably, 1995 was a key year in the development of Chinese-language online literature in both the U.S. and mainland China. *Ganlanshu* (Olive Tree, Wenxue.com) and *Huazhao* (Cute Tricks, Huazhao.com) were the very first websites devoted to CIL in the U.S., launching in 1995 (Hockx, 2015). Meanwhile, the bulletin-board system (BBS) began to expand from Tsinghua University to other universities in China in 1995 (Hockx, 2015). In 1998, *Diyi ci de qinmi jiechu* (The First Intimate Contact) became the first BBS Chinese-language web literature to get published, becoming a bestseller in Taiwan

and mainland China (Hockx, 2015). *The First Intimate Contact* broke with the traditional writing style because it was written in colloquial language and divided into numerous small sections (Hockx, 2015). Additionally, a crucial starting point of CIL in mainland China began in 1997, when William Zhu launched a literary website, *Rongshuxia* (Banyan Tree, Rongshuxia.com) (Hockx, 2015). Two years later, *Hong xiu tian xiang* (Hongxiu.com) was established.

The history of CIL in mainland China corresponded with the growth of Internet accessibility around the mid-2000s. World Bank data on "Individuals Using the Internet" indicates that the Internet users were less than 2 per cent of the Chinese population in 2000 and gradually grew by about 2 per cent each year until 2006 (see Figure 1). However, the number of Chinese Internet users grew from 16 per cent in 2007 to above 54 per cent in 2017 (see Figure 1). In fact, the number of Internet users in China rose from 210 million in 2007 to 854 million in 2019 (CNNIC, 2018, 2019).

CIL began to grow from the end of the 2000s. Among the major online literature providers are Qidian.com and Jinjiang wenxue cheng (JJWXC, Jjwxc.com); they established their websites in 2002 and 2004, respectively. By 2008, these two and Hongxiu had become the three largest and most renowned CIL portals in China. In the same year, Shanda Group, an online games operator, decided to extend its interactive entertainment business to online literature, forming Shanda Literature by purchasing these three literary providers. Subsequently, the revenue and market growth of CIL eventually appeared. The CIL market has increased by more than 20 per cent per annum since 2012, to about US$1.3 billion (Hong, 2017) in revenue in 2017. Tencent Literature and Shanda Literature merged to form China Literature Group (Yuewen Group) in 2015; China Literature's revenue grew to US$290 million in 2016 based on growth in subscription fees (Meng, 2017; Wu, 2015). Later, CIL

started to spread to other parts of the world. As of June 2019, about 53.2 per cent of China's Internet users, 454.54 million, had accessed online literature applications, 146.95 million more users than in 2016 (CNNIC, 2019). The number of Internet users consuming online literature on their mobile phones grew from 281.2 million in 2016 to 435.4 million in June 2019 (CNNIC, 2019).

The boom in CIL gradually expanded to English-speaking countries in the 2010s, the United States in particular. Wuxiaworld Limited (Wuxiaworld.com) originated from a Chinese-American who was fond of Chinese martial arts (or *wuxia*) novels; he used RWX as his username. RWX established Wuxiaworld.com in December 2014; it eventually became a notable Chinese-to-English translation website in the English-speaking world. Gravity Tales (Gravitytales.com), founded in January 2015, is another popular website where many foreign fans of CIL can read English-language translations of CIL. Two years after the rise of CIL in the United States, China Literature Group (Yuewen Group) seized an opportunity to expand Chinese-to-English novel translation by launching Webnovel (Webnovel.com) in 2017. In the same year, Webnovel decided to collaborate with Gravity Tales (PRnewswire, 2017). From 1 June 2020, Gravity Tales has integrated its content and redirected its domain to Webnovel.com (Gravitytales.com, 2020). These three major websites not only helped to expand the readership of CIL in the English-speaking world, but also in the non-Sinophone world, especially Southeast Asia.

The history of CIL in Southeast Asia can be traced back to the early 2000s. I would like to take the earliest Chinese-language Internet novels of Cai Zhiheng and Giddens Ko (or 九把刀) as the starting point of the history of CIL in Southeast Asia. *The First Intimate Contact* was the first CIL novel, written by Cai Zhiheng, a Taiwanese student in the United States. The novel was translated into Thai and issued by Kimberly Publishing in 2006. The Chinese version of *The First Intimate Contact*

was published in a physical edition in Taiwan and sold by Kinokuniya (Singapore) and Popular Book (Malaysia) in 2008. In the same timeframe, the works of the Taiwanese online novelist Giddens Ko began to appear in Southeast Asia. In Thailand, Ko's novel *Kungfu* (Chinese title: 功夫) was translated and published by Matichon Publishing in 2006. In Malaysia and Singapore, several Ko novels, for instance, *Kongju zhadan* (Chinese title: 恐懼炸彈), *Kungfu* (Chinese title: 功夫), and *Bingxiang* (Chinese title: 冰箱) were sold in local book stores from 2003. These novels became the first stage in the history of CIL in Southeast Asia.

Taiwanese online novels were well received in Thailand during the 2000s because of the revitalising of Taiwanese popular culture in Thailand. Most of the Chinese-language novels that were translated into Thai between 2006 and 2012 were by Taiwanese novelists such as Tsien Hsin and Yu Wo. During 2000–2010, numerous romance TV dramas from Taiwan such as *Meteor Garden* and *Devil Beside You* (2005) (Chinese title: 惡魔在身邊) were broadcasted in Thailand. Moreover, it was common to see tape cassettes and CDs of Taiwanese singers like Wang Leehom, Jay Chou, and Show Lo in Thai music stores in the same period as Mandarin pop music became popular in Thailand. In addition, the famous boyband F4 (consisting of several cast members from *Meteor Garden*) held a concert, *Bangkok Fantasy with F4*, in Bangkok in 2004 (Zhao, 2004). The craze of F4 led to the higher price of tickets, the most expensive was 6,000 Thai baht (Zhao, 2004).

By the mid-2000s, Southeast Asia readers began to give greater recognition to CIL from mainland China. Three well-known works of online novelists from mainland China are Tong Hua's *Startling by Each Step* (Chinese title: 步步驚心) and He Ma's *The Tibetan Code* (Chinese title: 藏地密碼) and *The Grave Robbers' Chronicles* (Chinese title: 盜墓筆記). Firstly, Tong Hua published *Startling by Each*

Step on JJWXC in 2005; physical editions were put out by several mainland Chinese and Taiwanese publishers in 2007. Chinese readers from Malaysia and Singapore could find this novel in their local book stores in 2011, while Thai readers had to wait for several more years before they could read the Thai translation of *Startling by Each Step* in 2013. In addition, *Startling by Each Step* was made into a television drama and broadcast by Hunan Broadcasting System in 2011 with the title *Scarlet Heart*. *Scarlet Heart* war aired by Malaysia's Astro television station in 2011, by Singapore's MediaCorp Channel 8 in 2012, and Thailand's Channel 3 SD in 2015. Secondly, He Ma published *The Tibetan Code* on the Internet in 2005 before he sold the copyright to publishers in mainland China and Taiwan. In Malaysia and Singapore, *The Tibetan Code* was available in simplified and traditional Chinese editions in local book stores in 2008. In Thailand, Siam Inter Publishing translated *The Tibetan Code* into Thai in 2011; it became a bestseller in Thailand in the same year. Thirdly, Xu Lei (Nan Pai San Shu) started writing *The Grave Robbers' Chronicles* on Qidian.com; a physical edition was published in 2007. *The Grave Robbers' Chronicles* became available in Malaysia and Singapore in 2007, whereas, monolingual Thai readers had to wait for a translated edition released in 2013. Indicative of its popularity, there are numerous adaptations of *The Grave Robbers' Chronicles*. It was made into serialised manga in 2011, but the manga stopped after five volumes. What brought this serial novel to the mainstream in other countries was its adaptation in the form of television dramas, the first season was aired in 2015 and the second season was premiered in 2019. Besides television dramas, it was made into a movie in 2016.

The above information suggest that Southeast Asian readers who are literate in Chinese—such as ethnic Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore—can enjoy reading CIL earlier than non-Chinese speakers. On the other hand, the vast majority of Thai

readers, including Thais of Chinese descent, are monolingual speakers who require

Thai translations. The advent of the Internet and the arrival of CIL has also led to

changes within communities of translators in Thailand.

Changes in Translation Communities in Thailand

The history of Thailand's translation communities from the 1860s to the end of

2000s can be divided into four periods: 1) 1860s–1910s, 2) 1920s–1950s, 3) 1960s–

1990s, and 4) 2000s onward.

The first period of Thai translations of Chinese literature was the 1860s to the

1910s. Before the flourishing of Chinese serial novels in the newspapers in 1922, the

only group of Chinese-to-Thai translators were Thai elites and Chinese migrants. The

translation community before 1868 was small and limited, the empowered translators

during the reign of King Rama I were His Royal Highness Prince Thong-In, the

Deputy Vice King of Siam and Chao Phraya Klang Hon Bunlong (Suksai, 2010).

Therefore, Somdet Chaophraya Sri Suriwongse supplemented the translation

community by hiring six Chinese migrants and one Thai nobleman to translate

twelve pieces of Chinese literature (Suksai, 2010).

The second period of Chinese translations in Thailand coincided with the

boom of nationwide newspapers during the 1920s to 1950s. The transformation of

translation communities became evident in the 1920s when the *Krungthep Daily

Mail* and *Siamrath* were permitted to translate and publish Chinese literature without

any restrictions in 1921 and 1922, respectively (Suksai, 2010). The translation

community in Thailand began to expand; translators were not only limited to Thai

noblemen, but also ordinary Chinese migrants and Thais of Chinese descent. As

Chinese martial arts novels became popular through the spread of newspapers in the

1920s and the mid-1930s, newspaper offices tended to employ ethnic Chinese people

to translate Chinese fiction. Nonetheless, Chinese novels encountered a decline for almost two decades before rising again in the late 1950s.

After recovering from the recession, the third period of Chinese fiction translation began around the 1960s. During this time, translation communities in Thailand had become more diverse. Translation communities between the 1960s and the 1990s welcomed more well-educated Thais of Chinese descent. The renowned translators from this period were Wor. Na. Muenglung (pseud.), Chamlong Pitnaka, and Nor. Nopparat (pseud.) It should be noted that Nor. Nopparat refers to Aanon (passed away) and Thanathat Phiromanukul, who is still active in translating Chinese novels into Thai at present.

The fourth period refers to the period after the 2000s when the Internet and CIL came into play in translation communities in Thailand. From 2000, the Chinese-to-Thai translation community was no longer limited to elites and ethnic Chinese people, there were also no gender and age preferences, and varying levels of education. It is important to highlight that the rise of Taiwanese romance novels—including online novels—in the mid-2000s led to a significantly higher number of female translators in translation communities, especially translators at Jamsai Publishing (Jamsai, n.d.-a). Moreover, numerous young and non-professional online translators have gradually appeared on several platforms such as Dek-D.com and Pantip.com since 2010. Hence, the Internet has progressively changed translation communities in Thailand since the early 2000s.

Changes in Reading Behaviour and Genre Preferences

Readers in each country prefer different genres. According to Picodi (2019a, 2019b, 2019c), the most popular genre of fiction among Malaysian readers is thrillers, romance is the most preferred among Singaporean readers, and sci-fi and fantasy are the most liked by Thai readers (see Table 1). Since the arrival of CIL in Southeast

Asia in the early 2000s, it has changed the consumption of Chinese fiction in Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand. Unlike Malaysia and Singapore, where local distributors can directly import Chinese fiction from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, since ethnic Chinese in both countries are likely to be literate in Chinese, the majority of readers in Thailand require Thai translations. Put differently, Thai publishers tend to carefully select the novels in accordance with readers' preference and the prevailing trends of given periods, hence, this section will focus only on the changing genre preferences of Thai readers of Chinese fiction.

From the mid-2000s, Thai readers began to see numerous Chinese online novels of various genres in the market. I have adopted a coding scheme to comprehend the changing genres of Chinese fiction in Thailand between 2000 and 2018, based on data from the National Library of Thailand. The data suggest that a shift of genre preference, from *wuxia* to romance, gradually appeared in the 2000s. *Wuxia* has been one of the most popular genres among Thai readers since the 1950s. As mentioned above, the martial arts novels of Jin Yong and Gu Long were frequently republished in Thailand. Between 2000 and 2005, there were 121 *wuxia* novels published in Thailand (see Figure 2). However, Chinese romance novels also started to appear around the mid-2000s. As mentioned above, the broadcast of the television series *Meteor Garden* introduced Chinese romance to Thai viewers. Seven Chinese romance novels were published from 2000 to 2005 (see Figure 2). Between 2006 and 2010, martial arts and romance novels accounted for the largest proportions of Chinese-language fiction published in Thailand. However, Figure 3 suggests that the number of Chinese-language romance novels surpassed martial arts novels in 2007 and promptly grew annually. The positive reception of romance fiction led Jamsai Publishing to seize an opportunity by introducing a *wuxia*-romance novel, written by a mainland Internet novelist, Ming Xiaoxi, *The*

Flame's Daughter (Chinese title: 烈火如歌) in 2006; this novel was republished again in 2007. Chinese romance novels became the dominant genre from 2011 to 2018 (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

Between 2006 and 2010, Jamsai Publishing distributed 96 Chinese-language romance novels by 39 novelists from mainland China and Taiwan (see Figure 6). The leading authors were Tien Hsin 典心, Qiao An 喬安, Yang Guang Qing Zi 陽光晴子, Zhan Qing 湛清, and Qi Yan 齊晏. Among the 39 authors, there were only nine online writers, of which Qiao An was the most prominent. According to available data, only 22 per cent of Jamsai's Chinese romance novels were written by online writers (see Figure 7). In fact, the vast majority of Jamsai's novels between 2006 and 2010 were historical romance. Back in the 2000s, historical romance fiction was rather fresh to Chinese writers and Thai readers (Pruksanusak, 2019). Thai readers are fond of Chinese historical romance because of the beautiful wording and the detailed description of the scenes in the novels (Pruksanusak, 2019).

From the early 2010s, Thai readers started to recognise other genres of Chinese novels. The spread of Chinese romance, time-travel, historical adventure, *xuanhuan* (mysterious fantasy), sci-fi, and *xianxia* (immortal hero) novels progressively rose as they were new and foreign to Thai readers. For example, mystery fiction grew rapidly and overshadowed the number of *wuxia* novels in 2010 (see Figure 3). Between 2011 and 2016, mystery novels were the second most published genre (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

Starting from the 2010s, Siam Inter Books, one of the largest publishers of Chinese-language literature in Thailand, began to publish a variety of CIL. In 2011, they translated and published two serialised CIL novels, *Xie bing pu* (Chinese title: 邪兵譜) and *Que yue wu tong* (Chinese title: 缺月梧桐). Two years later, a time-travel/historical romance novel, *Startling by Each Step*, was issued. *Que yue wu*

tong originated from Qidian.com and *Startling by Each Step* was first posted on JJWXC. Qidian.com and JJWXC are the two biggest CIL providers in China. Previously, Siam Inter Books only concentrated on publishing Chinese martial arts novels, but they bent their focus to the historical adventure and mysterious fantasy Chinese novels from the 2010s. They started to distribute more serialised novels such as *The Grave Robbers' Chronicles*, and *Datang xingbiao* (Chinese title: 大唐行鏢). To show the growth of CIL in Thailand, Siam Inter Books continued issuing mysterious fantasy novels in 2014, including *Dunneng shidai* (遁能時代) and *Wu da zeiwang* (Chinese title: 五大賊王).

Besides the mainstream genres as mentioned above, "Boys' Love" (BL) or "Yaoi and Yuri" (Y) is one more genre of Chinese-language online fiction that is appealing to many young Thai female readers. Chinese BL novels appeared in Thailand in 2011 and became the third dominant genre from 2011 to 2018 (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). As a result, many new publishers were founded to translate and distribute Chinese BL novels, for example, Happy Banana, Meedees, and EverY.

At present, BL novels are thriving in Thailand. However, the Chinese government has banned BL and time-travelling fiction (Pruksanusak, 2019). Nevertheless, these genres are well-liked at the moment because the stories are rather new to Thai readers and they still have some room to grow. Chinese fiction will also continue to flourish in Thailand, but the popularity of genres will keep altering in the future (Pruksanusak, 2019).

CIL has altered the reading behaviour of Southeast Asian readers, who now spend a shorter time reading books and increasingly read Chinese novels on electronic devices. In brief, Southeast Asian users spend almost 13 minutes per day reading CIL on various platforms, and the majority of them read CIL on mobile devices. Concerning the visit duration on Chinese-language CIL websites, users in

Malaysia and Singapore spent more than 18 minutes per day, whereas users in Thailand spend less than 3 minutes (see Table 2). In contrast, Thai users spend roughly 15 minutes per day on English-language translation websites, while users in Malaysia and Singapore spend about 14 minutes and 3 minutes, respectively (see Table 4). Thai users spent almost 19 minutes per day on Thai translation websites (see Table 6). The results also indicate that users access platforms for English translations and Thai translations of CIL on their mobile devices; more than 70 per cent of visits to English-language translation websites and roughly 77 per cent of visits to Thai-language sites were made through mobile devices.

This study investigates what languages Southeast Asians read CIL in. To determine this, I have collected data from 22 Chinese-language websites. According to the result (see Table 2), there were close to 790 million visits to CIL websites worldwide between October and December 2019. Visits from Malaysia accounted for 6.89 per cent (54.43 million visits), 1.75 per cent (13.82 million visits) of visits were made by Singaporeans, and Thai readers made up about 0.18 per cent (1.43 million visits) of the total worldwide visits (see Table 2). As predicted, the number of Chinese-language CIL readers in Malaysia is higher than in the other two countries; this could be because of the greater preservation of Chinese culture and identity among ethnic Chinese in Malaysia. Tan (2004) stated "if religion (i.e. Islam) is the most important principle of mobilising Malay support, language (Mandarin) is the most important mobilising principle among the Chinese" (p. 17). Hence, the Chinese language is one of key values that holds ethnic Chinese together in Malaysia.

Readers in Malaysia and Singapore visited Chinese-language CIL websites more than English-language translation websites, this is because there are the larger number of people who are literate in Chinese in these countries. In Malaysia, 33 per cent of ethnic Chinese students opted to read in Chinese, while 28 per cent chose to

read in English, and 38 per cent preferred reading materials in English and Chinese (Abidin, 2016). In Singapore, 53 per cent of ethnic Chinese adults tend to read in English and Chinese, 35 per cent of them only read in English and 13 per cent read only in Chinese (NLB, 2019a).

There were more than 198 million visits globally to seven English-language CIL translation websites between October and December 2019 (see Table 4). In theory, there should be more visits from Singapore to English-language translation websites than from Malaysia and Thailand, because of the English-based education system there; however, the visit distribution from Singapore was less than 1 per cent (1.94 million visits) of the total visits. Unexpectedly, the result shows that the most frequent visits among the three countries were made from Thailand; about 1.57 per cent or 3.12 million visits. While, the second most visits came from Malaysia; 1.35 per cent or about 2.68 million visits (see Table 4). Inasmuch as the majority of Thai readers are illiterate in Chinese, they have to consume CIL in either English or Thai. As the result, Thai readers visited English-language translation websites more often than the Chinese-language websites. Unsurprisingly, almost 99 per cent of visits to Thai translation platforms were made by readers from Thailand (see Table 6).

The arrival of CIL might have led to changes in readership, translation communities, genre preferences, and reading behaviour in Southeast Asia. However, the predominant age and gender of readers have remained unchanged. Moreover, the continuity of Chinese popular fiction from the 1950s has assisted CIL to grow in in the region.

Continuities and Expansion of Chinese Fiction's Readership in Southeast Asia

In the past, Chinese popular fiction was popular among specific groups such as young adult males. It is worthwhile to take account of CIL readers' ages and gender in Southeast Asia to investigate how the readership of Chinese fiction has remained

the same in the present day. This research analyses data from 22 Chinese-language CIL websites, 7 English-language translation websites, and 6 Thai-language translation websites between October and December 2019 via the web analytics tool, SimilarWeb.com.

Young adults have been the main group of Chinese fiction readers since the boom of the Chinese martial arts novel in the 1950s. The majority of readers on Chinese-language and Thai-language translation websites are 25–34 years old; almost 39 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively (see Table 3 and Table 7). However, about 40 cent of the users on English-laguage translation websites are 18–24 years old (see Table 5). The largest proportion of readers on the Thai-language site Tunwalai.com are between 18 and 35 years old (Sorasing, 2019). Furthermore, Prachathai (2018) reported that the majority of Thai e-book readers on MEB were working females aged 20–45 who liked reading novels and had high purchasing power; the majority of e-book users on Oookbee were between 18 and 45 years old; more than 50 per cent of users on Kawebook were 25–34 years old. In short, the popularity of Chinese fiction has continued among young adults in Southeast Asia.

Chinese fiction has been popular among male readers since the boom of Chinese martial arts fiction from the 1950s. At present, male readers are still predominant over female readers in CIL reading communities, although the gap between male and female is decreasing. On average, male readers make up close to 64 per cent of the users of Chinese-language platforms and 71 per cent of English-laguage translation platforms (see Table 2 and Table 4). Interestingly, more than half of the users of CIL websites designed to target young women users such as *Jinjiang wenxue cheng* (Jjwxc.net) and Qidian Women's Net (*Qidian nüsheng wang*, Qdmm.com) were male. Additionally, about 55 per cent of users on Thai-language translation platforms were male. Nevertheless, female readers—above 60

per cent of total users—dominate Tunwalai.com and ReadAWrite.com (see Table 6),

sites which offer an enormous number of romance and BL novels that young female

readers like. There are three possible reasons why men read CIL more than women:

1) the literacy rate among men is higher than among women in Southeast Asia; 2)

men in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand are more likely to acquire reading

materials from the Internet; 3) CIL offers more male-lead fiction and more male-

preferred genres.

Higher literacy rates among male populations can explain why there are more

male readers than female readers in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. According to

UNESCO (2020), literacy rates among women above fifteen years old were one

average 3 per cent lower than male in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand in 2018. In

Thailand, the reading rate among male readers above six years old was almost 2 per

cent higher than among female readers (NSO, 2019).

Male readers tend to do a higher percentage of their reading online than

female readers. According to Chong, Lim, and Ling (2008) and Roesnita and Zainab

(2013), Malaysian male students use e-books more than female students. Similarly,

Chaudhry and Low (2009) reported that more than 35 per cent of Singaporean male

respondents acquired reading materials on the Internet, while, less than 10 per cent of

female respondents read online. Moreover, TKPark (2008) discovered that 11 per

cent of the total male youth population read e-books, compared to only 7 per cent of

female youth. In addition, Singaporean male readers were motivated to read more on

the Internet and on digital devices (NLB, 2019a, 2019b). Therefore, it is not

surprising that there are more male than female readers on various CIL platforms.

Before the arrival of CIL in Southeast Asia, readers of Chinese popular

fiction were mainly men because the dominant genre was martial arts. Lange,

Schwarz, and Wühr (2017) found that the drama and romance genres were more

highly admired by females than males, while a higher number of males preferred

genres like war, action, Westerns, adventure, sci-fi, fantasy, mystery, horror, and

erotica; both males and females equally liked thrillers, animation, history, crime, and

comedy. Thai male readers are less likely to read Chinese romance fiction (Hunrod

& Panthanuwong, 2016). For instance, among the comments attached to the novel

Full Marks Hidden Marriage: Pick Up a Son, Get a Free Husband on Tunwalai.com,

less than 7 per cent of comments were made by male users. Moreover, Singaporean

males aged of seventeen to nineteen like reading mysteries and thrillers the most, on

the other hand, young females prefer love and relationship fiction (NLB, 2019b).

Singaporean men in their twenties prefer reading humorous stories and jokes, male

readers in their thirties read sci-fi; however, Singaporean female readers in their

twenties and thirties read love and relationship fiction the most (NLB, 2019a). In the

same manner, Chaudhry and Low (2009) find that Singaporean men preferred

science fiction and fantasy, whereas women read mysteries and humour.

      Considering the availability of genres, males seem to have more choices than

females. The most significant CIL genre on Qidian.com is mysterious fantasy; there

are more than 710,000 mysterious fantasy novels. Additionally, readers have a high

tendency of choosing a story with a protagonist of their gender (Lange, Schwarz, &

Wühr, 2017). Also, only 3 out of 71 novels on Wuxiaworld.com are romance or

female-lead novels. Similarly, Webnovel.com has divided novels into male-lead and

female-lead; there are twelve genres under the male-lead section, while there are only

seven genres under the female-lead section. On CIL translation platforms in Thailand

such as Kawebook.com, under the top 35 Chinese online novels, there are only 6

romance or female-lead novels. Although male readers remain predominant in the

Chinese fiction reading community, more female readers are reading Chinese

romance and other genres.

Furthermore, the relationship between the preferred genres and gender should be emphasised. This study collected data from eight different novels on Fictionlog.co, a Thai-language CIL translation website, dividing them into two groups; each group contains four CIL novels (see Table 8). The first group consists of fantasy, adventurous fantasy, sci-fi, and *wuxia* novels, predicting that there would be more male readers for these genres. The second group refers to four romance novels that may have more female readers than male readers. This study analysed word choices, usernames, and profile pictures to identify the gender of users. According to the data (see Table 8), it appears that 81 per cent of readers in the first group are male, while the result from the second group shows that 96 per cent of romance novel readers are female. This study suggests that CIL has expanded readership in Southeast Asia as both male and female readers can select novels based on their preferences.

Continuity of Chinese Popular Fiction in Chinese Online Fiction: From Gu Long to Butterfly Blue

This section examines the continuity of Chinese popular fiction in Southeast Asia by comparing Gu Long's *The Little Li Flying Dagger* with the CIL novel by Butterfly Blue, *The King's Avatar*. The goal is to examine common characteristics and to understand the elements of existing Chinese popular fiction that have contributed to the success of CIL in the region.

Gu Long. Xiong Yaohua, whose pen name was Gu Long, was born in Hong Kong in 1938 and later moved to Taiwan where he attained a bachelor's degree in English literature from Tamkang University. He actively published martial arts novels in Taiwan in the 1960s and 1970s (Ma, 2019; Thongkamsai, 2011). Gu Long's works were inspired by Western cultural elements and television dramas and his writing technique was also constructed on the Western narrative method, such as beautiful storyline and description (Thongkamsai, 2011). Gu Long's works have

never disappeared from Southeast Asia and are still well-received at present. By dint of dramatic adaptations and e-books of Gu Long's novels, many young Southeast Asians have been exposed to his literary works. Many inquisitive viewers read his novels to find out how dramatic adaptations are dissimilar to the original novels. In Thailand, Gu Long's works are available in paper books and e-books. In Malaysia and Singapore, his novels are available in Chinese at local book stores.

Butterfly Blue. Wang Dong is known as Butterfly Blue or Hu Die Lan. Born in 1983, Wang is a renowned, platinum-level Internet novelist on Qidian.com and his works are mainly based on online game themes ("Hudielan 蝴蝶藍 Dong Wang," n.d.). Regarding his education background, Wang obtained a university degree in teaology and became a full-time writer one year after his university graduation (Fan, 2019). He wrote his first novel, *Du chuang tian ya* (Chinese title: 獨闖天涯) on Qidian.com in 2005 ("Zhongguo wangluo wenxue 20nian," 2018). Wang joined the Beijing Writers' Association in 2011 and started to write a serialised novel, *Wangyou zhi jianghu ren wuxing* (Chinese title: 網友之江湖任務行) for *Princess* (Gong zhu zhi), a magazine for young female readers, in 2012 ("Hudielan 蝴蝶藍 Dong Wang," n.d.). At present, Wang has already written seven serialised novels. Wang has admitted that his novels are strongly influenced and inspired by the works of Gu Long; his novel protagonists hold the same the values of Gu Long's ideal protagonists who are forceful value and appreciate friendship (GMW, 2018).

The Little Li Flying Dagger. *The Little Li Flying Dagger* is one of the most remarkable serialised martial arts novels of Gu Long; it was first published in 1968. This novel was translated into Thai by Wor. Nawarat in 1970. *The Little Li Flying Dagger* has been adapted into movies and television dramas at various times. The first film adaptation, *The Sentimental Swordsman* (1977), was produced by the Hong Kong film production company the Shaw Brothers in 1977, and the first television

drama adaptation, *The Romantic Swordsman* (1978), was made by Hong Kong's TVB in 1978 (Thongkamsai, 2011). The most recent television drama, *The Legend of Flying Daggers* (2016)*,* was produced and premiered on the video-streaming platform Youku in mainland China in 2016. Later, in 2018, this television drama was broadcasted on Thailand's Channel 3 and Singapore's HUB VV Drama.

  The Little Li Flying Dagger is the story of Li Xun Huan, who is famous for his skill of flying dagger in the *jianghu* (martial arts community). He loves Lin Shi Yin, but he has to give up his beloved woman to his sworn friend, Long Xiao Yun, as a repayment for saving his life. Also, he gives Long Xiao Yun his house. Emotionally hurt, Li Xun Huan decides to leave the *jianghu*. Ten years later, Li Xun Huan comes back to the *jianghu* again and this time he meets a swordsman, Ah Fei, and befriends with him. Coincidentally, when Li Xun Huan is back in the *jianghu* it is also the same time when a robber, the Plum Flower Bandit, reappears and Li Xun Huan is mistaken for being that bandit. In the meantime, Li Xun Huan has to confront Shangguan Jinhong, an evil leader of the Gold and Money Sect, who aims to conquer the *jianghu.* To protect the *jianghu*, Li Xun Huan must fight against Shangguan Jinhong; this battle is not easy because Shangguan Jinhong's martial arts skill is superior to Li Xun Huan.

  The King's Avatar. *The King's Avatar* is an original novel of Butterfly Blue (Hu Die Lan). The novel was published on Qidian.com in February 2011. This novel was translated into English and posted by Webnovel.com from April 2017. There are 1,729 chapters in total for the Chinese and English versions. In Thailand, *The King's Avatar* was translated and distributed by Siam Inter Publishing in October 2016; there are 24 serialised books at present. This online novel has been adapted into anime and television series. The animation of *The King's Avatar* was streamed on Chinese platforms—Tencent Video and Bilibili—in 2017. Later, the anime became

available on YouTube.com with English subtitles and on WeTV.vip with several foreign language subtitles including Thai in 2019.

The novel is about Glory, the most popular massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) in the era. This online game can lead one to be a professional player to make a living as it is one of the biggest e-sport competitions. The main character, Ye Xiu, is a mysterious top-tier professional player, also known as Glory's encyclopedia, who has won three championships for his club, Excellent Era (*Jia shi*). Unfortunately, Ye Xiu is forced to leave the club because he is not interested in participating in any commercial activities to benefit the team. According to the termination of his contract, Ye Xiu has to give his gaming character, One Leaf's Autumn (*Yi ye zhi qiu*), to the new team player; he instantly becomes unemployed. Then, he comes across an internet cafe where the owner is a big fan of Glory and applies to work the late-night shift. Coincidently, Glory is about to launch its new server, as a professional gamer with ten years' experience, Ye Xiu starts to build his undefeated gaming character from this new beginning and make his way to entering this gaming arena once again.

The popularity of *The Little Li Flying Dagger* and *The King's Avatar* is owing to close cultural proximity between China and Southeast Asia. Similar cultural and historical elements allow local readers to reflect themselves better through characters in Chinese novels. The concept of "cultural proximity" (including cultural capital, identity, and language) can explain why consumers would rather choose national or local productions over globalised or Americanised productions (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008; Straubhaar, 2003). Moreover, Straubhaar (2003) stresses that language and culture could define the markets for production and consumption; this idea is called cultural-linguistic markets. For example, ethnic Chinese audiences in Malaysia and Singapore tend to consume Chinese cultural products such as drama and music. In

fact, cultural proximity is not only based on components of common cultural elements and similar language, but also similar historical or cultural aspects without analogous linguistic roots (Straubhaar, 2003). More importantly, Chua and Iwabuchi (2008) and Iwabuchi (1998) agree that a sense of "Asianness" or cultural proximity could generate regionalisation that predisposes one to consume cultural products from East Asia. For example, Iwabuchi (1998) discovered that youngsters in Taipei and Hong Kong found Japanese dramas more attractive than American dramas. Chinese fiction has attracted Southeast Asian readers by the common values and beliefs. Many Southeast Asian cultural elements and customs are of Confucian and Buddhist origins. *The Little Li Flying Dagger* and *The King's Avatar* are appealing to Southeast Asians because they can relate themselves to cultural elements—such as the idea of humanity in Confucianism and uncertainty in Buddhism—in the novels.

Chinese fiction often portrays how the imperfect protagonists try to improve themselves to overcome difficulties. A hint of Confucian philosophy in the fiction enables Southeast Asian readers understand the content more profoundly. Numerous Southeast Asians, especially ethnic Chinese people, still follow the teachings of Confucius (Tu, 1998). *The Little Li Flying Dagger* and *The King's Avatar* applied Confucian concepts of "imperfection" and "self-cultivation." Muller (2020) translated *The Analects of Confucius* as follows:

> [7:26] The Master said: "I have not yet been able to meet a sage, but I would be satisfied to meet a noble man. I have not yet met a man of true goodness, but would be satisfied to meet a man of constancy. Lacking, yet possessing; empty, yet full; in difficulty yet at ease. How difficult it is to have constancy!"
>
> [7-26] 子曰。聖人、吾不得而見之矣。得見君子者、斯可矣。子曰。善人、吾不得而見之矣。得見有恆者、斯可矣。亡而爲有、虛而爲盈、約而爲泰、難乎有恆矣。

[7:34] The Master said: "I dare not claim to be a sage or a *ren* man. But I strive for these without being disappointed, and I teach without becoming weary. This is what can be said of me."

[7-34] 子曰。若聖與仁、則吾豈敢 抑爲之不厭、誨人不倦、則可謂云爾 已矣。公西華曰。正唯弟子不能學也。

These contexts indicate that no one is perfect, not even Confucius himself, but one should not stop improving oneself. A "sage" in Confucianism refers to a person who cultivates himself to perfection such that he can benefit the multitude; the constancy of self-cultivation will progress one's virtues and virtuosities and this will allow one to become a noble man or a sage (Ni, 2017). In *The Little Li Flying Dagger*, Li Xun Huan is a courageous and compassionate person who believes in virtue. Although his martial arts skill is not the best in the *jianghu*, he cultivates his competence to fight against mighty opponents. Throughout the novel, his decisions and drinking habits put him in danger, but his determination, courage, and virtue save him and his friends. Likewise, the imperfections of Li Xun Huan have been inherited by Ye Xiu, the male protagonist of *The King's Avatar*. Ye Xiu is a passionate, straightforward, and caring character. His club's president forces him to leave the team, but this does not discourage Ye Xiu from trying. He works his best to form a new team and advances his skills to re-join the gaming competition again. In short, Li Xun Huan and Ye Xiu are not perfect from the beginning; they both have to master their skills to attain their goals. The idea of imperfection and self-cultivation can lead Southeast Asian readers to reflect that one has to be determined and work harder to master their skills in order to achieve their goals.

The two novels establish attachments between their protagonists and readers by inspiring them through the value of humanity (*ren xing*). The meaning of humanity is perhaps similar to *ren* (benevolence) in Confucianism. *Ren* is the central

feature of human nature and it is the source of all virtues; the meaning of *ren* can be translated in my ways: love, humanity, and human goodness, but the commonly used term is benevolence (Koller, 2012). The basic teaching of *ren* is to love and respect parents, siblings, friends, and others as well as willingly to act towards them with sympathy (Koller, 2012). In fact, humanity is a core of Gu Long's martial arts fiction, and is an aspect that attracts and inspires its readers (Ma, 2019). The concepts of humanity and friendship can be seen through the main protagonists. *The Little Li Flying Dagger* reflects humanity, love, sacrifice, virtue, friendship, and compassion in fellow humans through the character of Li Xun Huan. When Ah Fei is captured at the Shaolin Temple as a negotiation for Li Xun Huan to surrender, Li Xun Huan holds Shaolin's pupil, Xin Shu, as a hostage. Only thinking of saving his friend, Li Xun Huan knows that this is a trap and that they intend to take his life, but he still wants to give himself up to save Ah Fei. Xin Shu tells Li Xun Huan that they will kill him if he surrenders; Li Xun Huan replies: "Everyone does a few stupid things in his life. If everyone only does smart things, then wouldn't life get too boring?" (Chapter 22, p. 167). Xin Shu replies: "Friendship comes first, before life and death. Li Xun Huan really is Li Xun Huan" (Chapter 22, p. 167). Gu Long directly described Li Xun Huan as "courteous to everyone. For he feels that a person is a person regardless of anything else. He never likes to harm another person, even if that person's harming him" (Chapter 47, p. 297). After giving up his beloved woman to his sworn friend, Li Xun Huan thinks to himself, "Money, power, fame, place in society are all easy to give up. But those great memories, those sweet memories, all act like locks, trapping him so he can never escape. Never break free" (Chapter 2, p. 21). These illustrate humanity in Li Xun Huan as he is willing to sacrifice his own life for the ones he loves at any time, and in his heart, there is no resentment, only love.

Similarly, Ye Xiu cares for his friends and teammates. In Chapter 54, when Tang Rou and Chen Guo are doing research on the Battle Mage class, one of the roles in the game, Ye Xiu volunteers to revise the guidebook for them. Not long after leaving the computer, Chen Guo sees food on the table and finds out that Ye Xiu ordered for them. Throughout the novel, when his teammates are in critical situations, Ye Xiu often rescues them and after the game he tends to point out their weaknesses and give them some advice for improvement. What readers can reflect from Ye Xiu is how one should treat others and these characteristics of Ye Xiu are also associated with the value of humanity in the present day. Also, what *The King's Avatar* tries to convey to readers is that everyone is essentially equal, and they must be respectful of each other, though they play and laugh and have small fights. Li Xun Huan and Ye Xiu portray the value of humanity through their friendships with other characters in the novels.

Both novels imply "harmony," a central value of Chinese culture that also exists in Southeast Asian society. The notion of harmony is presented in both novels, albeit differently. Cheng (2002) briefly explains that Chinese philosophy stresses the sense of cohesion and harmony that integrates the Chinese people as a whole. Referring to the ideal harmonious society of Confucius, a ruler should govern the country under the rule of *ren* (benevolence) and in order to achieve the harmonious society, both ruler and subject should follow the concept of *li* (propriety) which is a social order (Koller, 2012). In *The Little Li Flying Dagger*, in order to bring back harmony to society and peace back to the community, Li Xun Huan and his fellows have to fight against many evil men, including Shangguang Jinhong, who wants to conquer the *jianghu*. After fighting alongside Li Xun Huan and restoring peace and justice to the *jianghu*, Ah Fei reflects: "He suddenly felt himself surge with courage and confidence. He suddenly felt a rekindled hope in all of humanity" (Chapter 89, p.

558). In *The King's Avatar*, the merit of harmony is portrayed through the formation of a team. Ye Xiu gradually forms a club, Happy (*xing xin*), with Chen Guo, an owner of an Internet café and the eventual leader of Happy club. It can be simply said that the traits of benevolent rulers (leaders) are illustrated through Chen Guo and Ye Xiu. Notwithstanding the fact that each team member (or subject) shares the same ultimate goal and genuinely makes efforts on behalf of the team to achieve that, each of them has distinct personalities and thoughts. In Southeast Asia, Confucian values such as harmony can be seen in Chinese communities along with local customs. For example, children in Southeast Asia are taught to respect seniors and superiors; they are expected to follow their superiors' command and abide by social rules and customs in order to maintain harmony in society. These customs have been carried on and practiced for generations in Southeast Asia, there is no doubt that readers can relate to this value throughout the novels.

Both novels are popular among readers in Southeast Asia because of they reflect on the uncertainty of life, which is associated with Buddhist teachings. Buddhism is one of the main religions in Southeast Asia. Thailand has the largest number of Buddhists in the region, as 93.6 per cent of the total population, or almost 60 million people, are Buddhists (NSO, 2011). The Buddhist population in Malaysia makes up about 20 per cent of the population, or about 5.6 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011) and 33 per cent of Singaporeans, or 1.65 million people, claim to be Buddhists (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2011). The characteristics of the male protagonists of both novels represent two Buddhist concepts. The first one is the Four Noble Truths, which describes that one has to understand that life is suffering, and must find the origin of that suffering and seek for the path to end that suffering (Tsering, 2005). The second notion is Three Marks of Existence, this refers to impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, meaning one cannot be forced to

live forever, he cannot fulfil every desire of his in life, and he is not permanent and not unchanging (Chah, 2005).

Li Xun Huan and Ye Xiu encounter uncertainty even when they are at the highest point of life and they eventually have to give up their positions and titles. Li Xun Huan is born into a scholar family and seems to have a perfect life, he has got everything, a big house and many possessions. He has both intelligence and martial arts abilities. In intelligence, he was able to pass in the third rank of the imperial examination, or the rank of *tanhua* (探花). For his martial arts skills, his flying dagger skill was ranked third in the *jianghu*. However, he gives up everything after the love of his life marries his friend; he becomes a recluse and lives outside the *jianghu*. Similarly, Yu Xiu is the main character of *The King's Avatar*; he is from a good family, but his family disdain his e-sports career. As a result, he runs away from home to pursue his professional gamer path. After joining Excellent Era club and being a captain for many years, a club's executive forces him to leave the club. At the end of *The Little Li Flying Dagger*, Li Xun Huan reflects that "Success and victory can never really bring satisfaction, nor can it really bring happiness. True happiness can only be experienced during the struggles that you encounter throughout your life" (Chapter 89, p. 554). Readers can echo Buddhist teachings and accept the uncertainty of their lives through Li Xun Huan and Ye Xiu.

Both *The Little Li Flying Dagger* and *The King's Avatar* share a universal theme of "heroism." These novels have gained a wide readership in Southeast Asia because of their heroic genre, which portrays how one is willing to sacrifice themself for others. According to Becker and Eagly (2004), heroes are "individuals who choose to take risks on behalf of one or more other people, despite the possibility of dying or suffering serious physical consequences from these actions" (p. 164). Li Xun Huan has this attribute since he is not afraid of death when it comes to saving

his friends and others. For example, Li Xun Huan takes a high risk to save Reverend Xin Mei from Five Poison Kid in Chapter 19: "Xin Mei didn't think Li Xun Huan would take such a big risk" (p. 140). Later, Bai Xiao Sheng is surprised that Li Xun Huan comes to save him; Bai Xiao Sheng says, "You shouldn't have come" (p. 144), to which Li Xun Huan replies, "Although I've killed countless people in my life, I've never watched someone die without helping" (p. 144). In fact, Li Xun Huan's good deed is to put his life at risk to save others, but he does not want anyone to get hurt because of him; when Zhao Zheng Yi and others severely injure him because they think that Li Xun Huan is the Plum Flower Bandit, instead of hoping for someone to come and save him, Li Xun Huan can "only hope Ah Fei would not come back and try to save him" (p. 110). It is evident that Li Xun Huan is a true hero in the martial world; he is willing to take a risk to save others. *The King's Avatar*, on the other hand, portrays a hero in the current era. Schwartz (as cited in Igou et al., 2017) refers to heroes as "individuals who demonstrate practical wisdom, showing the desire to do good for others and the capacity to do the right thing in a particular situation" (p. 20). This definition can describe heroism in Ye Xiu's character. Ye Xiu uses his intelligence and experiences to encourage and support others; he is a hero and he cares for his juniors. For instance, in Chapter 145, Qiao Yifan struggles to survive in Tiny Herb club because his contract is about to expire, Ye Xiu encourages him to switch his role to a more suitable role, Ghostblade class. While Qiao Yifan doubts his ability, Ye Xiu says "Muster up some courage" after hearing that Qiao Yifan is touched because a god-level player notices him. In addition, when Ye Xiu and his team plays Glory, he often saves his teammates from dangerous situations. In short, *The Little Li Flying Dagger* and *The King's Avatar* offer incredible portrayals of heroism, and the genre of hero fiction has been widely appreciated by readers in

Southeast Asia and beyond. These two novels are inspirational and may enable readers to reflect their heroic actions and possibly become heroes in their lives.

Summary

There are various aspects to the growth in popularity of CIL in Southeast Asia, including the pre-existing cultural context of Chinese popular fiction from the 1950s. Before the arrival of CIL in Southeast Asia, the principal genres of Chinese fiction were martial arts and historical fiction; however, CIL has expanded the selection of genres to include immortal heroes, mysterious fantasy, and gaming. Nevertheless, Chinese martial arts fiction continues to be read by Southeast Asian readers.

Malaysian and Singaporean readers spent the most time on Chinese-language CIL platforms, while Thai readers spent the longest time on the English-language and Thai-language translation platforms. This indicates that considerable numbers of ethnic Chinese readers in Malaysia and Singapore continue reading Chinese fiction in Chinese, regardless of the language and education policies in both countries. Conversely, Thai readers consume CIL in English and Thai because many of them are not literate in Chinese. In addition, readers of Chinese fiction in Southeast Asia have gradually shifted from paper books to electronic devices, as they often read CIL on their mobile phones and desktop computers.

What remains unchanged is the principal readership of Chinese novels: young adults between 18 and 34 years of age. Moreover, the dominant gender of CIL readers is male, because they have a greater tendency to find and read novels on the Internet. The genres favoured by males—such as mysterious fantasy and science fiction—are significantly more diverse than that which is appreciated by female readers—primarily romance fiction.

The martial arts novels of Jin Yong and Gu Long established the popularity of Chinese fiction in Southeast Asia and had a positive impact on the future reception of

CIL in the region. This chapter compared Gu Long's *The Little Li Flying Dagger* and Butterfly Blue's *The King's Avatar* in order to determine the common elements that make Southeast Asian readers like reading Chinese fiction. Generally, similar culture, beliefs, and customs between China and Southeast Asia—particularly ethnic Chinese communities—enable Southeast Asian readers to comprehend and absorb Chinese culture and thoughts. Both novels applied the concepts of Confucianism and Buddhism to which Southeast Asians readers are able to relate. *The Little Li Flying Dagger* and *The King's Avatar* contain Confucian notions of self-cultivation, humanity, and harmonious society that Southeast Asia readers can easily understand. The Buddhist teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Three Marks of Existence can be found in *The Little Li Flying Dagger* and *The King's Avatar*. Finally, the theme of heroism is illustrated through the male protagonists of both novels. In short, Southeast Asian readers are familiar with these elements, and this is why Southeast Asian readers appreciate Chinese popular fiction and CIL.

Chapter 2: CIL Communities in Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia

"[W]hen talking about the relationship between authors and readers that these journals fostered, literary journals are by definition interested in creating a community of readers and contributors, for whom the journal is a kind of virtual meeting place."

– Michel Hockx (2004, p. 111)

Introduction

This chapter aims to understand the activities and roles of Internet users in three different CIL online communities. The Internet, Web 2.0, and CIL have enabled ordinary Internet users to become translators, producers, and fans in different online communities. Undoubtedly, computer-mediated communication (CMC) represents more "democratic communication" because this mean of communication offers borderless accessibility without disclosing a given participant's identity, such as race and origin (MacDonald, 1998). A core argument of this chapter is that the Internet, Web 2.0, and CIL have enabled ordinary Internet users to become translators and producers in CIL online communities in Southeast Asia and that these communities can stimulate cultural consumption in the region.

This chapter is organised in accordance with three types of online community related to CIL: translation communities, writing communities, and fan communities. By examining the roles of translators in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, this will rebound to how these translators can deliver and disseminate Chinese cultural elements in Southeast Asia. Moreover, the study of writing communities in Thailand and Malaysia will demonstrate how CIL works can inspire local writers to create their versions of CIL in Southeast Asia; this chapter will consider the question of the

incorporation of Chinese cultural elements in these works. Furthermore, this investigation of CIL fan communities in Thailand will further our understanding of the organisation of fan communities and the means by which fans circulate and appreciate CIL within their communities.

Before discussing translation communities, it is a good idea to review the meanings of translation and community. Thus, the "translation community" is a group of people who deliver the meaning of the same words in different languages. According to Yu (2016), there are two types of fan translation communities: audio-visual and text-oriented. At present, the purposes of translation communities are rather diverse, but the content is mainly textual (Yu, 2016). In the Internet age, CIL translators can be found in various online communities, such as Dek-D.com and specific groups or pages on Facebook.com, where different users create their profile pages or groups to post translations of CIL.

User-generated content (UGC) is a common feature in online communities in the Web 2.0 context. Web 2.0 is characterised by user-generated content (UGC); Baym (2011) described it as when "all of the content [is] generated by the people, for the people" (p. 384). Furthermore, UGC is a part of digital cultural production and consumption (Wu & Xue, 2017). In addition, Web 2.0 has also brought about "user-generated translation" (UGT). This term is defined by O'Hagan (2009) as a broad spectrum of translation that is implemented by the involvement of free labour in online media platforms where the translation is carried out by users on the Internet. Importantly, Diaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez (2006) note that translation works under UGT are likely to be done by fans for fans. Pertinent to UGT, "fan translators" are a clear example of "prosumers": as consumers of translations have become translation producers (O'Hagan, 2009). This shift in the CIL translation community

is evident since the majority of translators, presently, are freelancers or work in small translation offices (Doherty, 2016).

CIL Translation Communities

The following sub-section introduces three types of translators in CIL translation communities: professional translators, paraprofessional translators, and amateur translators. After that, the roles of translators in expanding cultural consumption, the process of translation, and difficulties in translation will be illustrated. Another sub-section discusses how translation in Web 2.0 can provide opportunities for Internet users to become translators, but this also leads to questions on ethics and copyrights in the online translation communities.

Types of Translators in CIL Communities

This sub-section discusses distinct groups of translators in CIL translation communities in Southeast Asia. Web 2.0 and the demand for CIL in the region has caused the emergence of online translators. It is evident that higher demand for translation, notably in Asia, is caused by the expansion of globalisation, international markets, and the increase of diverse content (Doherty, 2016). To explore different types of translators, I have utilised secondary research and ethnographic research methods of participant observation and interview. After observing CIL translation communities, I have separated translators into three categories: professional translators, paraprofessional translators, and amateur translators.

The first group, professional translators, refers to any persons who have trained professionally and work as translators. According to Harris (as cited in Pym, 2011), "professional translators" can be defined as "people who do translating for living" (p. 96). A good example of a professional translator is Linmou. On 15 June 2019, I conducted a in-person interview with Linmou (Miss Suree Pruksanusak) at Sureeporn Publishing, a small self-publisher where she works as a full-time

translator and editor. Linmou obtained her master's degree in Chinese history from a university in Beijing. She utilised her knowledge of Chinese history and Chinese language to pursue a career in the translation of Chinese novels in 2007. Her first translation work was a Taiwanese fantasy novel written by Zhang Yun, *The Lord of the Kings*, published by Sataporn Books in 2007. She translated novels for Sataporn Books, Physics Centre, and Happy Banana between 2007 and 2011, before establishing her own small publishing house, Suree Publishing, in 2011. Linmou translated ten novels between 2007 and 2017; five fantasy novels and five romance-fantasy novels. Her renowned translated novels are *Manman qingluo* (Chinese title: 蔓蔓青蘿) and *Eternal Love* (Chinese title: 三上三世十里桃花), as these novels were adapted into popular productions in China. Professional translators make up the smallest proportion of translators in CIL translation communities. For instance, Tunwalai.com employs one full-time translator, while the rest are freelancers (Sorasing, 2019).

The second group of translators is paraprofessional translators. Pym (2011) proposes the term "paraprofessional translator" to describe any persons who are involved in translation activities without being trained professionally or those who do not rely on translation as their principal source of income. The most substantial proportion of translators in CIL translation communities are paraprofessional translators; for example, Tunwalai.com hires about 60 part-time translators (Sorasing, 2019) and various paraprofessional translation groups and users mostly do English-language translations of CIL on Webnovel.com. To be highlighted, this group of translators share a similar background, being Chinese cultural consumers and Internet users before becoming translators. Examples of paraprofessional translators in Southeast Asia are Mod Daeng, CaiQing, CKtalon, and StackThatCoin.

Mod Daeng is a well-known translator from Jamsai Publishing in Thailand. In total, she has translated more than 70 Chinese novels, including CIL from Taiwan and mainland China (Jamsai, n.d.-c). Mod Daeng works full-time in finance, translating Chinese novels is instead a hobby for her since she only works on the translation during weekends (Mod Daeng, 2010). Mod Daeng became a part-time translator because she likes reading Chinese *wuxia* and historical romance novels; her interest led her to study Chinese as she wanted to read the novels without waiting for translations (Jamsai, n.d.-c). Mod Daeng's CIL translations include *Jade Dynasty* (Chinese title: 誅仙), an eleven-volume serialised Chinese online *xianxia* novel written by Xiao Ding; *Ballad of the Desert* (Chinese title: 大漠謠), a CIL historical romance novel by Tong Hua; and Mao Ni's *Jiang Ye* (Chinese title: 將夜) series martial of arts novels, published by Qidian.

Another paraprofessional translator from Thailand is CaiQing. On 2 April 2020, I interviewed CaiQing via Facebook messenger. CaiQing is the pseudonym of an office lady who spends her time after work reading and translating Chinese novels. Moreover, she casually translates Chinese novels for her Facebook Page, where there are more than 10,000 followers. CaiQing enjoyed reading Chinese martial art novels such as *Juedai shuangjiao* (Chinese title: 絕代雙驕), *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* (Chinese title: 射鵰英雄傳) when she was in her teenage years. Back then, Chinese sci-fi and fantasy novels were in limited supply in Thailand. Therefore, CaiQing started to learn Chinese in order to be able to read such novels in Chinese. CaiQing translated two BL novels for Rose Publishing: *Zhen hai shi ruci suifeng linlin* (Chinese title: 朕還是如此威風凜凜), written by Gong Zi Zhan on JJWXC, and Yu Xiao Lan Shan's *Diwang gonglüe* (Chinese title: 帝王攻略).

One of the paraprofessional translators from Singapore is Oon Hong Wen, or CKtalon. He is a Singaporean scientist who converted his hobby into a part-time job as a translator for Webnovel.com and Qidian International (Lin, 2018; Sunnnyy, 2018). CKtalon began translating for Webnovel.com in June 2017 and he is known as a star translator on the platform (Sunnnyy, 2018). Prior to that, CKtalon became interested in CIL when he learned that his favourite Chinese comic—*Tales of Demons and Gods* by Mad Snail—was an adaptation of a CIL novel (Lin, 2018). His reputation can be seen from the high number of views (79 million) and rating score (4.3 stars) for the translation of *True Martial World*, an Eastern Fantasy novel. Since then, CKtalon has translated five titles: *Seeking the Flying Sword Path*, *True Martial World*, *Absolute Choice*, *The Monk that Wanted to Renounce Asceticism*, and *Dead on Mars*. Furthermore, CKtalon (2019b) appears to work with Atlas Studios, another Singapore-based translation group, as he made several posts on Webnovel's discussion forum on behalf of Atlas Studios.

The next paraprofessional translator is a Malaysian, StackThatCoin. This username is used by one of the translators in the translation team EndlessFantasy Translation. StackThatCoin is one of a few paraprofessional translators who works full-time as a translator. He is the translator of *Stealing the Heaven*, an Eastern Fantasy novel, which received more than 9 million views. He has been reading Chinese online novels for more than a decade and he did some translation as a hobby before joining a translation team at Webnovel.com in 2017 (StackThatCoin, 2017).

In CIL communities, some Internet users have attempted to be produser-translators. Put it briefly, produser-translators refers to amateur translators (see below) whose translations eventually become a source of paraprofessional status. One case of this kind of produser-translator is an Internet user who adopted a penname of Xiu Jin. Formerly, Xiu Jin translated the CIL novel *Feipin zhe zhiye*

(Chinese title: 妃嬪這職業), and posted it on the largest online novel website in Thailand, Dek-D.com in October 2014 (ayacinth, 2014). In the introduction section, Xiu Jin wrote a note to readers that her purpose in translating the novel was to share a good novel and to master her Chinese skills; if this novel were to be published by authorised publishers she would stop posting and delete what had already been posted. Xiu Jin paused posting on the platform in October 2015 and explained to readers that the author, Yue Xia Die Ying, signed a contract with JJWXC and Yue Xia Die Ying did not have rights to authorise anyone to republish her works. After signing a contract, JJWXC changed the title to *Gongting jishi* (Chinese title: 宮廷記事). Luckily, Jamsai Publishing bought the copyright and allowed Xiu Jin to complete her translation of the novel. Later, Xiu Jin translated two more works of Yue Xia Die Ying, *This Time... Lucky in Game, Lucky in Love* (Chinese title: 福澤有餘) and *Weihe xianqi* (Chinese title: 為何賢妻); Arun Publishing published her translations. She subsequently translated one more BL novel by Da Feng Gua Guo, *Huang Shu* (Chinese title: 皇叔), published by overgraY. In conclusion, Xiu Jin is a reader/user who wanted to share the translation of CIL and fortunately got a chance to publish her works with publishers; hence, in this context, Xiu Jin is a produser-translator.

Paraprofessional translators can be found in translation teams on numerous platforms. Within translation communities, many paraprofessional translators such as Mod Daeng and CaiQing work alone, but many others work in teams. The Chinese-to-Thai translation team Hor-muen-ak-sorn works for Tunwalai.com, within this team there are numerous freelancers, they have translated and are in the process of translating 76 titles; the majority of their translated novels are romance and fantasy. Similarly, Fictionlog.co also employs a translation team, ProjectZyphon, to translate

Chinese martial arts, fantasy, and mystery novels from Chinese into Thai, in total, this team has translated 159 titles. On Webnovel.com, there are several translation teams, for instance, Atlas Studios, EndlessFantasy Translations, and Henyee Translation. EndlessFantasy Translations (EFT) is a Malaysia-based translation team that was founded by Daniel Lai (Zenobys) and Adrian Sim (Insignia) in October 2016. Daniel Lai is fond of the classical Chinese novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and has consumed it in different media such as games and manga (Zenobys, 2017). He states that translating one novel may require more than one translator; for example, the first 149 chapters of *My Father-in-law is Lu Bu* were translated by 3–4 different translators (Zenobys, 2017). Unlike individual CIL translators, EFT was contacted by Qidian International and offered a translation job; it was an exceptional opportunity for the team to earn extra income while doing something they like. Thus far, EFT has translated 49 novels on Webnovel.com.

It can be said that the above translators are freelancers as they work full-time and only translate CIL for leisure in their free time. Although they might not have received formal translation training, they accumulated skills through their experiences, and eventually, they became recognised by publishers and readers in CIL translation communities.

The third group of translators in CIL translation communities in Southeast Asia is amateur translators. The definition of an "amateur translator" is a person who does not translate novels for payment but for recreation. A significant distinction between amateur translators and paraprofessional translators is their recognition in CIL translation communities; usually, translations by paraprofessional translators are authorised to be publicised by copyright holders (such as local publishers), while amateur translators are not granted such authority. Amateur translation shares common features with fan translation since fans are not professional translators and

they do not earn money from translations, they practice this for pleasure and the rewards are what they give and receive within the fan community (Vazquez-Calvo et al., 2019). Moreover, Doherty (2016) points out that Internet, technologies, open-source community, and globalisation have led to the birth of numerous amateur and volunteer translators who translate online content. Amateur translators are often Internet users who can be seen on platforms such as Dek-D.com in Thailand.

In amateur translator groups, the tendency is to translate CIL from available English translations into Thai. Due to the lack of skills and Chinese illiteracy, these amateur translators tend to translate for pleasure and wish to practice their English skills. Macneil (2018) translated Xi He Qing Ling's *Waiting For You Online* (Chinese title: 就等你上線了) from English into Thai on Dek-D.com; she claimed that she wanted to improve her English and translation abilities during a semester break, but after posting 16 chapters, she stopped updating new translation since a Thai publisher obtained copyright from the original author. Similarly, Teepo_V (2016) translated *I'm Really a Superstar* (Chinese title: 我真是大明星) on Dek-D.com, he stated that the Gravitytales.com translation team permitted him to translate this novel; he also added that his translation skills might not be good enough, but he would like to improve through translating this novel. However, Teepo_V stopped posting and deleted his translation posts when Fidtionlog.co acquired the copyright for the novel.

It is inevitable for English-to-Thai translators and produsers to encounter some difficulties. These amateur translators tend to drop the novels after a while because they do not have the right to publish them and many of them do not have enough patience and skill. Ana_I.LD (2016) is one of the non-Chinese-speaking produsers on Dek-D.com; he stated that he did not speak any Chinese, but he attempted to translate the BL novel *The Legendary Master's Wife* (Chinese title: 傳說

之主的夫人) from English into Thai, continuing for 27 chapters before announcing that he would be away and would not work on the novel any more. Similarly, Netear.ST does not speak or read Chinese, but she has translated several Chinese online novels from English into Thai (Netear.ST, 2016b, 2020). Her first translation was *Close Combat Mage* (Chinese title: 近戰法師), she started translating from English into Thai in April 2016, but she stopped updating new translations after 61 chapters in November 2016 (Netear.ST, 2016a). There are 790 original chapters in Chinese, 411 chapters in English translation (Taffy, 2015). Dek-D.com users such as KGGPage and Sevios translated *Zhan long* (Chinese title: 斬龍) by Shi Luo Ye from the English translation on Gravitytales.com into Thai; KGGPage translated Chapter 1 to Chapter 82 and Sevios continued translating Chapter 83 to Chapter 341 on Dek-D.com (KGGPage, 2015a; Sevios, 2015); he moved to posting on his Facebook page until Chapter 385 before dropping the novel (ZhanLongTH, 2017). Later, Kawebook.com obtained copyright from the original publisher to translate and distribute this novel in Thailand and the translator was Sinsupa. T (Kawebook.com, 2019).

Only a handful of English-to-Thai translators are given a chance to publish their translations on the more prominent CIL platforms with copyright approval. Some renowned fan translation groups are invited to work with the copyright holders (O'Hagan, 2009). A good example is Netear.ST (2016c). She posted her translations of *King of Gods* (Chinese title: 主宰之王) in October 2016, nevertheless, she announced in March 2017 that Fictionlog.co had purchased the copyright of this novel and she would not post anything on Dek-D.com after Chapter 79. However, Netear.ST continued translating *King of Gods* for Fictionlog.co until Chapter 441 before 周姿玲 (Zhou Zi Ling) and other translators from ProjectZyphon took over the translations from Chapter 442 to Chapter 1,585 (the final chapter).

There are several distinctions between translating CIL from Chinese into Thai and from English into Thai. First, amateur translators often translate CIL from English into Thai. They are initially interested in CIL and have some English-language abilities; while Chinese to Thai translations are likely to be done by professional and paraprofessional translators. Second, the lack of beautiful phrasing, insightful depictions, and word choices are noticeable when translating CIL from English to Thai, as the translators tend to use casual or colloquial language instead of formal vocabularies. Third, amateur translators who do not speak Chinese nor have knowledge of *pinyin* 拼音 and the four tones 四聲 of Mandarin are likely to translate character names and places inaccurately. For example, the title of Chapter 25 of *Zhan long* is 燕趙無雙 (*Yanzhao wu shuang*) in Chinese: the English translation on Gravitytales.com is "*Yan Zhao* Warrior" (Gravitytales.com, 2015); Sinsupa. T transliterated this Chinese title into the Thai alphabet "*yan-zhao-wu-shuang*" (เยี่ยนจ้าวอู๋ซวง) (Kawebook.com, 2019), while KGGPage tried to transliterate English words of "Yan Zhao" and directly translated the meaning of "warrior" into Thai; what he wrote is "*nak-rob-yaen-jua*" (นักรบแหยนจั้ว) (KGGPage, 2015b). From this observation, it can be said that KGGPage does not have a basic knowledge of Chinese and *pinyin*.

Cultural Consumption, the Translation Process, Problems of Translation, and Produser–Reader Interaction in Translation Communities

Within translation communities, translators believe that CIL can deliver some aspects of Chinese culture and thought to readers. Prik Hom, a Thai translator of *The Journey of Flower* (Chinese title: 花千骨), and CaiQing agreed that Chinese historical romance novels could transmit knowledge of Chinese customs, traditions, proverbs, metaphors, idioms, and philosophy to Thai readers (CaiQing, 2020; Jamsai, n.d.-b). In the same vein, a translator of *Battle Through the Heavens* (Chinese title:

斗破蒼穹), Lee Linli, said that Chinese martial arts novels and dramas were not only

entertaining to read and watch because they were extraordinary and far beyond

reality, but they also transmitted some cultural knowledge and reflections on virtues

to the audience, in which this audience could emulate (Jenkitcharoen, 2015).

CKtalon quoted one CIL author, Tian Can Tu Dou (Heavenly Silkworm Potato), that

"translations are a conversation between online literature and foreign culture,"

because the popularity of CIL outside the Chinese-speaking world is a form of

cultural exchange (Lin, 2018).

CIL translators not only help to circulate Chinese novels in their respective

regions, they also convey a better understanding of Chinese culture to their readers.

Translators such as Linmou and Mod Daeng explain Chinese cultural elements and

history to Thai readers using footnotes. A professional translator and the owner of a

small publishing house, Linmou believes that inserting footnotes and images in

books is very important since it is a way to transfer knowledge of one culture to

those who may not be familiar with that culture (Pruksanusak, 2019). Hence, she

began to publish her translated novels with additional details of Chinese culture and

with full-colour images in order to educate the readers, and she hopes that her

dedication will inspire those who want to become a translator in the future

(Pruksanusak, 2019). These actions show her intense passion and her commitment to

the readers. Mod Daeng, a paraprofessional translator, also adds some interesting

cultural explanation in the footnotes of her translations because she wants readers to

have a clearer understanding of Chinese cultural and historical elements (Mod Daeng,

2010). Additionally, CKtalon hopes that his translation of 700 Chinese terms,

including Chinese proverbs, idioms, and cultivation levels, will enable readers of all

cultural backgrounds to have a very clear understanding of CIL and Chinese culture

(Sunnnyy, 2018). In short, translators not only translate the novels, they also pass on Chinese cultural and historical knowledge to local readers.

Individual CIL translators in Southeast Asia tend to have the freedom of selecting which novels they translate. For a professional translator like Linmou, she has four basic requirements in choosing a work of CIL. First, she must enjoy reading the novel because it will be torturous for her to translate it if the novel is not enjoyable. Second, the novel must have a happy ending. Third, it should not contain sexual activities because it is her social responsibility to self-censor and filter this type of material before publishing. Fourth, the novel should not be too long, or still be ongoing (Pruksanusak, 2019). Linmou carefully selects the novels that she likes, and they often become famous in Thailand as a result of her selection of them (Pruksanusak, 2019). Sometimes, Linmou buys print versions of CIL from Kinokuniya, a Japanese chain book store in Thailand, and reads some CIL online before deciding on which one to translate. Moreover, after deciding on which novels she wants to translate, Linmou often contacts the authors of the novels directly and expresses her interest in buying the copyright. Thanks to the Internet and social media, Linmou does not have any difficulties in interacting with Chinese novelists. Similarly, Mod Daeng often chooses to translate her favourite genre, romance fiction; after submitting the translation draft to the publisher, Jamsai Publishing will contact the copyright holders and process this legal matter for translators (Mod Daeng, 2010). Likewise, CaiQing selects CIL from print books and online; she often visits JJWXC.com to read new CIL and to look for potential novels that she can translate.

However, translators who work in teams for CIL translation platforms such as Webnovel.com and Tunwalai.com have to choose novels from lists provided by the platforms. CKtalon explained on a discussion forum how translators for Webnovel.com cannot freely decide which novel is to be translated and published, as

this would violate the copyright; instead, translators must select a novel from a list of books provided by Webnovel.com (CKtalon, 2019c). However, translators will occasionally undergo a request-based process when the translators get a chance to propose the book to the content editors on Webnovel.com (CKtalon, 2019c). The Webnovel.com user Neverfire7 (2018) created a "frequent asked questions" webpage where other users can find relevant information on novel selection. They also made a process chart on how they select novels (see Figure 12). Analogously, for Tunwalai.com, novels are either selected directly by the Tunwalai.com team from their Chinese partner websites such as Qidian.com or based on these Chinese partners' recommendations (Sorasing, 2019). In terms of choosing the novels, the primary consideration is whether this novel is already famous in China and has features that indicate that it will sell well in Thailand; some novels may be selected despite not being well-known in China, solely because their content is understood to be interesting and with the possibility of gaining popularity in Thailand (Sorasing, 2019). Users often request that Tunwalai.com translate their favourite CIL into Thai, for example, ดวงใจอสุรา *Duangchai-asura* (Chinese title: 鬼王的金牌宠妃) (Sorasing, 2019). Individual and freelance translators tend to select novels based on their preferences, while translators who are hired by CIL translation platforms cannot enjoy the freedom of choosing novels to be translated.

In terms of the translation process, translators share similar ways of translating CIL. Firstly, translators often spend some time reading the novels first and directly translate the text into local languages. Secondly, they will spend more time editing and arranging pages. For instance, Linmou and Mod Daeng read the original novel in Chinese first to understand the stories and think about the way to communicate and deliver them to Thai readers; then they will spend more time on polishing the translations (Mod Daeng, 2010; Pruksanusak, 2019). For Mod Daeng,

she often directly translates every character, then, she will see if the translation is too long or not and see if the context is rational or not while editing (Mod Daeng, 2010).

Although the translation process may sound simple, some translators for whom Chinese is not their mother tongue have encountered issues when translating from Chinese into their native language. Mod Daeng, for example, said that translating Chinese historical romance fiction was not easy for her because she was not familiar with Chinese history, imperial officials, royal and noble ranks, proverbs, and idioms, thus, she had to research further to make her translations and wording more beautiful and smooth (Jamsai, n.d.-c; Mod Daeng, 2010). In contrast, ethnic Chinese translators who are bilingual do not seem to have many translating problems. CKtalon is bilingual, as are most Singaporeans of Chinese descent, hence translating CIL from Chinese to English is not difficult for him. As a translator, he firmly believes that translators must truly comprehend the writing style of the original author in order to deliver the author's intentions accurately. During the translation process, translators should communicate with the author and editor frequently. Similarly, the Chinese-Malaysian translator StackThatCoin is multilingual, he speaks Mandarin Chinese and other Chinese dialects, English, and Malay; therefore, switching and translating between languages is not a big issue for him (StackThatCoin, 2017).

CIL has established author-reader interaction on digital platforms and this social interaction can be seen in CIL online translation communities as well. On Webnovel.com, translator-reader interaction is relatively active as readers can interact with translators by several methods: leaving comments at the bottom of each chapter of a novel, spending "coins" (the digital currency of the Webnovel.com platform) on a novel, and giving gifts to translators. Besides, readers and translators can create a thread on the site forums to initiate discussion or make some

announcement. On the forums there is a section titled "Report Translation Mistakes" through which readers can report any mistakes to translators. Moreover, translators can also interact with readers by replying to their comments on both novel chapters and forum threads. Interactions between writers and readers can be found via translators' profile pages where there are records of their replies on individual chapters of a given novel (see, for instance, CKtalon's profile page: www.webnovel.com/profile/1657837878). When readers comment on phrases, wordings, and translations, translators tend to respond and amend their mistakes in accordance with suggestions from readers. Similar to Webnovel.com, readers on Tunwalai.com can interact with translators by commenting, giving "likes," and purchasing chapters. However, the degree of interaction between translators and readers on Tunwalai.com is relatively low and it seems that readers only interact with other readers on the platform. It should also be highlighted that translators in Thailand often set up Facebook pages to make announcements and interact with readers; see, for example, Hor-muen-ak-sorn (a member of Tunwalai.com's translation team), Lee Linli, and CaiQing. Nonetheless, translator-reader interaction is comparatively low.

Violation of Copyright in Translation Communities

This shift in the translation community from professionals to amateurs has be beneficial for many who wish to become professional translators in the future. Tunwalai.com, for instance, believes that hiring freelancers provides them with an excellent opportunity to earn some money and advance their translation skills (Sorasing, 2019). There are, however, some downsides. Linmou states that the Internet not only created opportunities for amateur translators, but also caused some problems in the translation community (Pruksanusak, 2019). Of course, the Internet enables amateur translators to accumulate experience and skill. However, some

inexperienced translators try to earn some money from translating novels without using proper literary styles, as such, they may derogate the aesthetic quality of the novels (Pruksanusak, 2019). In CIL translation communities in Thailand, some amateur translators take advantage by requesting donations from readers or by instituting membership/VIP fees to read translated novels.

These translators or translation teams tend to publish or republish CIL without licenses or copyright from original authors or publishers. In Thailand, these translators usually open Facebook pages and post spoilers or free chapters there. After obtaining a certain number of followers, they will invite the followers to pay to join VIP groups on Facebook or alternative platforms such as Blogger.com and Wordpress.com, where they post novel translations. For example, the Facebook page *Returning From The Immortal World – นิยายแปลไทย*, asks followers to pay 100–150 Thai baht to join arranged groups, each group consists of 100 chapters ("Returning From The Immortal World," 2019). From my observation, many Facebook pages or groups do not give credit to original authors and do not inform readers of the sources of translated novels. In other cases, they use images from the original novels that may state the Chinese title and the names of the author, although this is clearly a violation of copyright as well. However, due to unprofessionalism and limited translation ability, many of these pages eventually became inactive; other users have reported some pages for violating copyright. Hence, they are no longer available. In the same manner, Louktan_RPZ (2017) translated *Great Demon King* (Chinese title: 大魔王) from English into Thai. Louktan_RPZ (2017) posted her translations of 20 chapters of *Great Demon King* on Dek-D.com before inviting readers to visit her Facebook page. Then, she began to create private groups where VIP readers had to pay 100 Thai baht per group (i.e., per 100 chapters) ("Louktan Translate นิยายแปลไทย," 2017). Even though she mentioned the original Chinese title, original author, and the

English-language translation website, she had not been granted copyright to translate or publish on the Internet. Both Facebook pages distribute literary works for commercial purposes without copyright.

Linmou believes that the digital platforms enable netizens to give feedback to translators; also, as more and more people can speak Chinese they can detect the mistakes quickly. Therefore, amateur translators who defectively translate novels on the Internet will be heavily criticised by netizens and this can damage their reputation and career. CKtalon believes that readership of CIL is constantly changing due to the increase of CIL on the market, and that this will eventually oust the low-level translators.

The growing number of amateur translators in CIL translation communities has also raised some questions about their quality and legal status. Doherty (2016) and O'Hagan (2009) have expressed their concerns over the matters of quality, responsibility, legality, and monetary reward in UGT. O'Hagan (2009) states that many fan translation groups affirm that they would delete their translations when an official translation became available, nonetheless, due to digitalisation, many fan translations have already been publicised and distributed on the Internet when this occurs. However, user-generated translations may be seen as a threat to professional translators since they are likely to gain remuneration from the enterprises even though the quality of their translations are still questionable (Kelly, 2009, as cited in O'Hagan, 2011). In the same manner, Diaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez (2006) also agree that the quality of fan translations is often below average, but that they reasonably preserve foreign cultural idiosyncrasies.

All in all, Thai translators are typically fans or ordinary Internet users before receiving the opportunity to take part in official translations; they are vivid illustrations of how users became translators, or, in other words, produsers. The rise

of produser-translators coincided with the growing popularity of CIL in Thailand after 2010.

Writing Communities

This section aims to introduce CIL writing communities where Southeast Asia writers produce their versions of CIL. This section illustrates the localisation of CIL production in Malaysia by utilising a case study of eManyan.com and examines the imitation of CIL writings among Thai online writers on several digital platforms.

EManyan.com is Malaysia's first original Chinese-language literature website; all novels are written in Chinese by ethnic Chinese in Malaysia. Chinese-language literature in Malaysia is categorised as "sectional literature": literary works that are not written in Bahasa Malay. *Manyan* 漫延, the precursor to eManyan.com, began in 2004 when four Chinese literature students expressed an interest of organising the underground publication of Chinese-language literature. Later, Dream Seed Publisher 漫延書房 was established in November 2005; this locally grown publisher gradually published more than 40 books. After four years of setting up the publishing house, Dream Seed Bookshop was founded in Kampar district, Perak state in 2009; the bookshop has hosted numerous events such as book exhibitions and social gatherings to connect Chinese-language literature readers and writers. Responding to changing modes of reading and creating in the digital age and the rise in CIL platforms in greater China, eManyan.com was eventually launched in 2014. There were six objectives in the establishment of eManyan.com. First, to improve Malaysian Chinese-language literature works. Second, to create a new platform for interaction between writers and the readers. Third, to promote the creativity of Chinese-language literature and allow Chinese-language literature creators from all over the world to connect with like-minded colleagues through the platform and produce more outstanding works. Fourth, to enable people from around the world to

access creative works from Malaysia's network through the Chinese-language website. Fifth, to meet the changes and needs of the times in the forms of electronic media and allow Malaysian-Chinese original works to have a better display platform. Sixth, to welcome different types of creative works: for instance, novels, prose, essays, poems, and drama, as long as the creators follow the website's requirements.

What makes Chinese-language fiction on eManayan.com different from CIL is their writing style and eloquence, genre preferences, and cultural elements. In general, serialised novels on eManyan.com are shorter than CIL, for instance, the most popular novel on the platform, *Xianzu monü zhi yinian hou* (Chinese title: 仙族魔女之億年後), consists of 283 chapters with only 856,106 written characters. The author of *4 xuan 1 de lianai* (4 選 1 的戀愛), Ning Jing, wrote the novel in traditional Chinese characters and used onomatopoeia such as "ko…ko…" and "Pang!!!" instead of Chinese characters. According to data collected on 21 February 2020, there were a total of 1,115 novels on eManyan.com under nine categories (see Table 9). It is evident that fantasy/mystery and school life/youth are the dominant genres on eManyan.com, while the fewest novels are found under the history and military genres (see Table 9). The majority of Chinese-language novels on eManyan.com do not adopt Chinese settings, excluding some historical settings such as palaces; see *Qingran gongzhu* (Chinese title: 傾然公主), for example.

Inspired by CIL, Thai writers have also imitated and created their versions of Chinese genre fiction. Since these novels use Chinese or China-like settings (in particular, Chinese palaces), as well as adopting Chinese names of characters and cities, therefore, they are categorised as Chinese genre fiction.

In fact, Chinese genre novels are written entirely in the Thai language by Thai writers for Thai readers. Thonnaratana, a Thai fan of CIL, told *Global Times* that, "This emerging group of non-Chinese writers imitating Chinese web novels has

come about partially due to the difficulties involving translation of Chinese online literature" (Liu, 2019). After reading 24 different Chinese genre novels written by Thais (see Table 10), I found that most of these novels exclude accurate elements of Chinese culture and history because writers have clearly remarked that they created these novels solely from their imagination and inspiration from Chinese dramas and novels. Some Chinese genre novels attempt to imitate the language of classical Chinese novels. For instance, instead of using "*chan*," the Thai pronoun for I or me (equivalent to *wo* 我), Thai Chinese genre novels tend to adopt "*kha*," the older Thai pronoun for I or me (equivalent to *wu* 吾). The transliteration of Chinese words such as 太子 (*taizi*), 哥哥 (*gege*), and 妹妹 (*meimei*) is also ubiquitous in these novels. From my observation, there are two main types of Thai Chinese genre novels, fantasy and *wuxia*, many are mixed with romance.

It should be noted that Thai Chinese genre novels are often set in ancient times, but there is no association with Chinese history. Many Thai Chinese fantasy novels are female-lead, while martial arts novels are male-lead. Possibly, the close cultural proximity between Thai culture and Chinese culture has lead Thai readers to forge a connection to the settings and scenes of these novels. Certainly, Thai readers have responded enthusiastically to Chinese romance (Pruksanusak, 2019). Among these writers, Thadaporn, the author of *Nang-nai* (Chinese title: 宫女), is distinguished because she is genuinely interested in Chinese history and culture during the Qing dynasty; she spent about six years to research and complete this novel (Thadaporn, 2016). Importantly, in contrast with other online writers, Thadaporn was inspired by a historical book that depicted the life of female servants inside the imperial palace during the rule of Empress Dowager Cixi. Moreover, Thadaporn is also a translator of *Tianshang you ke ai qing shu* (Chinese title: 天上有

棵愛情樹), a novel written by Zhuang Zhuang. Another outstanding Chinese genre novel is *Mue-pee-saat*, written, organised, and published by Matsuo Masahito. What more interesting is that he used Teochew dialect in his novel for the names of characters and pronouns.

Authors of both CIL-inspired novels in Malaysia and Thailand are produsers who also help to boost cultural consumption in CIL communities. These novels may not explicitly express Chinese cultural elements. Nevertheless, these writings are the localisation of cultural products that have been influenced and inspired by CIL that could extend cultural consumption in the local context.

Fan Communities

This section explores CIL fan communities or CIL fandom in Thailand. Fan is an individual who likes a fan page on Facebook or a member of a social network in which members interact and share information with each other (Chandler and Munday, 2016). In addition, Chandler and Munday (2016) defines fandom as "[a] collective identity based on a shared enthusiasm for some aspect of mass culture and regular participation in group activities arising from this.". Before the advent of the Internet, fandom was expressed through fan clubs where fans had a face-to-face interactions and gathered at conventions, however, during the early 1990s, traditional fandom moved to online platforms where information could be transmitted and received more quickly; as such, fans from around the world can interact with each other (Busse & Hellekson, 2006). At present, fans of a given cultural product can obtain information and share it with other fans on social media platforms; sharing fan artefacts is undoubtedly a typical activity in today's world (Duffett, 2013).

This section adopts participant observation and coding scheme with content analysis to investigate the discussions of Thai fans relating to the CIL novel *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* (Chinese title: 魔道祖師). Data were collected

from discussion forums on Pantip.com and Facebook fan pages as well as fan groups. This study gathered data from Webnovel.com and Tunwalai.com to understand fans' comments. Also, this study presents cases of copyright infringement among CIL fan communities in Thailand.

Fans as Consumers in CIL Fan Communities

Readers can be either fans or consumers in CIL fan communities. How are fans different from consumers? According to da Silva and Las Casas (2017), discussing this in the context of sports teams, spectators will watch a sports game and forget about it, whereas fans will engage their daily activity with the sport or the sports team. Therefore, in the context of CIL, fans are individuals who read particular genres or specific CIL frequently and who are actively involved in fan activities online; on the other hand, consumers are ordinary readers. Fans consume multiple novels across genres and may join fan groups in order to obtain updated information. For example, there are 66,000 members in the *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* fan group, but there are on average 60 comments under each post or discussion.

Furthermore, a fan community encompasses a group of people who share a universal admiration of pop culture materials and individuals, establishing a sense of identity and a similar ethos with them; these fans frequently build and participate in various sites to intensify their involvement with a given pop culture product (Baym, 2007). CIL fan communities appear to be where CIL readers express their common interests and interact and exchange information with each other, but the engagement within fan communities can rather diverse. According to Jenkins (2006), participatory culture often emerges from community involvement. Individual fans often engage with fan communities by creating new posts and commenting on other posts. In contrast, consumers tend to have minimal engagement in fan communities,

they only like or share posts. Yet, both fans and consumers co-exist in CIL fan communities.

After observing these fan communities, there are two types of fan group: officially organised groups and fan-organised groups. Thai publishers or translators form official fan groups. For example, Siam Inter Publishing founded a Facebook fan group for *The King's Avatar.* In this group, the translator often posts previews and promotions of *The King's Avatar*'s novels and manga. Also, readers or fans of *The King's Avatar* enthusiastically join the discussion on the novel; this has established translator–reader and reader–reader interaction. However, the degree of engagement within this type of fan communities is relatively low as there are about 20 posts per day. The second type of fan group is founded by fans; see, for instance, the Facebook group for *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* (www.facebook.com/groups/1295187390628221). Members in this group frequently talk about adaptations of the novel, actors in the adaptations, and promotions of original novel and adaptations such as web drama and anime. Fans in the *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* fan group are extremely active as they circulate about 339 posts per day within the group. Fans of the BL novel *Grave Robbers' Chronicles* also established a specific fan group on Facebook (www.facebook.com/groups/239505929588609), to express their love for male characters in the novel; some fans also write BL fanfictions and share them with other readers. Since the *Grave Robbers' Chronicles* fan community is a private group, the level of interaction between fans is relatively low.

Besides Facebook groups, CIL fans in Thailand have also made Facebook fan pages to share information with other fans. The distinct features between Facebook groups and fan pages are the initiation of discussions and file sharing. On Facebook fan pages, only the administrators of the page are allowed to make new posts, while

in the Facebook groups any member can start a new post or discussion. Also, the file-sharing option is only available in Facebook groups; this feature allows members in the groups to create files and share with other members. For instance, a member of the *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* Facebook group uploaded a file explaining the five sects in the novel (see the fan page "ปรมาจารย์ลัทธิมาร" at https://bit.ly/34j24fi). It is common for fans to join CIL-related Facebook groups and to follow Facebook fan pages at the same time in order to obtain insights and to interact with those who share the same interest. Likewise, fans can be seen as (specialist) consumers (Hills, 2002). Moreover, the number of followers on fan pages are usually higher than the number of members in Facebook fan groups. For instance, there are more than 94,000 followers of the *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* fan page, while there are just above 66,000 members in the *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* group. More importantly, fan interaction keeps the fan community alive since members actively and passionately talk about their favourite characters and stories. In the *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* Facebook group one member asked others why they liked this novel or its adaptation: 31 members stated that they liked the plot and characters; 17 members expressed that they were fond of the novel's dramatic adaptation and the actors in that adaptation; and another 6 members said they enjoyed the novel and its adaptation because of its Boys' Love genre. This result indicates that Thai fans primarily consume *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* because of its plot.

I collected data from Thailand's largest discussion forum, Pantip.com, under a tag of "ปรมาจารย์ลัทธิมาร" from 4 May 2019 to 8 May 2020 in a total of 476 threads, to comprehend what fans of *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* discussed in the fan community. According to the data (see Table 12), the most significant proportion of discussion threads related to various discussions of *The Untamed* (the dramatic

adaptation of *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation*). About 24 per cent of the threads centred around the web series adaptation, for example, 53 threads were made to express their love for the web series and 12 threads discussed whether there would be the second season of *The Untamed* or not. Additionally, 11 per cent of the threads were about actors in the web series, such as Wang Yibo and Xiao Zhan. About 6 per cent of fans talked about the musical score of *The Untamed* and another 3 per cent of the threads were about fandom and fan interactions with the leading actors in *The Untamed*. The proportion of threads regarding the original novel was comparatively smaller. Discussions on the content of the novel represented about 17 per cent; fans started discussions on the elements of the novel, many expressed that they wanted to read the novel because they had watched *The Untamed* and some fans sought detailed explanations of the content. Furthermore, 14 per cent of Thai fans discussed when and where to buy the novel; some fans requested "spoilers." Another 14 per cent of discussions related to characters in the novel; significant numbers of these threads were associated with "shipping"—a fandom term expressing the desire for two characters in a given novel to be in a romantic relationship—and a vast number of fans discussed the personalities and appearances of characters in the novels. Discussions on the similarities and differences between the original novel and its adaptation made up 5 per cent of the total threads. These data indicate that the adaptation of *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* stimulated the recognition of original novel in fan communities.

Within these fan communities, users undertake two major roles: as administrators and as ordinary fans. The administrators refer to the founders of fan pages or groups, they are in charge of moderating the content and posts in the communities. Fans are users who consume the content in these groups, initiate discussions, and interact with other fans. Some fans in these communities are also

produsers, especially in Facebook fan groups where members can create posts, content, and fan arts to share with other fans.

Fans' Comments on CIL Platforms

Both Webnovel.com and Tunwalai.com provide a comment section where fans can interact and express their opinions on novels. Fans engage is two types of interaction based on these comments: replying to the comments and liking the comments. Fans of CIL on both platforms both comment on the high cost of reading CIL on the platforms.

In this case, I will comprehend the reader's opinions on *Full Marks Hidden Marriage: Pick Up a Son, Get a Free Husband* through coding scheme. I have collected 5,257 comments from 1 November 2018 to 28 June 2019. According to the collected data (see Figure 11), the common keywords "funny," "so cute," and "love it" made up slightly more than 60 per cent of the comments and these indicate the positive expression of the readers. About 16 per cent of comments said "cliffhanger": this expresses the reader's excitement and expectation. Moreover, 6 per cent of the comments show the demand of the readers for more content: the keywords are "wanna read," "quicker," and "cannot wait." Although this novel is fully available on the online platforms, readers are still interested in reading this novel in print as 4 per cent of the comments addressed how users wanted to purchase it in the form of a print book. Slightly less than 1 per cent of the readers wrote "edgy": this could be what they felt towards the content and the personalities of the characters. The keywords "I am broke," "expensive," and "coins" demonstrate the readers' concern over their financial issues; these made up slightly less than 11 per cent of the comments. About 4 per cent of the readers wrote "pay" to express their demand for the content and their willingness to pay to read this novel.

I also adopted the coding scheme to analyse the reflections and comments of readers on five novels: (1) *Full Marks Hidden Marriage: Pick Up a Son, Get a Free Husband*, (2) *Abe the Wizard*, (3) *Cultivation Chat Group*, (4) *The King's Avatar*, and (5) *Super Gene*. Each novel represents a different genre and was done by a different translator. To comprehend the opinions of users, I have gathered the most-liked comments on the first page of the comment section. The most liked comments can indicate how much other users agreed with the comments. In general, 4 out of the 5 novels received positive comments from the users (see Figure 8).

Outstandingly, *The King's Avatar* seems to have the most positive comments as there was only one negative comment. *Super Gene* received 19 negative comments and 6 positive comments. Positive comments expressed users' appreciation and love for the content and characters of the novels; they also showed the gratitude to the translation teams for translating and uploading the chapters. Negative comments related to four issues: the cost of reading the novels, the slow speed of uploading new content, the quality of translations, and the quality of the novels themselves (see Figure 9). About 84 per cent of negative comments under *Super Gene* were related to pricing; this refers to the paywall that limits access to free chapters (freemium) and the unworthiness of the paid subscription chapters (premium). Numerous users voiced their dissatisfaction with the paywall, as many chapters were locked, and to unlock the chapters, the users must purchase coins and use those coins to pay for those chapters that they wanted to read. Many users expressed their anger toward the translator by calling him a "greedy translator," since the free chapters were increasingly being locked. Also, several users complained that each chapter was too short, and the cost of unlocking these VIP chapters was not worth it. One user asked other users to boycott the novel due to the increase of locked chapters that required more coins. Indeed, these financial related comments

can indicate that some readers or fans are not willing to or are unable to pay for accessing CIL; this leads to following section on the violation of copyright in fan communities.

Fan Communities and Copyright Infringement

The popularity of CIL in Southeast Asia has led to the circulation of pirated articles and the republishing of CIL within fan communities. Piracy can cause severe financial losses to businesses; it is no doubt illegal and unethical. Choi and Perez (2007) define online piracy as the unsanctioned reproduction and usage of copyrighted digital materials. The rise of online piracy has coincided with the popularisation of the Internet. Notably, in the past several years, piracy has had an intricate effect on creativity and the production of new CIL, and on business models in the CIL industry. This sub-section provides a brief review of copyright law in China, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand before investigating infringements of copyright in fan communities in Thailand.

China, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand have enacted similar copyright laws. These four nations are the members of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), one of the United Nations agencies. WIPO is a global forum that promotes innovation and creativity through a balanced and effective international intellectual property system. China has been a member of WIPO since 1980, Malaysia and Thailand became the members of WIPO in 1989, followed by Singapore in 1990 (WIPO, 2020). Copyright laws imposed in all four nations aim to protect the copyright and ownership of literary works of local citizens and citizens of any nations in WIPO; derivative works such as translations and adaptations are also protected as original works ("Copyright Act (1987) [Revised 2006]," n.d.; "Copyright Act 1987," n.d.; "Copyright Act B.E. 2537 (1994)," n.d.; "Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China (1991)," n.d.). A person who engages in "copyright

infringement" is any person who, without the licence or consent of the owner of the copyright, imports an article into the country, and manufactures an article for sale or hire by way of commercial sale, distribution for commercial purposes, exhibition or offer of articles in public, or causes any other person to do so ("Copyright Act (1987) [Revised 2006]," n.d.; "Copyright Act 1987," n.d.; "Copyright Act B.E. 2537," n.d.; "Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China (1991)," n.d.). Therefore, any copyright holders from China, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand are protected and copyright laws allow copyright holders to take legal action against infringers.

CIL translation providers adhere to copyright laws and they take this matter seriously. In terms of copyright, Webnovel.com moderators Yaoyueyi (2019) and CKtalon (2019a) stated that all official translations on Webnovel.com—those novels that are marked as "original"—must be checked with the copyright department before translation into English and other languages and eventual release. Yaoyueyi (2019) noted that other translations of novels, such as fan translations, do not obtain legal permission to translate and publish. For Tunwalai.com, if there is a violation of copyright–distribution without permission–of novels which Tunwalai.com holds the right to translate and publicise, Tunwalai.com will compile a list of copyright violators and forward it to the company legal department for further action (Sorasing, 2019). Besides, in most cases, after Thai publishers have purchased the copyright for a given novel from the original authors or publishers, they will announce their right to translate and publish the novel on their websites or Facebook pages. If these licensed publishers find anyone publishing or republishing this novel, they often give copyright violators some warnings to delete the posts before pressing charges against them.

Copyright infringements often occurs when fans circulate articles on the Internet without permission from copyright holders. Since amateur translators are

fans of Chinese fiction, they often publish translations of CIL to share with other fans. For example, Teepo_V, a user on Dek-D.com, began translating *I'm Really a Superstar* (我真是大明星) by Chang Yu 嘗諭 in October 2016, but he announced that he would cease translating and delete all posts on this novel in December 2016 after being informed that Fictionlog.co had bought the copyright of the novel. Although Teepo_V translated this novel from English into Thai, he did not have rights from the Chinese author nor the English-language translator to publish the novel. After deleting his translations, he also informed other readers to support *I'm Really a Superstar* on the licensed website, Fictionlog.co (Teepo_V, 2016).

However, there are many cases when copyright holders decided to file a lawsuit against copyright infringers. Linmou encountered numerous cases of online piracy as some netizens scanned and uploaded her works on the Internet without her authorisation (Pruksanusak, 2019). She filed a case against one user who republished her translation of *Manman qingluo* (Pruksanusak, 2019). Another case of copyright infringement occurred on 15 August 2018. Kawebook.com, Thailand's Chinese novel publisher, filed a police report against the Facebook group "แชร์นิยายจีน" (Share Chinese Novels) and the website Sixxxit.xe for circulating materials without copyright (Kawebook.com, 2018). Linmou believes that those who want to read the novel for free will not make an effort to buy anything, while those who want to buy will buy it regardless of the price (Pruksanusak, 2019). With the growth in popularity of CIL and the rise of online communities related to CIL, copyright violation is inevitable, and in many cases, fans are the ones who infringe of the copyright of CIL translations.

Summary

The roles of users in CIL communities are diverse; they not only consume content but also produce and circulate content, as well as promoting cultural consumption in

online communities. There are three major CIL communities on the Internet in Southeast Asia: translation communities, writing communities, and fan communities.

The translation communities in Thailand illustrate how Chinese translation has gradually expanded from a limited group of translators to a broader range of translators as well as circulated Chinese literature outside ethnic Chinese communities. Three types of translators are found in translation communities: professional translators, paraprofessional translators, and amateur translators. Among these three types of translators, paraprofessional translators make up the most significant share in CIL translation communities in Southeast Asia. Paraprofessional translators are those who have not been trained professionally and their main occupations are not translators. Furthermore, individual translators have more freedom of selecting CIL titles than translation teams who work for major platforms. Ethnic Chinese translators who are bilingual do not encounter translation issues, but Thai translators, particularly paraprofessional translators, may face some difficulties when translating historical novels. There is produser–reader interaction on CIL translation platforms; however, CIL readers and translators are more active on Webnovel.com.

In writing communities, ethnic Chinese people in Malaysia have created their own CIL platform where local writers can write novels in Chinese and post on the platform; most of the fiction on eManyan.com do not share similarities with CIL in mainland China in terms of writing styles and eloquence, yet the influence of CIL can still be seen. In Thailand, CIL has inspired Thai online writers to create Chinese genre novels that adopt Chinese settings and vocabulary. However, the accurate information on Chinese cultural aspects is missing, since most of these novels are solely written from the writers' imagination.

Additionally, many CIL fans in Thailand have built fan communities on Facebook, they have created Facebook fan pages where admins of the page convey information to their followers and fan groups where everyone in the groups can start discussions and inform other members of updated news on CIL and CIL adaptations. Pantip.com is another platform that Thai fans and readers use for discussion of CIL and express their interest in CIL. After analysing data collected from fans' discussions on Pantip.com, it is evident that CIL adaptations can boost fan interest in original novels. Within fan communities, CIL translation platforms also provide a feature that allows fans and readers to comment and interact. Comments on Webnovel.com and Tunwalai.com do not only show how readers appreciate CIL, but also allow them to raise concerns over financial matters; readers on both platforms have complained about the expensive cost of VIP chapters. This concern indicates that not every reader is willing to pay to read the content. Once consequence of this has been the growth in copyright infringement. Some amateur translators and fans tend to violate copyright by distributing CIL content within their communities for free or with entrance fees. Several private Facebook fan groups post CIL which has been illegally translated into Thai and some groups also share scans of CIL without permission from copyright holders; CIL publishers in Thailand such as Linmou and Kawebook have filed lawsuits against violators, yet copyright infringement is unavoidable. It is essential to highlight that both users and produsers in these three communities have boosted the recognition of CIL and cultural consumption in their communities.

Chapter 3: Commercialisation and Adaptation of CIL in Thailand and Southeast Asia

"Authors gain profit through selling the copyrights of their works, and they might also participate in the creation of the TV series or movies as screenwriters. In the past few years, a vast number of successful TV series and movies were adapted from well-known Internet literary works; the popularity of these works online guaranteed a large initial fan base."

— Yuyan Feng & Ioana Literat (2017, p. 2599)

Introduction

The argument of this chapter is that the commercialisation and adaptation of CIL are correlated, as both can help stimulate recognition of CIL and help to disseminate a broader view of Chinese culture to audiences in Southeast Asia. The first section examines the commercial models of the CIL translation websites Webnovel.com (English-language translations) and Tunwalai.com (Thai-language translations). The second section investigates CIL adaptations on the video-streaming platform WeTV.vip, through which Southeast Asian audiences can watch CIL adaptations such as web dramas and anime with subtitles in their local languages. The goal of this section will be to comprehend how CIL adaptations can promote original works and Chinese cultural elements to Southeast Asian viewers.

Influence of CIL on the Commercial Models of Online Novel Platforms

The established commercial models of CIL in mainland China (see the business models of mainland Chinese sites like Qidian.com and JJWXC) have expanded to online novel providers overseas, visible in the greater prevalence of the "freemium" business model. "Freemium" is a portmanteau

of "free" and "premium," and is typically used to describe businesses that provide both free and paid services. This business model allows users to experience the essential services at no cost, and in the meantime, this also entices users to pay for the further features at a premium. According to Seufert (2014), the fundamental purpose of the freemium business model is the consistent distribution of services to the broadest possible group of potential users. There are three realities that the business sector will encounter in the freemium model. First, the business must set the cost of its primary function at $0 (or equivalent) to broaden the total number of users trying the products and services (Seufert, 2014). Second, a low proportion of freemium users will monetize after the end of free trial (Seufert, 2014). Third, the minority of highly engaged users will expand the revenue of the services if they find the services intriguing (Seufert, 2014). Chinese online fiction platforms usually offer a specific number of free chapters for readers to try; if readers want to continue reading they have to pay for locked chapters or VIP chapters. CIL translation providers widely adopted this commercial model in Southeast Asia. This section will provide two case studies: Webnovel.com, an English-language CIL translation platform, and Tunwalai.com, a Thai-language translation platform.

Webnovel.com

Webnovel.com is one of the largest English-language CIL translation platforms; it is owned by the China Literature Group (Yuewen Group). Although Webnovel.com has not registered a domain in Southeast Asia, it is seeking to open an office in Singapore (Sunnnyy, 2019) and numerous Southeast Asian translators work for Webnovel.com. More than 34,000 users from Southeast Asia visit Webnovel.com daily. Currently, there are more than 300 serialised novels and more than 90,000 chapters published on the platform. *Castle of Black Iron* was the first English-language translation of a CIL novel; it was uploaded on Webnovel.com in March 2017. The translation

of *Castle of Black Iron* was done by Wu Qinglei, whose username is WQL.
Webnovel provides English-language translations of CIL novels for foreign users on
its website and mobile application. During its initial launch, Webnovel.com allowed
users to earn bonus chapters through donations. It later introduced a video
advertisement model that granted registered users the opportunity to read bonus
chapters for free after watching advertisements. Qidian.com claimed that the revenue
gained through this method would be divided between the translation and editorial
teams and other staff of Qidian International. This method gave some benefits to
both users of and labours for the platform.

Currently, Webnovel.com generates revenue by using the freemium model.
To encourage users to be more active on the platform, Webnovel introduced the
levels and privileges of membership. Currently, there are five levels of membership,
Level 1 to Level 5; each level allows users to enjoy various privileges (Qidian, 2018).
For example, when users invite friends to join the platform, a Level 1 user will earn 1
Energy Stone daily, while a Level 5 user will earn 3 Energy Stones and 2 Power
Stones (Qidian, 2018). In order to level up, users will be upgraded to a higher level
when they accumulate and attain a certain amount of experience points ("exp"); users
must earn 100 exp to move from Level 1 to Level 2 and they have to get 500 exp to
upgrade from Level 2 to Level 3 (Qidian, 2018). Webnovel gives users simple
missions to complete in order to gain experience points; users can visit
the "rewards" page to complete the daily missions and upgrade missions (Qidian,
2018). In terms of daily missions, users earn 5 exp daily for logging-in and another 5
exp for posting a review (Qidian, 2018). For upgrade missions, the users can earn at
least 5 exp from each mission, such as adding a book to the library and completing
their personal profile (Qidian, 2018). Users receive a set number of Energy
Stones and Power Stones for logging in on a daily basis. Users can use the Energy

Stones to vote for the novel they want to read first on the following Monday under the "What's next?" page (www.webnovel.com/vote) (Qidian, 2018). There will be two novels for users to vote for in two different categories: female lead and male lead. The usage of Power Stones is similar to Energy Stones, but they must be used for recommending to others and voting novels for the "Power Ranking" page, as well as for showing the support to the creators (Qidian, 2018).

"Coins" are another feature of Webnovel.com's freemium model. This refers to the official currency on the platform. There are two types of Coins (Qidian, 2018). The first type is Bonus Coins; these can be obtained through participating in various online activities such as friend referral and daily log-in; Bonus Coins expire after 30 days (Qidian, 2018). The second type is simply "Coins" which users must purchase in advance and for which there is no expiration date (Qidian, 2018). Both Bonus Coins and Coins can be used for skipping advertisements and encouraging the hard work of translator-editor teams (Qidian, 2018). After giving Coins to a novel, including purchasing the premium chapters, distributing gifts to the novel, and using Coins to skip the advertisements, users will automatically receive "Contribution Points" that will allow them to be on the "Top Fans" ranking section (Qidian, 2018). Besides the Bonus Coins system, Webnovel.com also offers a "Fast Pass" that will unlock one chapter for free; users must use the pass within a week before it is expires (Qidian, 2018). Similar to Bonus Coins, users can obtain Fast Pass by completing different missions such as voting with Energy Stones and Power Stones (Qidian, 2018).

Like other freemium platforms, Webnovel.com also adopts premium features, which users pay to access. "Privilege" chapters are available on ongoing novels, viewed on the "Content" page of the mobile application. "Privileges" enable subscripted readers to gain access to the advance or locked chapters before others.

However, Privileges only last until the end of every month, then readers have to make another purchase for the following month (Qidian, 2018). For instance, if a user purchased privileged chapters on 8 February 2020, his privileges would last until 29 February 2020, or 21 days after buying.

Translators determine the fees and conditions of privileged chapters. In this study, I took samples from the second- and nineteenth-ranked novels in the translation section—*Lord of the Mysteries* and *Super Gene*, which are ongoing novels—to show the different use of Privileges. In order to read more advanced chapters of *Lord of the Mysteries*, users are required to spend 1,000 Coins for 5 advanced chapters, 1,500 coins for 10 advanced chapters, 2,000 coins for 15 advanced chapters, and 2,500 coins for 20 advanced chapters. On the other hand, *Super Gene* only allows users to purchase "Preview Chapters"; to read 2 Preview Chapters users have to spend 1 Coin, 199 Coins for 10 Preview Chapters, 499 Coins for 15 Preview Chapters, 749 Coins for 20 Preview Chapters, and 999 Coins for 25 Preview Chapters.

This research also gathered extensive data from Webnovel.com's "Top 20 Novels Ranking" on 22 January 2020 to comprehend genre tendencies, status of novels, and groups of translators. These twenty most popular translated novels can be categorised into five main genres: romance, fantasy, sci-fi, video game, and magic realism (see Table 11). Undeniably, "romance" is the most preferred genre, as there are eleven romance novels among the top twenty most popular novels. *Full Marks Hidden Marriage: Pick Up a Son, Get a Free Husband* is in the highest-ranked novel; this is a romance novel that has been received more than 367 million views since its launch. Another well-liked genre is "fantasy," particularly "Eastern fantasy," which is increasingly popular. For example, Heng Sao Tian Ya's *Library of the Heaven's Path* is one of the popular fantasy novels, having received more than 150 million

views. A new genre that is also receiving wide acceptance among the readers is "video game." One example of this is *The King's Avatar*, which has been translated into English and adapted into a web-drama and an anime series; this novel gained about 112 million views on Webnovel.com. The "sci-fi" and "magical realism" genres are getting more recognised by online readers as well.

This commercial model not only allows the CIL platform owners to make a profit from this model, but also allow translators or translation teams to earn their living from translating and uploading CIL to the platform. Contracted translators can choose to be paid a flat rate for their translations or opt to take 30 a per cent share in the profits for the novel once it is uploaded; the majority of translators take the flat rate (Webnovel_Official, 2019). Webnovel.com hires translators and translation teams by signing contracts with them. According to Neverfire7 (2018), if a translator stops uploading anew chapters of a novel, that translator will undergo a "quality assessment" (QA) and they may get fired.

Tunwalai.com and Other CIL Translation Platforms in Thailand

Tunwalai.com is one of the online platforms of Thailand's largest e-book provider, Ookbee Group. Founded in 2012 as a start-up business, Ookbee Group aimed to expand user-generated content and various digital communities on the Internet. At present, Ookbee Group owns ten different online platforms that provide e-books, music, fictions, and comics. Tunwalai.com, a writing-reading online community, was later established with the idea of being an intermediary between writers and readers. There are two types of literary works available on the Tunwalai.com website and mobile application: official novels and unofficial novels. The official works refer to the novels that Ookbee Group authorised Tunwalai.com to distribute on their platforms, while the unofficial works are novels by amateur writers on the platforms. Ookbee Group initiated a partnership with China's Tencent in 2016; this joint venture

grants the rights to Ookbee Group to translate and publish CIL from China Literature Group. Tunwalai.com decided to enter the competitive market of Chinese novels in 2017 (Sorasing, 2019). The prime reason why they started to publish CIL on their platforms was that Chinese novels had been a part of the leisure reading habits of Thai readers for a long time. Currently, there are more than 2 million users registered on Tunwalai.com (Sorasing, 2019).

Like other CIL platforms in China, Tunwalai.com adopted a freemium business model that allows users to read specific chapters of novels for free before requiring users to buy the locked chapters. On Tunwalai.com, this freemium model is introduced as a "support system" that allows users to show their support to translators or authors and novels by giving them the following items: "Stars," "Keys," and "Coins." First, any users who like the novel can press the button "give a Star to this writer" on the main page of the novel; "Stars" are similar to giving " Likes" on other social media platforms. Second, "Keys" are a free currency. Keys can be used to unlock chapters; each chapter requires about 4–5 keys. After using all of the Keys given to users when they first register on the platform, they will obtain one Key for every 30 minutes that they spend on Tunwalai.com. Third, users can purchase Coins and use them to unlock chapters; each chapter requires 200–400 Coins. Users can purchase Coins in different prices and benefits; for instance, if a user spends 50 Thai baht on buying 3,900 Coins, they will be granted VIP status for a particular period, this means they can enjoy reading novels without advertisements.

A writer/translator earns 1 Thai baht per 200 Coins spent on their novel, and another 1 baht from 200 Stars; there is an additional monthly bonus based on the total number of Keys received (Tunwalai, 2016). For example, as of 10 December 2018, the Thai-language translation of *Full Marks Hidden Marriage: Pick Up a Son, Get a Free Husband* (or *Xu ni wanzhang guangmang hao* 許你萬丈光芒好) on

Tunwalai.com has received more than 16 million views and 440,748,900 Coins (see Figure 10). If 200 Coins earns to 1 Thai baht, this novel has earned 2,203,744.5 Thai baht, with a further 546 Thai baht from 109,200 Stars.

Full Marks Hidden Marriage: Pick Up a Son, Get a Free Husband is a romantic comedy CIL novel that has been ranked as the most popular on Tunwalai's platforms. The first chapter of this novel was published on 28 September 2017. Initially, *Full Marks Hidden Marriage* is a written work of Jiong Jiong You Yao and the completed chapters were posted on Qidian Women's Net; an online novel platform of Qidian that targets on female writers and readers. On Tunwalai.com, there are 2,163 chapters in total and it is marked as "completed" novel.

How much does one user have to pay for the whole novel? After reading 22 free chapters of this novel, a user will be offered with an option to purchase 1,071 chapters for 321,500 Coins or about 4,090–4,126 Thai baht; there are 2,163 chapters in total. Therefore, a user has to spend more than 8,000 Thai baht to read all chapters. However, users can use their granted Keys to access the locked chapters for free as well. In comparison, a regular print novel of 500 pages usually costs 369 Thai baht or 0.738 baht per page. *Full Marks Hidden Marriage: Pick Up a Son, Get a Free Husband* is composed of about 19,467 pages; as a result, this novel would cost roughly 14,366 Thai baht in a printed version. Hence, it is still cheaper to read CIL translations on digital platforms.

Besides Tunwalai.com, three other online novel platforms have also adopted a freemium business model. Fictionlog.co, Kawebook.com, and Hongsamut.com allow users to read limited numbers of CIL chapters for free, and if users want to continue reading, they pay for locked chapters. Currencies are different on each platform; Fictionlog.co uses "Coins," Kawebook.com uses "Hearts," and Hongsamut.com uses "Diamonds." Moreover, Hongsamut.com offers a bonus

currency, "Silver Pigs," which registered users on the platform can use to read extra free chapters; users will be rewarded with 100 Silver Pigs for logging-in (limited to once every 24 hours), and users can receive another 100 Silver Pigs for their first and second comments on novels. In short, registered users on Hongsamut.com can get up to 300 Silver Pigs per day and users need 200–300 Silver Pigs to unlock one chapter. However, this does not mean that every chapter accepts Silver Pigs. After observing Hongsamut.com, it occurs that users can read about 50–60 chapters for free and they can use Silver Pigs to unlock about 40–60 further chapters; after this users must purchase Diamonds to unlock further chapters. Users on each platform must pay between 3 and 4 Thai baht to unlock a chapter. For instance, users must use 3–4 Diamonds or 3–4 Thai baht (one Diamond costs 1 Thai baht) to unlock one chapter on Hongsamut.com and users need to spend four Hearts or 4.1 baht (one Heart is about 1.025 Thai baht) to read one locked chapter on Kawebook.com. Under this freemium business model, free chapters function like movie trailers or previews that can attract and persuade readers to buy locked chapters or e-books. Unlike brick-and-mortar book stores, readers can spend time to select and decide to purchase which CIL novel they prefer from their electronic devices.

The commercial models of Webnovel.com and Tunwalai.com are not significantly different from CIL platforms in mainland China. Since China Literature Group and Qidian International operate Webnovel.com, undoubtedly, the commercial model on Webnovel.com is similar to Qidian.com. However, what makes Webnovel.com distinct from Qidian.com are the monthly membership and Coin Bonus systems, these features allow users to read VIP content for free or at a lower price. Moreover, Tunwalai.com shares a similar business model with Webnovel.com as they also provide bonus currency (Keys) for users to read additional chapters for free, but a monthly subscription is unavailable on Tunwalai.com. Since

Gravitytales.com merged with Webnovel.com on 1 June 2020 (Gravitytales.com, 2020); this has led to a competition between Webnovel.com and Wuxiaworld.com among English-language CIL platforms. Introducing a monthly subscription feature is a way to expand their revenues and to keep international readers engaged with their platforms. On the other hand, Thai translations of CIL are available on numerous authorised platforms and users must possess credit cards to pay subscription fees monthly. Nonetheless, only 34 per cent of the Thai population have credit cards (BOT, 2020); therefore, a vast majority of Thai users cannot pay monthly subscription fees.

Circulation of CIL through Commercialisation

The commercialisation of online fiction platforms has boosted the competitiveness of the book market in Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand. According to The Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand's statistics in 2018, the book industry in Thailand has decreased markedly for many consecutive years, but the online book market, in contrast, is still growing (PUBAT, 2018). It was expected that online channels would increase by 62 per cent by 2018 (PUBAT, 2018). Moreover, the e-book market accounts for about 5 per cent of the book market in Thailand, it is worth 600–700 million Thai baht per year, and online book orders have also grown 2–3 times since 2017 (Prachathai, 2018). The e-book market still has more opportunities to grow because the number of brick-and-mortar book stores has gradually decreased, and this makes it harder for readers to find books (Prachathai, 2018). Major licensed CIL translation platforms like Tunwalai.com, Fictionlog.co, Kawebook.com, and Hongsamut.com not only allow users to read CIL online, but also offer users the opportunity to buy e-books; Kawebook.com and Hongsamut.com provide print books as well.

The commercialisation of online novel platforms stimulates better recognition of CIL in Thailand. As CIL translation platforms in Thailand have become more commercialised, they have been able invest in technological development in order to provide better accessibility of CIL for Thai readers. The better quality and more affordable price of e-book devices, such as mobile phones, has allowed Thai readers to consume novels on digital platforms at ease (Prachathai, 2018). For example, users on Tunwalai.com and Fictionlog.co can read CIL translations on websites and mobile phone applications at any time. Hence, commercialisation and technology can assist the spread of CIL in Thailand. According to data collected from the web analytical tool SimilarWeb.com (as of 20 May 2020), Tunwalai.com is visited by 8.32 million users monthly, about 1.8 million users visit Fictionlog.co each month. Kawebook.com welcomes about 960,000 users per month, and about 230,000 users read the translations of CIL on Hongsamut.com every month. These numbers indicate that commercialisation has contributed to the growth in CIL readers and in the overall popularity of CIL in Thailand.

Commercialisation also allows Thai readers to enjoy reading CIL without violating copyright. Since CIL translation platforms are commercialised and the online novel market has become more competitive, these platforms have been incentivised to buy copyrights from original authors or publishers in China in order to provide a variety of choices for users on their platforms. Also, these platforms apply fan-based marketing to boost consumers' interest and increase their revenues from fan consumption. Baym (2007) states that commercial and popular culture industries are aware that online communities and fanbases can enhance the marketing of their products. Wang, Y. (2020) stresses that "[c]onsumerism influences individuals within subcultural groups and communities by making subcultural products available to anyone no matter their age or social class." (p. 78). Thus,

translation platforms offer a wide range of novels and genres to satisfy the different interest of fans and consumers of CIL. Genres of CIL on these platforms are, for example, *xianxia* (immortal heroes), romance, martial arts, fantasy, mystery, Boys' Love, and gaming. Tunwalai.com and Fictionlog.co usually translate and publish CIL from China Literature Group (e.g., Qidian.com and Qdmm.com); Kawebook.com and Hongsamut.com buy copyrights of CIL from numerous publishers (e.g., Zongheng Zhongwen Wang 縱橫中文網, 17k.com, and JJWXC). Hence, Thai readers can select CIL to read per their preferences.

Adaptations of CIL

Southeast Asian audiences have been familiar with Chinese dramas since the 1970s when Hong Kong and Taiwanese dramas flourished; literary adaptations of popular Chinese novels of Jin Yong and Gu Long were made into television dramas by Hong Kong and Taiwan producers. Around the mid-1970s, television stations in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand started to import Hong Kong and Taiwanese dramatic adaptations—e.g. *Judge Bao* (1974), *Heaven Sword and Dragon Saber* (1978), *Luk Siu Fung* (1976), and *The Romantic Swordsman I* (1978)—to broadcast in their countries (Ou, 2019; Stardom, 2009; "Dianshitai zai 'Lu xiaofeng' zhihou," 1979). However, television dramas from mainland China did not appear in the region until the 2000s, for example, *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* (2003) and *The Legend of Chu Liuxiang* (2007).

The popularity of CIL has led to an increase in literary adaptations and cultural exports from mainland China to Southeast Asia since the early 2010s. Numerous CIL novels have been adapted for other mediums such as television dramas, movies, manga, anime, and video games. By the early 2010s, Southeast Asian audiences began to see more dramatic adaptations of CIL from mainland China. Before the availability of "Over-The-Top" (OTT) platforms such as Netflix

and WeTV.vip in Southeast Asia in 2016, drama adaptations of CIL could only be seen on local television channels or other online video-sharing platforms such as YouTube and Dailymotion. Among the more notable dramatic adaptations of CIL that were broadcasted on television in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand were *Scarlet Heart* (2011), *The Journey of Flower* (2015), *Nirvana in Fire* (2015), and *Eternal Love* (2017) (see Table 13). *Scarlet Heart* was aired on Channel 3 SD in 2015 in Thailand; unfortunately, there are no statistical data available for viewer numbers. However, the Thai-dubbed version of *Scarlet Heart* was illegally uploaded on YouTube.com, and the first episode received more than 3 million views (Nescarfanner, 2015). *Eternal Love* was uploaded to YouTube.com with Thai subtitles in 2017 and the first episode was viewed almost 1.2 million times (LingGeNC, 2017); Thailand's Channel 3 broadcast *Eternal Love* in 2019 and received 12.8 million views on their official website in total, for all of the episodes (Ch3Plus, n.d.). Dramatic adaptations of CIL have established a sizable viewership in Southeast Asia.

In mainland China, privatisation has raised the competitiveness of the entertainment industry and resulted in the development of more dramatic productions. In the past, Chinese television dramas were constructed on the party-state socialist ideology and aimed to show developments of China (Chua, 2012). According to Goh (as cited in Chua, 2012), state-owned media companies began to accept private and foreign investment in cultural industries at the end of 2009; this coincided with the strengthening of intellectual property rights protection laws and greater efforts to combat piracy. Undeniably, adaptations of CIL—movies, dramas, animations, and manga—have increased Chinese cultural exports (iResearch, 2019). Driven by the competitiveness of the entertainment sector and the significant audiences in

Southeast Asia, Tencent Video envisioned the importance of video streaming service

market in Southeast Asia and decided to launch its service in the region in 2018.

WeTV.vip

The positive reception of CIL adaptations in Southeast Asia urged the Chinese video

streaming platform Tencent Video to expand its services in Southeast Asia. Thailand

is one of the biggest markets of Chinese cultural products in Southeast Asia. To

demonstrate the upswing of Chinese digital products in Thailand, Tencent Video

launched its first OTT overseas service, WeTV.vip, in Thailand in November 2018

(Leesa-nguansuk, 2019a). The director of strategy development of Tencent Group

and head of Tencent's overseas video business, Li Kaichen, told the *Bangkok Post*

that Thailand had a relatively high household income which would make it a great

market for Tencent Video to expand its Chinese content and revenue (Leesa-

nguansuk, 2019a). Moreover, Tencent Penguin Pictures senior vice president, Jeff

Han, explained that the sizeable number of Tencent users in Thailand was the

primary for introducing WeTV.vip to Thailand (Tanakasempipat, 2019). Currently,

WeTV.vip is available in all counties in Southeast Asia, and its streamed content is

available with English, Chinese, Bahasa Indonesian, Hindi, Thai, and Vietnamese

subtitles.

      Like other video-streaming service platforms, WeTV.vip also introduced a

freemium business model. According to Krittee Manoleehagul, the WeTV.vip

freemium model allows users to watch for free with advertisements, while the

removal of advertisements and other privileges could be obtained by becoming VIP

members at a monthly subscription rate of 139 Thai baht (US$4.56) (Leesa-nguansuk,

2019b). The benefits of VIP membership are: (1) watching premium content on

WeTV.vip; (2) watching content in advance before ordinary users; (3) watching VIP

content on two devices at the same time; (4) no advertisements. On purchasing VIP

privilege, Thai users can enjoy the lower price of an auto-renewal monthly subscription fee as cheap as 59 Thai baht (US$1.81), while users from other countries have to pay US$5.99 monthly; users can purchase through the App Store and Play Store.

WeTV.vip obtained many Thai users in less than a year. While competing with other foreign video streaming service providers such as the U.S.-based Netflix and Japan's Line TV (Leesa-nguansuk, 2019b), WeTV.vip established a high number of the users, many of whom chose the service to watch new mainland Chinese dramas. After the launch of WeTV.vip in Thailand at the beginning of 2019, Tencent Thailand found that WeTV.vip users tended to spend about 84 minutes a day watching its content, the primary consumers aged between 18 and 34, 85 per cent of whom were females (Techsauce, 2019). Having subscribed to WeTV.vip, I have discovered that the success of WeTV.vip in Thailand is due to their selection of content. The three most popular genres of Chinese web series are romantic comedy, period drama, and action-fantasy (Techsauce, 2019). The content on WeTV.vip consists of Tencent's original Chinese series (60 per cent), content from Thai partners (20 per cent), South Korean dramas (10 per cent), American series (5 per cent), and another others (5 per cent) (Leesa-nguansuk, 2019b). Chinese dramas have been well received among Thai audience for decades, with the most watched being the historical and *wuxia* genres.

The web series on WeTV.vip are varied; there are *xianxia*, romance, urban romance, gaming, and mystery genres. WeTV.vip only selects the most viewed series by Chinese audiences and this is able to partially guarantee the popularity among Thai viewers. As of 18 May 2020, there are 78 Chinese dramas, 15 variety shows, 8 animated series, and 28 movies on WeTV.vip. It should be highlighted that 36 dramas

on WeTV.vip are adaptations of CIL (see Table 14). Among these adaptations, romance seems to be the dominant genre, as there are 23 romance drama series.

Other than WeTV.vip, Southeast Asian viewers can watch Chinese drama adaptations of CIL on Netflix. In January 2016, Netflix, one of the world's largest OTT platforms, announced that it would expand its service to 130 countries worldwide including all countries in Southeast Asia (Kim, 2016; Netflix, 2016). Although Netflix is banned in mainland China, Chinese dramas are available for foreign audiences on the platform. As of 24 May 2020, there are 18 dramatic adaptations of CIL novels on Netflix.

Dramatic adaptation can increase the sales volume of CIL and the recognition of other Chinese pop culture products in Thailand. It is common for Thai audiences to buy novels during or after watching drama adaptations if the original novels are available in Thailand. For instance, while the original online novels of *Scarlet Heart* and *Eternal Love* were translated and distributed in Thailand before these novels were made into adaptations and aired in Thailand, these novels might not have been widely known before; the sales volume of the translation of *Eternal Love* increased after it was broadcasted on Channel 3 (Pruksanusak, 2019).

After watching dramatic adaptations of CIL novels, Thai viewers tend to read the original CIL novels on which the adaptations were based. The first reason is they want to know what happened in the novels while waiting for the upcoming episodes of the adaptations. The second reason is they can absorb more details in the stories since adaptations may not include some minor points in the original novels due to time constraints. Moreover, when original novels have not been translated into Thai, but the adaptations became popular among Thai audiences, in many instances publishers will hasten to translate and distribute the translations. For example, *The Untamed* began to air on WeTV.vip in June 2019 and eventually received much

interest from Thai viewers. The 50-episode web series is an adaptation of the BL-*xianxia* novel *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu. After its premiere on WeTV.vip, the publisher Bakery Book swiftly bought the copyright, translated the novel into Thai, and published it in order to satisfy the high demand of Thai fans. *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* was positively received by Thai readers, winning Best Novel of the Year in the Naiin Readers' Awards 2019 (Bakerybook, 2019).

     Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation was also made into animated series. The first episode with English subtitles was viewed 2.2 million times on YouTube.com (Tencent Video, 2019); the first episode with Thai subtitles received more than 732,000 views on YouTube.com (WeTVThailand, 2019).

     The Untamed was extremely popular and led to the first event in which fans of the series could meet the cast, in Bangkok on 21 September 2019. Tickets for the event were as expensive as for a concert by Blackpink, one of the most well-known K-pop girl groups, which were 7,500 Thai baht (US$245), and more expensive than tickets for concerts by world famous K-pop boybands such as BTS and Exo, which are about 6,000–6,800 Thai baht (US$196–US$222.20). Therefore, adaptations of CIL can stimulate and increase the recognition of original novels and other Chinese cultural products such as aminations and entertainment industry in Thailand.

     Adaptations of CIL can enhance and promote a better understanding of Chinese culture and society to audiences in Southeast Asia. Zhang (2011) states that "Films made for native speakers usually portray a social reality in which people in the society live, behave, and connect with others in a way that is shaped by certain cultural perspectives and is governed by certain ideological, social norms" (p. 210). This statement indicates that visual media can depict the current social issues and

culture of a particular country. Southeast Asian audiences can broaden their

perspectives on Chinese society and culture through Chinese dramatic adaptations.

For example, the ongoing social problems and everyday struggles in China

can be seen in urban romance dramas. Three different types of Chinese family—

middle-income family, wealthy family, and single-parent family—are illustrated

in *Le Coup de Foudre* (2019), a dramatic adaptation of *I Don't Like This World, I*

Only Like You by Qiao Yi. *Le Coup de Foudre* presents a female protagonist in a

middle-income family where each family member loves and understands one another.

In contrast, a male protagonist is portrayed as being in a wealthy family where

parents are extremely busy with work and do not have time for their children, and

another female character is in a single-parent family where her mother tries her best

to provide everything for her, but lacks affection and time. Another issue that is often

portrayed in Chinese dramas is class conflict or discrimination between rich and poor.

This theme is appealing to Southeast Asian audiences because they can reflect on

their own everyday struggles and events in similar settings. For example, *Boss &*

Me (2014), a drama based on Gu Man's *Shan Shan Comes to Eat*, and *The Fox's*

Summer (2017), a dramatic adaptation of Shen Cangmei's *When the President Falls*

in Love. The female protagonists of these two dramas represent ordinary working-

class women trying to survive in their careers in big firms. On the other hand, the

male protagonists are the company's heir and CEO; the dramas show the class

conflict through how the male protagonists' family or friends try to hinder their

romantic relationship with the female protagonists due to different socioeconomic

status.

In addition, Southeast Asian audiences can learn some Chinese cultural

elements and customs through dramatic adaptations of *xianxia*, *wuxia*, and historical

genres, since these genres are constructed on Chinese philosophy such as Taoism and

Confucianism, which are the core of Chinese culture. The Confucian values of family and friendship as well as Taoist self-cultivation are frequently presented in these dramas; for example, *The Untamed* illustrates both Taoist and Confucian values.

Dramatic adaptations based on CIL may be presented otherwise in order to allow them to be broadcasted on television or video-streaming platforms. Differences between original novels and dramatic adaptations are determined by the length of the broadcast cycle and censorship. In general, each CIL novel comprises of more than 1,000 chapters, while Chinese dramas usually run for 45–90 episodes. In February 2020, The National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) announced new regulations that would limit the length of Chinese dramas to a maximum of 40 episodes (Huang, 2020). For example, while there are 1,729 chapters in *The King's Avatar* (26 volumes in print), a dramatic adaptation of this novel was made into 40 episodes which covered volumes 1–16 of the original novel, while the twelve-episode animated adaptation only covered volumes 1–4 of the print version. Therefore, dramatic adaptations may not be able to convey every detail in the novels to audiences. Another crucial factor that causes dramatic adaptations to alter original novels is censorship and the screening process in mainland China. Media censorship is taken seriously in mainland China; NRTA must screen any publications and materials that will be presented to the public. In order to pass the screening process, a producer's responsibility is to ensure that their dramas do not include obscenity, violence, abnormal sexuality (i.e., homosexuality), and specific sexual activities that may provoke wrongdoing and may be harmful to minor viewers. For instance, the novel on which *The Untamed* is based is a Boys' Love novel, but the dramatic adaptation converted the romantic relationships between male characters into relationships of friendship and brotherhood in order to be approved for broadcast.

Moreover, the character of Ye Xiu, a male protagonist in *The King's Avatar*, is portrayed as a committed non-smoker, on the contrary, Ye Xiu in the novel is a very forthright, stubborn, and heavy smoker. Due to these limitations and the differences between original novels and adaptations that result, it is not surprising that audiences of dramatic adaptations will look for the original novels on which adaptations are based to better absorb the story.

Summary

In the context of CIL, commercialisation and adaptation are correlated, and both can enhance recognition of CIL and Chinese cultural products in Southeast Asia. CIL translation platforms such as Webnovel.com and Tunwalai.com as well as video streaming platforms like WeTV.vip, where users can watch drama adaptations of CIL, have applied a freemium business model on their platforms. A freemium business model allows users to access content for free with additional conditions such as completing daily activities and watching video advertisements. However, some platforms like Fictionlog.co and Kawebook.com do not have such activities that will allow users to read extra chapters for free; they expect users to buy locked chapters after reading free chapters. Moreover, commercialisation and competitiveness have encouraged greater diversity in the subject matter and genres of literary works in an attempt to satisfy different groups of readers and broaden the commercial appeal of CIL.

The greater commercialisation of CIL is also reflected in the growing number of dramatic adaptations and animations based on CIL source material. Tencent Video seized an opportunity to capture n audiences by introducing WeTV.vip, a platform where viewers can watch numerous Chinese dramas and adaptations of CIL with subtitles in their preferred languages. Before the launch of WeTV.vip in 2018, dramatic adaptations of CIL had circulated in since the early 2010s, as local

television stations broadcasted *Scarlet Heart* (2011) and *The Journey of Flower* (2015). WeTV.vip has allowed viewers to watch Chinese series conveniently on desktop computers or mobile devices and users on the platforms can also consume more content by paying an affordable monthly subscription fee. Dramatic adaptations of CIL can promote greater understanding of aspects of Chinese culture (e.g. Confucian values and Taoist thoughts) and provide accurate portrayals of Chinese society (e.g. the gap between rich and poor) to n audiences. The success of *The Untamed*, a dramatic adaptation of *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation*, led to another wave of heightened interest in Chinese pop culture in Thailand. After *The Untamed* was aired on WeTV.vip, Thai fans became fascinated by the storyline and the actors, and the original novel was in high demand; an event in which fans of the series could meet the cast was organised in Bangkok and the tickets were relatively expensive. In general, adaptations of CIL can stimulate sales of original novels as audiences want to develop and greater appreciation of the source material for these series.

Chapter 4: Tackling Censorship in Mainland China and Southeast Asia

"For research on contemporary Chinese web literature this exclusive focus on censorship issues is unnecessary as censorship is a fact of life for Chinese writers and it does not make their work less valuable or interesting."

– Michel Hockx (2005, p. 671)

Introduction

This chapter aims to understand censorship regulations in mainland China and as well as to observe how CIL creator/translator/readers attempt to avoid legal issues. Censorship regulations are enacted through media or print publication laws in mainland China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. The degree of severity is varied and materials involving obscenity and pornography are forbidden or highly restricted in each country.

This chapter argues that rigorous censorship of print materials in mainland China has led to an alternative flow of Chinese fiction and publications in . This chapter takes a case study of Chinese Boys' Love (BL) novels in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore to explore how mainland Chinese BL novelists circumvent censorship in mainland China and create an alternative path of publication of CIL in Southeast Asia.

Censorship and Alternative Flow of Publications

A key objective of censorship in mainland China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand is to prevent the dissemination of any material that is prejudicial to or likely to be prejudicial to public order, morality, security, and national interest. Each of the countries and states focused on in this chapter prohibit articles dealing with matters

such as sex, obscenity, violence, drugs, gambling, and race or religion that can be injurious to the public good ("Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984," n.d.; "Printing Recordation Act, B.E. 2550 (2007)," n.d.; "Undesirable Publications Act,"n.d.; "Chuban pin ji luying jiemu dai fenji," 2016; "Chuban guanli tiaoli," 2016). Furthermore, "obscene materials" refers to materials depicting explicit sex acts or pornography, child pornography, and sexual degradation (CMCF, n.d.; "Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China (1979) [Revised 1997]," n.d.). There are specific subject matters that are severely forbidden in mainland China and Thailand. Publications in mainland China must not be in opposition to the basic principles established in the Constitution and shall not promote cults and superstitions ("Regulation on the Administration of Publication (2016 Revised) [Effective]," n.d.). In Thailand, any printed matter must not include or indicate defamatory, insulting, or vengeful language against the King, the Queen, the Heir to the Throne or the Regent ("Printing Recordation Act, B.E. 2550 (2007)," n.d.).

Aside from censorship and regulations imposed by governments, self-censorship is also a common practice among Thai translators and writers. Self-censorship is the act of controlling one's own expression or discourse in order to avoid committing breaking the law. Since publishers in Thailand can publish their novels without submitting them to the government sector for approval, if readers report their publications to the government, the publishers and editors will receive punishment (Pruksanusak, 2019). For instance, Linmou, a Chinese-to-Thai translator, conducts self-censorship by not selecting "R-rated" novels that contain explicit descriptions of sexual activities (Pruksanusak, 2019). In addition to self-censorship, produsers in Thailand are encouraged to follow the rating system and advise readers that particular content is suitable for specific ages. According to the content rating policy on Fictionlog.co, there are three indicators. The first indicator

is "General" content; this content is suitable for all ages; the story may not contain vulgar language and violent or sexual content (Fictionlog.co). The second indicator is "No Children under 18" (or "NC18+"); this content is suitable for readers above 18 years old, as the story may include some vulgar language, violence, and minor sexual activities (Fictionlog.co). The third indicator is "No Children under 25" (or "NC25+"), and this advises consumers that story may contain strong vulgar languages, violence, and explicit sexual activities; readers who are below 25 years old are not allowed to read this (Fictionlog.co). It is customary to see these indicators or warnings alongside the titles of novels on online fiction platforms. If produsers fail to label their publications with indicators or label them incorrectly, this may result in termination of their account. Therefore, it is the social responsibility of produsers to exercise self-censorship to avoid the consequences.

Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand permit the publication and distribution of erotic and violent fiction and motion pictures with some restrictions. Publications that involve an excessive description of criminal behaviour, suicide, horror and violence, and obscenity and sexual behaviour can be harmful to the physical and mental health of children and adolescents are classified as restricted, those under the age of 18 are not allowed to read them. These materials must not be publicly displayed or sold to minors under 18 years of age; covers of erotic fiction must be appropriate for public exposure and must not contain nudity, sexual positions, or sexually explicit text. In Singapore, publications must carry consumer advice by presenting a label stating that they are "UNSUITABLE FOR THE YOUNG" and must be placed under The Restricted Publications Scheme (RPS) to prevent the sale of these publications to the young (IMDA, n.d.). In Taiwan, restricted publications should be clearly labelled on the cover as "Restricted: People under the age of 18 are not allowed to read" and these restricted publications must be placed in special zones

for sale or rent where there must be a clear statement that they "Restricted: People under the age of 18 are not allowed to buy or rent" ("Chuban pin ji luying jiemu dai fenji," 2016). In Thailand, publishing houses must adopt the book content rating system and must advise readers that the content may contain violence and mature content that may be appropriate only for the readers who are 18 years old and above (Chuechang, 2011).

Censorship may obstruct the publication and mass distribution of specific CIL in mainland China, but it cannot hinder the spread of CIL in other places. At the early stage of CIL writing in mainland China, many writers began to develop new genres such as *xianxia*, mysterious fantasy, and Boys' Love (BL). In brief, the BL genre refers to the description of a romantic relationship between two male characters. The creation of BL fiction would not be problematic if homosexuality were not a taboo topic in mainland China.

Homosexuality was a crime in mainland China until 1997 and it was listed as one of the mental illnesses until 2001. Same-sex marriage has not been legalised and homosexuality is still not widely accepted in China (Campbell, 2016; Hernández & Zhang, 2018; Wang, S., 2018). Negative attitudes towards homosexuality among the older generation in China owe to the cultural tradition of desiring more male heirs to continue the family line (Campbell, 2016). Thus, numerous mainland CIL novelists circumvent restrictions and censorship by publishing their works in Taiwan where any person can publish restricted publications. The following section will explore how Chinese BL writers and Southeast Asian readers evade strict regulations and censorship.

Case study: Boys' Love (BL)

Chinese BL novels emerged from a similar form of Japanese pop culture that is often made by female writers for female readers. In China, the definition of BL (or

danmei 耽美） is male-male homoerotic fiction. The term *danmei* came from the

Japanese genre of manga, *tanbi*, which means "aesthetics." In fact,

Japanese *tanbi* manga aimed to suit the taste of female readers; this genre of manga

gradually arrived in China via Taiwan in 1991 (Feng, 2013). Soon, these Japanese

cultural products had established a sizable fanbase in China via the Internet; the

readers were well-educated young women between 19 and 26 years old (Feng, 2013).

Young women tend to be curious about eccentric sexual relationships, but this is

prohibited in China (Feng, 2013). In addition, due to the heavy censorship of

heterosexual romance and the repudiation of homosexuality in China, Feng (2013)

emphasises that "[*danmei*] fans often find it necessary to conceal this guilty pleasure

[of reading BL novels] from family and friends." (p. 56). The sensitive nature of BL

culture in mainland China has led to the disappearance of BL fandom websites and

makes it difficult to determine the number of BL fans in the country (Zhang, 2014).

Chinese writers began to produce *danmei* or BL fiction on the Internet around

the end of 1990s. Lin (2019) states that BL fiction has been circulating on the

Internet over two decades in China and that it is a product of the influence of

Japanese pop culture and local fandom; some BL novels have been adapted into web

series. According to Xu and Yang (2013), the earliest work of Chinese BL fiction was

found on one section of a Chinese manga fan website, Sangsang Academy

(http://sunsunplus.51.net), in 1998; this indicated the influence of Japanese BL

manga on the invention of Chinese BL fiction. In 1999, the first monthly BL manga

magazine, *Danmei Season*, was distributed in mainland China, after which BL

websites began to bloom (Zhang, 2014). The rise of BL fiction in mainland China

could be a result of the censorship of obscene images, as it is a textual form that

could easily evade the strict censorship on pornographic goods (Xu & Yang, 2013).

In addition, CNN reporter Serenitie Wang (2018), noted that the popularity of BL

fiction had risen in China in the past several years as many self-published writers produced hundreds of new novels monthly.

However, the Chinese authorities still consider BL novels to be obscene materials and this has resulted in the arrest of some BL novelists and the closing down of BL fiction websites in mainland China. In fact, China's laws do not have any criminal code in regard to private consensual same-gender activities between adults. However, the majority of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons still have to avoid mentioning their sexual orientation or gender identity in public; homosexuality and any words describing genitalia are also strictly prohibited (U.S. Department of State, 2018). In March 2011, the Public Security Bureau of Zhengzhou city shut down a BL website, *Danmei Fiction Network* (耽美小說網); a male webmaster and 32 authors operated this website, most of the authors were young women; the police found that there were more than 600,000 paid members on the website and almost 2 per cent of 80,000 novels were obscene and pornographic (Li, 2011; "Zhengzhou pohuo huangse xiaoshuo wangzhan," 2011). Moreover, in 2015, the BL writer Ding Yi (pseud. Big Bad Wolf with Long Wings 長著翅膀的大灰狼), who posted on JJWXC, was sentenced three years and six months of probation for the crime of profiting from the sale and distribution of pornographic materials (Peng, 2015). In 2018, another Chinese BL author, surnamed Liu (psued. Tianyi), was found guilty and sentenced to a ten-year jail term for selling and profiting from homoerotic book which was considered to be "obscene" literature (Macfie, 2018). Miss Liu wrote more than a dozen BL novels and she was severely punished for selling 7,000 copies of her BL novel, *Occupy*, that depicted a relationship between a male teacher and his male student (Hernández & Zhang, 2018). These cases indicate that Chinese authorities rigorously restrain BL fiction and homosexual matters.

Aside from BL novels themselves, adaptations of these novels are discouraged from illustrating same-sex relationships. BL dramas attract countless heterosexual Chinese women, and some fans consider this to be a form of rebellion against a Chinese traditional culture that asserts that women should be subordinated to men (Hernández & Zhang, 2018). Undoubtedly, any content concerning homosexual relations can be extremely challenging for many content creators in China (Wang, S., 2018), because this content often draws attention from censorship authorities (Hernández & Zhang, 2018). Nonetheless, numerous BL novels have been adapted into television dramas and web series; for example, Chai Jidan's *Are You Addicted?* (Chinese title: 你丫上癮了？) and Priest's *Guardian* (Chinese title: 鎮魂). The web series *Addicted* is an adaptation of the CIL novel *Are You Addicted?* This 15-episode web series aired from 29 January 2016 to 23 February 2016 on iQiyi, a Chinese online video platform. However, *Addicted* was removed from Chinese streaming sites after airing for 12 episodes and producers have not received official reasons from the authorities, but the portrayal of a same-sex relationship in the drama might be the cause of the cessation (Campbell, 2016). The creators of *Addicted* decided to post the last three episodes on YouTube.com, which is blocked in mainland China (Lin, L. & Chen, 2016). Furthermore, although *Guardian* is an adaptation of a BL novel, it was made into action drama in order to avoid being cancelled by Chinese authorities.

To eliminate and reduce obscene materials circulating on the Internet, China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SAPPRFT) imposed a rating system for online literature platforms. From 27 June 2017, any online platforms that do not uphold enough socialist principles are to be punished and if the platforms obtain a score of less than 60 on a 100-point scale, the platforms will be investigated carefully and will be forced to shut down (Churchill, 2017). In

the same vein, the China Netcasting Services Association (CNSA) announced a new set of guidelines to restrict the depiction of abnormal sexual behaviours—such as homosexuality and incest—and kissing scenes; these new regulations apply to all original online audio-visual content, producers must adhere to guidelines before broadcasting (Qian, 2017). When Chinese authorities introduced a later campaign to obliterate pornography and illegal publications they allowed anyone to report the contents to the police and would be rewarded with a payment of up to 600,000 yuan (Macfie, 2018).

Due to rigorous censorship, Chinese BL writers frequently publish their works in Taiwan where homosexuality is widely acknowledged. Previously, Chinese BL fiction was printed by some self-publishers in mainland China and mostly pirated from Taiwan (Chen, 2017). This has resulted in the emergence of the alternative flow of CIL publication from Taiwan to Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand.

BL and novels have been gained more reception from Thai readers since the mid-2000s. In Thailand, BL novels are widely known as *Yaoi*/*Yuri* novels; derived from Japanese terms that describe the romantic relationship between the same sex characters: *Yaoi* (male-male) and *Yuri* (female-female). Beginning in the 1990s, Japanese popular culture has gradually established a sizable fanbase in China and Thailand; Japanese anime, manga, and fiction are familiar to audiences in both countries. In fact, most Japanese BL-related works were transmitted to mainland China via Taiwan and Hong Kong during the 1990s. Undoubtedly, Japanese BL manga and novels are considered to be "obscene materials" and "pornographic materials" in mainland China and Thailand; as such they are highly prohibited. But this does not obstruct the popularity of BL literary works in both countries. By the mid-2000s, Chinese BL consumers turned themselves into BL producers and introduced Chinese BL novels to Thailand. Despite the growth of Chinese BL novels,

mainland novelists encounter severe restrictions from the government. Similarly, although BL literary products are widely accepted, they are still restricted to particular groups of consumers due to Thai regulations and the wider moral context in society. Despite these hindrances, Chinese online BL novels eventually became one of the mainstream genres of CIL in Thailand.

The growth of *Yaoi/Yuri* (Y) fiction in Thailand was influenced by Japanese manga. It should come as no surprise that Japanese *Yaoi* manga is made by women for women since its primary consumers are women (Chaitongsri, 2017; Jiararattanakul, 2008). More importantly, the close relationship between *Yaoi* and feminism is a reflection of wider issues relating to women and sexual discourse; often seen as a sexual objects in the patriarchal cultures of East Asia, through *Yaoi* women are able to fantasise about men as a sexual objects (Jiararattanakul, 2008). Before the expansion of the Internet and social media, Y manga and fiction were seen as obscene products in Thailand due to the sexual content; many Y-related goods were eliminated and destroyed in 2005 (Chaitongsri, 2017). Hence, both Y creators and consumers eventually shifted to communicate and publish their works online. According to Pimsak and Unthaya (2017), Y fiction is not a recent trend in Thailand because it was brought into the country during the first wave of Japanese pop culture in Thailand about 40 years ago, but it has grown more popular since the end of the 2000s. In fact, Y fiction has widely been accepted by Thai publishers and book stores from the early 2010s and it is now categorised as a type of romance novel (Pimsak & Unthaya, 2017).

Y fiction fans are addressed as "Y girls" since the majority of Y fans are young women, along with a relatively small group of male readers (Chaitongsri, 2017). Y girls have high purchasing power and they tend to buy every available Y product; thus, many publishers and producers were incentivised to capitalise on this

market (Amornsriwong & Sawunyavisuth, 2019). Most Thai Y novels were first published on online platforms such as Dek-D.com and Tunwalai.com before getting published as print books by other publishers (Pimsak & Unthaya, 2017). Additionally, numerous online Y novels have been adapted into television series, namely, *Love Sick* (2014), *Sotus* (2016), and *2 Moons* (2017) (Amornsriwong & Sawunyavisuth, 2019; Chaitongsri, 2017).

Reading Y fiction does not imply that the readers are homosexual; it is just for entertainment purposes. There are two groups of Y readers: women and LGBTI people (Chaitongsri, 2017; Jiararattanakul, 2008). It must be noted that Y fiction does not refer to the story of "homosexuality" but is rather the romantic relationship between an active male character (*seme*) and a passive male character (*uke*) (Chaitongsri, 2017; Pimsak & Unthaya, 2017). The majority of Y girls see this type of fiction as a form of recreation and a hobby; this does not affect their daily lives and their sexuality (Amornsriwong & Sawunyavisuth, 2019). Possibly, BL novels may be well-liked in countries where the topic of sexuality is taboo (Pruksanusak, 2019). However, a psychological consultant at Zhengzhou Foster Centre, Peng Yi (as cited in "Zhengzhou pohuo huangse xiaoshuo wangzhan," 2011) stated that girls favoured BL novels because they wanted to express their personality and the writing style of this type of novel required delicacy and beauty.

BL comics and novels were not widely accepted in Thailand before 2015. In 2005, รายการหลุมดำ (Dark Hole), a television programme, conducted an investigation on the controversial topic of BL comics that led to the arrest of several BL publishers at the National Books Fair of that year. This programme expressed great concern over BL comics; it stressed that BL comics were pornography which could affect Thai youngsters' sexual behaviour. Similarly, there was another seizure of BL fiction publishers at the 12th Thailand National Books Fair in 2007 (see

https://bit.ly/3gpcU5S). Therefore, BL works in Thailand have been restricted by morality and by regulations. The arrest of BL publishers caused fear among BL consumers and providers, and they had a difficult time during this period. Although they could consume BL fiction on digital platforms such as bulletin-board systems (BBS), BL readers might have to verify themselves with the Web Master in order to gain full access to the BL sections on these BBS. Some book stores did not dare to place BL comics and novels on the shelves. Thus, BL readers had to give the shopkeepers the titles and the shopkeepers would check in the store for them.

After a decade of restriction, BL fiction founder greater acceptance again after 2015 when *Love Sick*, an adaptation of a BL novel, started to air its second season on Thai television. In the same year, there were five BL-related television dramas and new small BL publishers gradually rose. Chain book stores eventually placed BL novels on their shelves and some book stores provided a BL section. More importantly, publishers started to adopt the rating system. They would warn the readers that a book may contain sexual and violent content that may be unsuitable for the readers who are below 18 years old (see Figure 13 and Figure 14). To show the acceptance of BL novels in Thailand, an annual Y book fair was introduced in 2017. The first ever Y book fair was held at the Royal Palace Guard Cavalry Division 2nd military base on 1 July 2017. According to an interview by *The Matter* with the Y book fair organising team, 30 small-to-medium publishing houses participated in the book fair; their central goal was to develop the Y novel market in Thailand (Nainapat, 2017). Y novels have since achieved greater recognition through social media and dramatic adaptations of Y novels (Nainapat, 2017).

In Thailand, Chinese BL novels were introduced around the end of the 2000s and most of the early BL novels were by Taiwanese novelists. The first Chinese-language BL novel, *Chuqing shi shen siyang fa* (วุ่นนักกฎหมายพิทักษ์ของผม, Chinese title: 純情

式神飼養法) written by a Taiwanese online novelist, Dong 鶇, was published by Physics Center Press in 2009. Two years after the launch of its first Chinese BL novel, Physics Center Press created a new sub-unit, Happy Banana, that focuses on distributing serialised Chinese BL novels. In 2011, *Daomai daozei wuyu* (บันทึกหัวขโมย ดวงซู, Chinese title: 倒霉盜賊物語), written by Yun Yi 雲易, became the first Chinese BL novel from Happy Banana. In the same year, Happy Banana issued four Chinese-language BL novels and all of them were the works of Taiwanese online authors. Additionally, there were 18 serialised Chinese BL novels published between 2011 and 2014; these novels were considered to include moderate sexual content with some kissing and intimate scenes. The themes of Chinese BL novels during this period were adventure, fantasy, mystery, and romantic comedy.

The excellent reception of BL novels has resulted in the rise of new BL fiction publishers in Thailand. MeeDees Content, or MeeDees Publishing, was founded by Siam Inter Multimedia Corporation (SMM) in 2013. This sub-company aimed to publish Chinese BL novels. In 2014, MeeDees Content issued the first Chinese BL novel, *Hanlin gongzi shengzhi ji* (Chinese title: 翰林公子升職記), by Ying Ye 熒夜. From 2014 to 2018, MeeDees Content distributed 13 Chinese BL novels, 12 of which were labelled as suitable for 18+ readers. Chinese BL novels from Meedees Content are also available on Fictionlog.co.

Bakery Book is another publisher that began to focus on Chinese BL novels in 2015. Responding to the rise of Chinese BL novels, Bakery Book published five BL novels within one year in 2015. Bakery Book adopted the content rating system and warned readers that the content was suitable either for 15 years old and above or 18 years old and above. From 2015 to 2019, Bakery Book issued about 14 BL novels.

Jamsai Publishing created its BL unit, EverY, in 2016. EverY has published seven Chinese BL novels in total, six of these novels are marked as suitable for adults over the age of 18; the first novel was *This Time Lucky in Game, Lucky in Love* (Chinese title: 福澤有餘). The only BL novel published by EverY without a rating was *Guardian* by Priest; this novel was later adapted into a television drama.

Another BL publishing house is Taisei. Taisei published 12 Chinese BL novels between 2016 and 2018. Four novels are rated for 15 years old and above, while the rest are rated for mature readers. Only *Fu zhai zi huan* (Chinese title: 父債子還) by Yu Chen Huan 羽宸寰 rated as for readers over the age of 21. The BL novels of Taisei are published as e-books on Fictionlog.co.

Rukkun Rainbow published six Chinese BL novels in 2018, and their novels are published on Fictionlog.co. Five of these novels are the works of E Fei 蛾非. Additionally, Amarin Books, one of Thailand's most prominent chain book stores and publishers, launched Rose Publishing to join the BL novel market in 2018. Rose Publishing published five Chinese BL novels within one year.

Chinese BL novels are restricted in Malaysia and Singapore as publications concerning abnormal sexual behaviour, particularly homosexuality, are still prohibited in both countries. Indeed, Malaysia, where the majority of the population are adherents to Islam, strictly prohibits same-sex relationships as it is against the *Syariah* law (Islamic law). The term *liwat* refers to sexual relations between male persons and *musahaqah* means sexual relations between female persons; those who commit *liwat* and *masahaqah* can be fined, imprisoned, or whipped, or any combination thereof (Syariah Criminal Offences (Federal Territories) Act 1997, 1997). According to The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Content Code that is prepared by the Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia (CMCF, n.d.), "indecent content" refers to "material which is offensive,

morally improper and against current standards of acceptable behaviour. This includes nudity and sex" (p. 12). Thus, content involving homosexuality is not allowed in Malaysia. Additionally, in Singapore, erotic fiction and art should not contain descriptions of sexually permissive and alternative lifestyles—same-sex relationships, partner swapping, transgenderism, and group sex—and should not promote deviant sexual practice such as bondage and paedophilia (IMDA, n.d.; Public Entertainments and Meetings (Classification of Arts Entertainments) (Exemption) Order 2016, 2016). Therefore, the availability of Chinese BL novels in Malaysia and Singapore is limited.

Chinese BL novels may be popular among Southeast Asian readers, but this does not imply that each country fully accepts these homoerotic novels. This research has adopted a coding scheme and content analysis to demonstrate how Chinese BL novels are circulated in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. The study gathered data from different book stores in three countries: Popular (Malaysia), Kinokuniya (Malaysia), Kinokuniya (Singapore), and two major book stores chain in Thailand, Se-ed Book Centre and Naiin.

The first study collected the availability of Chinese-language BL fiction of ten popular authors in three countries (see Table 15). Novels by nine BL writers are available in Thai book stores, while Kinokuniya (Malaysia) and Kinokuniya (Singapore) only sell BL novels by six writers, and only the works of five authors can be found in Popular (Malaysia). There is less BL fiction available in Popular (Malaysia) because Popular is a book store chain that is often visited by students and children under 18 years old. Hence, the BL genre may not be suitable for these groups of readers and the majority of Malaysian readers are not literate in Chinese.

On another note, translations of Chinese BL novels are commonly seen in most of the book stores in Thailand since book publishing is a competitive market

and publishers have to satisfy readers' demand in order to survive in the market. It must be emphasised that some BL novels by Priest, Meng Xi Shi, and Feng Ye Xin are sold in all of the countries surveyed, but the BL novels of these writers that are available in Popular (Malaysia) are suitable for young readers as they are mysterious adventure novels with all-male characters, for instance, Feng Ye Xin's *Yaoguai meinan lianmeng* (Chinese title: 妖怪美男聯盟). After investigating the availability of sixteen Chinese BL novels in three Southeast Asia countries, the results indicate that Thai book stores stock the most Chinese BL fiction (thirteen titles), since many Thai readers widely appreciate Chinese BL fiction. What is interesting is that Kinokuniya (Malaysia) stocks twelve BL novels, even though these homoerotic novels may be against Islamic law; as these BL novels are in Chinese, Malaysian authorities may not be appraised of their content, or may simply be unconcerned. Kinokuniya (Singapore) and Popular (Malaysia) only offer seven and five BL novels, respectively (see Table 15).

Southeast Asian distributors and publishers often import Chinese BL novels from Taiwan. Mainland BL authors tend to circumvent stringent censorship in mainland China by publishing their works in other regions or countries such as Taiwan and Hong Kong (Lin, X., 2019). According to data collected from the book stores surveyed above (see Table 16), Kinokuniya (Malaysia) and Kinokuniya (Singapore) tend to import BL novels from Taiwanese publishers (i.e., Jia Fei Wen Chuang, Yao Yue Wenhua, Ping Xin Gongzuo Shi, Mu Ma, and Qing Kong Chuban), that specialise in adult-oriented BL novels. Similarly, Thai publishers are likely to buy copyrights of BL fiction from Taiwan because Taiwanese versions often include some kissing and sexual content in the novels. CaiQing, a paraprofessional translator in Thailand, prefers Taiwanese versions of BL novels rather than mainland versions because as BL novels from Taiwan did not have to undergo severe censorship, hence,

there are more details and more scenes of explicit sexual behaviour (CaiQing, 2020).

Jamsai Publishing previously bought licenses and copyrights from Taiwan because

the publishing market was more advanced than in mainland China, and, due to

political limitations and conservative ideology, numerous writings of mainland

writers were printed in Taiwan (Mod Daeng, 2010). To distinguish Taiwanese

versions of BL novels from mainland Chinese ones, Chinese-language readers in

Malaysia and Singapore can assume that books published in traditional Chinese

characters with a label of "not suitable for readers below 18" on the cover are from

Taiwan (see Figure 15) and Thai readers can look for the "for 18+" tag on the covers

(see Figure 13 and Figure 14). Unsurprisingly, Popular (Malaysia) sells some

Chinese BL novels from mainland China as these novels are for readers of all ages

and do not describe sexual behaviour. Mainland publishers include Guizhou Renmin,

Beijing Shidai Huawen, and Changjiang Weiyi (see Table 16).

One intriguing case of a work of BL fiction and an adaptation of this work

that were banned in China but became famous in Thailand is Chai Jidan's *Are You

Addicted?* As discussed above, the adapted web series, *Addicted*, was pulled from

Chinese video streaming platforms after airing twelve episodes. Chinese authorities

did not give an official reason for this, but audiences suspected that the drama was

seized due to its homosexual content. The controversy arising from the cancellation

of *Addicted* made headlines on social media and many Southeast Asian audiences

became interested in this web drama. Gradually, *Addicted* gained a strong reception

in Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries; this was caused by its BL genre and

the charm of characters. In Thailand, *Addicted* was uploaded with Thai subtitle by

several users on YouTube.com in 2016; the first episode was viewed more than

754,000 times (WANGJCSUB, 2016). Channel One broadcasted *Addicted* with Thai

dubbing in 2016 and 2020. Currently, users can also watch *Addicted* on

WeTV.vip. The popularity of *Addicted* resulted in greater recognition for the original novel by Chai Jidan. It should be noted that all of Chai Jidan's novels are banned in mainland China, as such, she published them in Taiwan. Later, *Are You Addicted?* was translated into Thai and distributed by B2S, one of the largest book store chains in Thailand, in 2018.

Summary

Censorship plays a vital role in screening and obstructing the circulation of literary works in many countries, including mainland China, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. However, CIL writers can circumvent the stringent censorship in mainland China by publishing their novels in Taiwan. The primary purpose of censorship in these countries is to prevent the circulation of pornographic, violent, obscene, and misleading articles that may be harmful to the youth and may damage social order. Also, mainland China strictly forbids any materials that oppose the basic principles established in the Constitution and prohibit any articles that promote cults and superstitions; Thailand strongly prohibits any materials that insult the King, the Queen, the Heir to the Throne or the Prince Regent. Moreover, Thai translators and writers are encouraged to practice self-censorship; for instance, Linmou will not translate erotic novels and produsers on Fictionlog.co must declare that their content may contain violence and sexual behaviours and that children below 18 years old are not allowed. Erotic, crime, and horror novels are permitted to be printed and distributed in Taiwan, Singapore, and Thailand, but publishers must remark on the covers that these novels are unsuitable for readers below 18 years old.

The advent of BL fiction in China began around the end of the 1990s; it is a localised literary product that was influenced by Japanese popular culture. The novels often illustrate a romantic relationship between two male characters. Women typically produce these novels for other women, as women are likely to be oppressed

by social traditions and they cannot express their sexual fantasies fully, so they produce BL novels to rebel against those traditions. Nevertheless, Chinese authorities treat BL novels as obscene materials that include abnormal sexual behaviour. Therefore, several Chinese BL authors have been arrested and punished for circulating obscene and pornographic materials in mainland China.

Chinese BL novels arrived in Southeast Asia at the end of the 2000s. Beginning in the 2010s, the positive reception for Chinese BL fiction among Thai female readers encouraged Thai publishers to buy copyrights, translate, and print BL novels. It appears that Chinese BL novels are widely accepted by Thai readers as there are a more significant number of BL novels available in Thailand, while the availability of Chinese-language BL novels is slightly less in Malaysia and Singapore.

The study of Chinese BL novels can show the alternative flows of CIL publication in Southeast Asia. Due to limitations and rigorous restrictions on these publications in mainland China, many mainland Chinese BL writers publish their novels in Taiwan where censorship is homoerotic novels are welcomed. As a result, Southeast Asian publishers and distributors tend to import Chinese BL fiction from Taiwan. In fact, Thai publishers tend to purchase the copyrights of Chinese BL novels from Taiwan because these novels provide in-depth details and are likely to include some descriptions of sexual behaviours between male characters. Similarly, book distributors such as Kinokuniya (Malaysia) and Kinokuniya (Singapore) also import numerous Chinese BL novels—especially R-rated novels—from Taiwan, whereas Popular (Malaysia) only imports Chinese BL fiction without sexual content from Taiwan and mainland China. This alternative flow of CIL publications has emerged as a result of the circumvention of censorship in mainland China.

Conclusion

This research has situated the question of the rise of born-digital Chinese literary products in Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia in the past few decades. Four main arguments have been discussed throughout the thesis. The first argument is that the readership of CIL in Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia was both a continuation and an adaptation of existing reading habits with regards to Chinese popular fiction, beginning from the 1950s. Southeast Asian readers appreciate values that they can relate to themselves; the continuity can be seen through common characteristics shared by Chinese martial arts novels—of Jin Yong and Gu Long—and current Chinese online novels. The second argument is that the Web 2.0 context has enabled everyday Internet users to extend their roles from consumers to producers in CIL online communities—i.e., translation communities, writing communities, and fan communities—as well as promote cultural consumption in Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia. The third argument is that the coexistence of commercialisation and adaptation of CIL has established greater acknowledgement of CIL and has also circulated better understandings of Chinese cultural and societal elements to Southeast Asian audiences. The fourth argument is that strict censorship in mainland China has hindered the printing and distribution of homoerotic literary works in mainland China, but this has resulted in the expansion of a transnational flow of Chinese Boys' Love fiction, from Taiwan to Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia.

Summary of Findings

This research began with the examination of Chinese fiction in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. CIL started to appear in Southeast Asia around the mid-2000s as the Internet became broadly available in mainland China and Southeast Asia. Before the advent of the Internet and CIL, Chinese literature in Thailand could only be translated by noblemen and overseas Chinese, but that is no longer the case, since

anyone is permitted to translate Chinese novels. Significantly, the popular genres of Chinese fiction, especially in Thailand, have gradually shifted, from *wuxia* to historical romance and other genres (e.g., mystery, *xianxia*, and fantasy) since the end of the 2000s. I found that there are more male readers than female readers because of the broader range of genres that may be preferred by men. CIL readers are generally between 18 and 34 years old and are working young adults with purchasing power. On average, Southeast Asian readers of CIL spend about 12 minutes reading CIL novels per day, and they tend to read CIL from their mobile devices.

Furthermore, I discussed how the continuity of Chinese popular fiction from the 1950s had assisted the success of CIL in the region by comparing elements in Gu Long's *The Little Li Flying Dagger Series* and Butterfly Blue's *The King's Avatar*. Exploring common elements in both novels allowed me to recognise how and why these novels have been and are popular among Southeast Asian readers. It is evident that Southeast Asian readers have been fond of Chinese novels because they are not only entertaining, but they also reflect recognisable values; Chinese cultural elements such as Confucian thoughts and Buddhist teachings can be found in both novels.

I then assessed the roles of Internet users in CIL translation communities, writing communities, and fan communities. Within CIL translation communities, three types of translators were identified: professional translators, paraprofessional translators, and amateur translators. This typology is dependent on degree of professional training and sources of income from translation work. Professional translators are those who have trained to be translators and work full-time as translators. Paraprofessional translators refer to any persons who have not been trained professionally, but who utilise their skills and experience to become part-time translators for local publishers. Amateur translators are ordinary Internet users who want to master their skills by translating CIL into their native language, this type of

translator is likely to violate copyright and they often attempt to derive an income for their translations from their readership. Paraprofessional translators and amateur translators can be addressed as "produsers"—i.e., any Internet users who want to become producers on the Internet. Paraprofessional translators made up the most substantial proportion of CIL translation communities, as CIL translation platforms such as Webnovel.com and Tunwalai.com hire freelance paraprofessional translators to generate their content. Being in translation communities does not necessarily mean all translators work in teams in a particular community; many CIL translators work independently and some work in groups such as the EndlessFantasy Translations team from Malaysia, who work for Webnovel.com, and the Hor-muen-ak-sorn team from Thailand, who translate CIL for Tunwalai.com.

Translators are one of the essential roles in circulating CIL and dispersing Chinese culture in Southeast Asia since they translate literary works from Chinese into their local languages and this allows local readers to consume CIL in their languages. In the Web 2.0 context, translators have established a produser–reader interaction as they communicate on digital platforms.

Inspired by CIL, local writers have created their versions of CIL in online writing communities in Malaysia and Thailand. Within writing communities in Malaysia, ethnic Chinese who are literate in Chinese can express their fantasies through novels by publishing their works on eManyan.com, a Chinese-language online fiction platform. It must be noted that Chinese novels on this platform are written in Chinese, but their novels do not contain Chinese cultural or historical elements. While Thai online writers produce novels with Chinese historical settings, these novels are called "Chinese genre" fiction. The majority of Chinese genre novels are created solely from writers' imagination; therefore, correct Chinese customs and cultural elements are missing. The reason behind the boom of Chinese

online fiction in Malaysia and the emergence of Chinese genre fiction in Thailand is

the demand of local literary works that can satisfy the high demand for CIL among

local readers.

CIL readers are either fans or consumers. Fans are those who actively engage

with activities in communities and are fond of certain novels and genres. Consumers,

on the other hand, like reading various CIL and they barely start discussions or

comment on any discussions in fan communities. In fact, consumers made up the

highest number in fan communities since they have joined the groups for receiving

information rather than participating in discussions. Social media platform such as

Facebook.com is a place where numerous fan groups are founded. In Thailand, fan

communities are divided into official groups and fan groups. Official groups are

organised by local translators or publishers, while ordinary readers found fan groups.

Fan communities are virtual communities where fans who share a common interest

in a particular novel interact with each other. These fans frequently express their

admiration on characters and the novel; they also share updated information and

discuss adaptations of the novel. Besides, some fans create Facebook fan pages to

spread news and the latest information on specific novels to others. The distinct

features between Facebook fan groups and fan pages are how fans interact since

anyone who has joined the group can post anything and they can share documents

within the group, whereas admins fully control the content on fan pages. My study

explored what fans of *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* discussed within fan

communities and found that majority of comments were about dramatic adaptations

of the novel.

The research on translation and fan communities determined that amateur

translators and fans are likely to infringe on copyright by circulating translations of

CIL within communities. Specifically, amateur translators attempt to profit from their translations without being granted authorisation.

The next chapter attempted to establish the main commercial models of CIL translation platforms and investigated how adaptations of CIL can stimulate recognition of original novels. China's online literature enterprises have used the freemium business model. This business model allows users to read their content for free before purchasing locked chapters. CIL translation platforms such as Webnovel.com and Tunwalai.com adopted this business model to gain revenue from VIP chapters. Users can purchase specific currencies on each platform, and they can use it to pay for locked or VIP chapters. Unlike CIL platforms in mainland China, CIL translation platforms in Southeast Asia like Webnovel.com and Tunwalai.com have introduced bonus currencies that users can earn from completing activities on the platforms; these bonus currencies enable users to read locked chapters for free. Another feature that makes Webnovel.com different from Chinese platforms is a monthly subscription option.

Furthermore, CIL translation platforms can promote Chinese online fiction in other countries since local readers can enjoy reading CIL in their preferred languages. Commercialisation has also led to more competitiveness in the publishing market; local publishers and translation platforms attempt to purchase copyrights of CIL and distribute them in order to satisfy readers' demand. Therefore, there are ever more options for local readers in terms of genres and stories. Besides, commercialisation has resulted in the production of dramatic adaptations of CIL. Numerous Chinese online novels have been made into animations and dramas. Adaptations can encourage greater acknowledgement of original works and also increase the sales volume of the adapted novels. Tencent Video saw the importance of the Southeast Asian market and eventually launched WeTV.vip, a video streaming platform, in

Thailand in November 2018. On this platform, Southeast Asian audiences can watch anime and dramatic adaptations of CIL such as *The King's Avatar* (2017 animation) and (2019 web series) as well as *The Untamed* (2019). The success of *The Untamed* incentivised a Thai publisher to translate the original novel, *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation*, and distribute to it Thai readers. The translation of *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* was sold out within a short period due to high demand. *The Untamed* demonstrated the development of the Chinese drama production and entertainment industry; the cast of this drama became very popular among Southeast Asian viewers, and their popularity led to the event outside of China in which fans of the series could meet the case, in Bangkok on 21 September 2019. Dramatic adaptations of CIL can provide a better understanding of Chinese culture and society to Southeast Asian audiences since fundamental cultural and societal elements are often included in the dramas. Southeast Asian viewers can reflect and relate to current social issues and struggles that often occur in daily life, for instance, distinct socioeconomic status and careers. Besides, romance fiction seems to be the most appealing genre that has been adapted into dramas. Due to time limit and regulations, drama adaptations may not include every detail of the source novels. Hence, audiences are likely to look for original novels to read and absorb into additional elements that cannot be found in adaptations.

Lastly, I observed and reviewed censorship-related regulations in mainland China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand to understand what articles are strictly banned and restricted in each country. In general, every country discourages obscene, violent, and pornographic publications as well as any articles that are harmful to public order. Mainland China rigorously prohibits any content that is against principles in the constitution and any articles that encourage cults and superstitions. Thailand censors and severely bans any matters dealing with the King,

the Queen, the Heir to the Throne or the Prince Regent. Also, explicit descriptions of sexual activities and violence are stringently prohibited from circulating or selling to minors in each country. However, publications involving sexual behaviour, violence, and crime are permitted in Taiwan, Singapore, and Thailand; publishers and distributors must remark on book covers that content is not suitable for readers below 18 years old. In Thailand, CIL translators practice self-censorship to screen content before translating and publishing as readers may report inappropriate content authorities.

Influenced by Japanese pop culture, Chinese writers have started to explore a new genre and write Boys' Love (BL) novels from the early 2000s. However, in mainland China BL novels are considered obscene objects that contain abnormal sexual behaviour. Therefore, homoerotic novelists often publish their works in Taiwan to avoid censorship. Many young female readers appreciate Chinese BL novels in Southeast Asia because they can satisfy their sexual imagination. Indeed, female readers tend to be oppressed by social customs and norms and they cannot express their sexual interest fully. In Thailand, BL is one of the mainstream genres. Thai female readers can select their favourite BL novels from any local book stores. Due to censorship in mainland China, Chinese BL authors publish their novels in Taiwan. This has created the alternative flow of publication as Southeast Asian publishers and distributors have to import Chinese BL fiction from Taiwan.

Furthermore, available Chinese BL novels in mainland China do not contain any descriptions of sexual interaction between male characters. Hence, Thai publishers and translators prefer Taiwanese versions that include such details. Moreover, my study revealed that Chinese BL novels are more welcomed in Thailand than in Malaysia and Singapore since the topic of homosexuality is against Islamic law in Malaysia and Singaporeans and authorities do not widely accept it.

Limitations of The Study

There may be some possible limitations of this study. Language fluency is the first

limitation of my research. Since Chinese is not my mother tongue, this research only

focused on English and Thai translations of CIL. I should emphasise that my

research has been fundamentally concerned with Chinese-language Internet

Literature in Southeast Asia, but, to no small extent, the research concentrated on

Thailand because I am a Thai native speaker. Insufficient access to data is the second

limitation of this study. Malaysian and Singaporean interviewees refused my requests

for an interview. Hence, this study had to rely on limited information on various

online platforms. Data on the web analytic tool, SimilarWeb.com, were restricted to

the duration of three months.

Implications and Recommendations for Research

On the surface, this study suggests that Chinese popular fiction between the 1950s

and 1970s was an essential factor in establishing the popularity of CIL in Southeast

Asia. However, CIL has created several changes in Chinese fiction readership in

respect of the variety of genres, reading behaviour, and the rise of young adult

readers. Studying the implications of CIL communities reveals that Web 2.0

platforms have allowed ordinary Internet users to become produsers such as

translators and writers and has enabled those who share similar interest on particular

works of fiction to form online fan communities. Nevertheless, copyright

infringements are frequently violated by amateur translators and fans of CIL in

online communities. Moreover, my research on the commercialisation and adaptation

of CIL provides suggestive evidence for the rise of Chinese pop culture market in

Southeast Asia. The study also connotes that an alternative flow of publications has

been caused by stringent censorship in mainland China. Chinese Boys' Love writers

have to circumvent censorship by publishing their novels in Taiwan. This has

resulted in the import of Chinese BL novels from Taiwan by local publishers and distributors in Southeast Asia.

Future research into Chinese-language Internet Literature in Southeast Asia might usefully focus on the localisation of CIL in other contexts, for instance, an in-depth study on Chinese online novels of Malaysian Chinese writers. Further study of CIL in other Southeast Asian countries where English is not the mother tongue—such as Vietnam and Indonesia—should be conducted because readers widely accept CIL in these countries.

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Tables

Table 1

Reading Habits in Southeast Asia

	MY	**SG**	**TH**
Reading			
Book store	53	30	63
Library	16	15	5
Not interested	22	33	29
Gender			
Women who bought at least one book in the past year	78	54	86
Men who bought at least one book in the past year	74	48	71
Where do they buy books?			
Paper books from offline store	46	30	71
Paper books from online store	54	45	34
E-books from online store	15	23	12
Paid subscription	15	11	5
Free download	31	30	19
Main factors determining book purchases			
Price	53	53	26
A movie based on the book	29	21	21
Friends' recommendations	50	36	21
Bloggers' reviews	28	26	29
Own decision	37	43	57
Most popular type of literature			

Fiction	76	79	49
Genres			
Romance	39	32	25
Thriller	43	30	12
Crime	36	28	9
Adventure	23	30	26
Sci-fi and fantasy	20	15	29
Historical	13	17	25
Modern	12	4	21
Why do they read?			
They love reading	48	57	56
As a stress remedy	18	11	16
For studies and work	20	23	25
As a gift	14	9	13

Note. From "Buying books in Malaysia (and around the world)," by Picodi, 2019, (https://www.picodi.com/my/bargain-hunting/buying-books-in-malaysia-and-around-the-world).

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Table 2

CIL platforms (in Chinese) 1

#	Websites	origins	total visits (million)	desktop distribution %	phone distribution %	visit duration (minutes)	MY %	visit duration (minutes)	SG %	visit duration (minutes)2	TH %	visit duration (minutes)3
1	17k	CN	9.358	7.79%	92.21%	14.02	0.75%	33.02	0.00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00
2	69shu	TW	18.13	12.11%	87.89%	34.32	14.83%	37.30	4.24%	17.26	2.04%	14.27
3	88dushu	CN	20.67	6.04%	93.96%	35.13	0.07%	39.19	22.00%	150.44	0.00%	0.00
4	123du	CN	21.33	9.99%	90.01%	13.46	1.13%	7.14	0.36%	8.08	0.00%	0.00
5	biduo	CN	30.53	6.88%	93.12%	19.55	0.65%	0.92	0.00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00
6	biquge	CN	89.49	14.17%	85.83%	16.42	0.00%	0.00	0.06%	26.37	0.00%	0.00
7	dingidann	CN	32.09	14.03%	85.97%	18.31	0.00%	0.00	0.13%	21.58	0.00%	0.00
8	emanyan	MY	0.0049	84.78%	15.22%	3.11	100.00%	3.02	0.00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00
9	hongxiu	CN	2.154	13.64%	86.36%	11.31	0.62%	0.48	0.68%	20.12	0.00%	0.00
10	jjwxc.net	CN	159.3	11.88%	88.12%	18.56	0.74%	20.59	0.48%	13.00	0.00%	0.00
11	kenshu.cc	CN	10.62	10.02%	89.98%	13.05	9.72%	40.44	2.18%	14.18	0.00%	0.00
12	Novel101	TW	12.36	6.09%	93.91%	24.45	2.24%	41.44	0.76%	19.30	0.00%	0.00
13	qidian	CN	131.5	40.53%	59.47%	17.21	0.50%	17.47	0.37%	14.11	0.19%	14.22
14	qdmm	CN	0.8524	24.13%	75.87%	0.20	1.19%	1.40	0.00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00
15	quanben-xiaoshuo	CN	3.932	11.47%	88.53%	31.20	2.85%	10.01	1.35%	31.41	1.31%	34.23
16	quanben5	TW	25.01	5.91%	94.09%	37.10	0.78%	26.56	0.36%	27.53	0.45%	1.24
17	readnovel	CN	2.225	10.66%	89.34%	14.08	1.31%	9.35	0.65%	0.38	0.00%	0.00
18	sto.cx	TW	66.45	5.94%	94.06%	38.05	4.74%	45.30	1.90%	22.33	0.00%	0.00
19	uukanshu	TW	120.7	12.96%	87.04%	34.25	5.04%	33.36	2.32%	28.50	0.00%	0.00
20	xibiquge6	CN	14.74	59.92%	40.08%	17.36	0.47%	5.53	0.00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00
21	xs8	CN	12.98	1.35%	98.65%	18.02	3.10%	7.48	0.00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00
22	xxsy.net	CN	5.482	11.36%	88.64%	8.35	0.86%	23.22	0.65%	3.21	0.00%	0.00
	Average Sum		789.90	17.35%	82.65%	19.89	6.89%	18.33	1.75%	18.99	0.18%	2.91
	Average visits (million)						54.42		13.82		1.43	

Note. Data were collected from 22 Chinese-language websites between October and December 2019 via the web analytics tool, SimilarWeb.com.

Table 3

CIL platforms (in Chinese) 2

#	Websites	origins	Male %	Female %	Age 18-24 %	Age 25-34 %	Age 35-44 %	Age 45-54 %	Age 55-64 %	Age 65+ %	others
1	17k	CN	69.25%	30.75%	28.17%	41.35%	17.65%	6.79%	3.82%	2.22%	
2	69shu	TW	58.08%	41.92%	26.46%	33.99%	18.96%	10.51%	6.37%	3.71%	
3	88dushu	CN	75.60%	24.40%	26.40%	39.30%	20.15%	7.51%	4.22%	2.42%	
4	123du	CN	69.65%	30.35%	28.48%	37.76%	19.91%	7.42%	3.99%	2.44%	
5	biduo	CN	70.12%	29.88%	29.24%	39.41%	18.49%	6.88%	3.70%	2.28%	
6	biquge	CN	71.60%	28.40%	29.00%	41.14%	18.15%	6.14%	3.52%	2.05%	
7	dingidann	CN	68.40%	31.60%	26.56%	40.49%	20.30%	6.78%	3.75%	2.12%	
8	emanyan	MY	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	
9	hongxiu	CN	60.60%	39.40%	28.38%	40.00%	17.56%	7.29%	4.23%	2.54%	
10	jjwxc.net	CN	54.13%	45.87%	31.64%	39.85%	15.87%	6.74%	3.78%	2.12%	for women
11	kenshu.cc	CN	64.15%	35.85%	25.42%	38.20%	19.35%	8.85%	5.16%	3.02%	
12	Novel101	TW	43.04%	56.96%	28.38%	37.41%	18.00%	8.87%	4.68%	2.66%	
13	qidian	CN	73.45%	26.55%	29.92%	40.29%	18.26%	6.25%	3.31%	1.97%	
14	qdmm	CN	67.42%	32.58%	27.33%	37.68%	18.81%	8.33%	5.04%	2.81%	for women
15	quanben-xiaoshuo	CN	63.45%	36.55%	25.41%	35.71%	19.71%	9.99%	5.72%	3.46%	
16	quanben5	TW	59.47%	40.53%	24.40%	36.17%	20.35%	10.13%	5.70%	3.25%	
17	readnovel	CN	64.58%	35.42%	28.05%	39.80%	18.34%	7.23%	4.12%	2.46%	
18	sto.cx	TW	42.18%	57.82%	30.55%	36.07%	16.87%	8.91%	4.81%	2.79%	
19	uukanshu	TW	74.47%	25.53%	27.56%	36.26%	18.92%	9.21%	5.05%	3.00%	
20	xibiquge6	CN	72.55%	27.45%	27.74%	40.84%	18.89%	6.70%	3.64%	2.19%	
21	xs8	CN	60.87%	39.13%	24.22%	42.50%	20.28%	6.96%	3.94%	2.10%	
22	xxsy.net	CN	59.62%	40.38%	27.35%	40.09%	18.56%	7.32%	4.32%	2.45%	
	Average Sum		63.94%	36.06%	27.65%	38.78%	18.73%	7.85%	4.42%	2.57%	
	Average visits (million)										

Note. Data were collected from 22 Chinese-language websites between October and December 2019 via the web analytics tool, SimilarWeb.com.

Table 4

CIL platforms (in English) 1

#	Websites	origins	Total visits (million)	desktop distribution %	phone distribution %	visit duration (minutes)	MY %	visit duration (minutes)	SG %	visit duration (minutes)	TH %	visit duration (minutes)
1	webnovel	US	23.8	48.58%	51.42%	24.50	2.43%	16.47	0.00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00
2	wuxiaworld	US	56.25	33.24%	66.76%	23.42	0.00%	0.00	2.37%	16.38	0.00%	0.00
3	readnovelfull	US	5.681	22.78%	77.22%	46.07	0.00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00	3.15%	37.05
4	novelfull	US	29.86	16.69%	83.31%	38.33	4.49%	55.39	0.00%	0.00	3.53%	55.28
5	novelupdates	US	56.76	35.17%	64.83%	8.04	0.00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00
6	readlightnovel	US	22.05	19.67%	80.33%	31.45	2.54%	28.34	0.00%	0.00	4.34%	16.03
7	gravitytales	US	3.96	27.14%	72.86%	29.03	0.00%	0.00	4.48%	7.55	0.00%	0.00
	Average Sum		198.361	29.04%	70.96%	28.69	1.35%	14.31	0.98%	3.42	1.57%	15.48
	Average visits (million)						2.68071		1.9411041		3.1227689	

Note. Data were collected from seven English-language CIL translation websites between October and December 2019 via the web analytics tool, SimilarWeb.com.

Table 5

CIL platforms (in English) 2

#	Websites	origins	Male %	Female %	Age 18-24 %	Age 25-34 %	Age 35-44 %	Age 45-54 %	Age 55-64 %	Age 65+%
1	webnovel	US	69.34%	30.66%	34.95%	31.39%	15.14%	9.05%	5.83%	3.64%
2	wuxiaworld	US	74.51%	25.49%	35.73%	31.60%	14.89%	8.81%	5.55%	3.42%
3	readnovelfull	US	66.44%	33.56%	33.35%	30.59%	15.71%	9.75%	6.57%	4.03%
4	novelfull	US	68.42%	31.58%	33.48%	31.11%	15.71%	9.55%	6.22%	3.93%
5	novelupdates	US	74.02%	25.98%	39.39%	30.77%	13.61%	8.03%	5.03%	3.17%
6	readlightnovel	US	74.28%	25.72%	37.57%	31.20%	14.33%	8.40%	5.28%	3.22%
7	gravitytales	US	68.23%	31.77%	31.42%	30.68%	16.38%	10.42%	6.90%	4.20%
	Average Sum		70.75%	29.25%	40.98%	36.22%	17.63%	10.67%	6.90%	4.27%
	Average visits (million)									

Note. Data were collected from seven English-language CIL translation websites between October and December 2019 via the web analytics tool, SimilarWeb.com.

Table 6

CIL platforms (in Thai) 1

#	Websites	origins	Total visits (million)	desktop distribution %	phone distribution %	visit duration (minutes)	MY %	visit duration (minutes)	SG %	visit duration (minutes)	TH %	visit duration (minutes)
1	Tunwalai	TH	24.57	12.99%	87.01%	22.05	0.25%	5.15	0.00%	0.00	98.37%	15.29
2	fictionlog.co	TH	5.771	35.63%	64.37%	17.47	0.05%	0.00	0.00%	0.00	99.13%	14.25
3	hongsamut	TH	0.76446	30.39%	69.61%	10.02	0.48%	2.23	0.00%	0.00	97.29%	6.03
4	readawrite	TH	19.8	15.09%	84.91%	18.40	0.09%	9.34	0.00%	0.00	98.58%	19.08
5	hellfact	TH	1.032	16.94%	83.06%	27.08	0.00%	0.00	0.04%	0.00	98.44%	17.12
6	kawebook.com	TH	3.434	29.45%	70.55%	17.52	0.00%	0.00	0.04%	38.06	99.30%	11.06
	Average Sum		55.3715	23%	77%	18.76	0.15%	2.79	0.01%	6.34	98.52%	13.81
	Average visits (million)						0.08029		0.00738		54.551042	

Note. Data were collected from six Thai-language CIL translation websites between October and December 2019 via the web analytics tool, SimilarWeb.com.

Table 7

CIL platforms (in Thai) 2

#	Websites	origins	Male %	Female %	Age 18–24 %	Age 25–34 %	Age 35–44 %	Age 45–54 %	Age 55–64 %	Age 65+ %
1	Tunwalai	TH	39.93%	60.07%	35.52%	35.85%	14.67%	7.98%	4.32%	1.66%
2	fictionlog.co	TH	56.07%	43.93%	33.87%	36.85%	16.13%	7.78%	3.86%	1.51%
3	hongsamut	TH	51.92%	48.08%	30.44%	38.89%	17.01%	7.79%	4.20%	1.67%
4	readawrite	TH	39.58%	60.42%	37.41%	36.63%	13.97%	7.22%	3.42%	1.35%
5	hellfact	TH	71.98%	28.02%	30.81%	37.09%	16.96%	8.27%	4.65%	2.22%
6	kawebook.com	TH	70.68%	29.32%	35.07%	36.39%	15.95%	7.56%	3.70%	1.33%
	Average Sum		55.03%	44.97%	33.85%	36.95%	15.78%	7.77%	4.03%	1.62%

Note. Data were collected from six Thai-language CIL translation websites between October and December 2019 via the web analytics tool, SimilarWeb.com.

Table 8

Genres and genders

Group 1	CIL novels on Fictionlog.co	Genre	N	F	M
	I'm Really a Super Star ฉันนี่แหละคือซูเปอร์สตาร์ ภาค 1 我真是大明星	Fantasy	100	31	69
	Gate of Truth ประตูสู่วันพิพากษา ภาค 1 天啟之門	Adventure-fantasy	49	6	43
	My Girlfriend is a Zombie เมื่อแฟนผมกลายเป็นซอมบี้! 1 我的女友是喪失	Sci-fi	38	2	36
	King of Gods ราชันเทพเจ้า ภาค 1 主宰之王	*Wuxia*	100	15	85
			287	54	233
				18.82	81.18
Group 2	CIL novels on Fictionlog.co	Genre	N	F	M
	Black Peach Z เดิมพันรักสาวแฮกเกอร์ Vol.1 國民校草是女生	Teen love	100	95	5
	Good Morning, Mr. President! อรุณสวัสดิ์ ท่านประธานาธิบดีที่รัก! ภาคพิเศษ 早安，總統大人！	Historical romance	29	28	1
	Jun Jiuling หวนชะตารัก 1 君九齡	Historical romance	82	80	2
	The Tang Dynasty's Female Forensic Doctor นิติเวชหญิงแห่งต้าถัง ภาค 1 เจียงหนาน 金玉滿唐	Historical romance	100	98	2
			311	301	10
				96.78	3.22

Note. Data were collected from eight novels on Fictionlog.co.

Table 9

Genres of Sinophone novels on eManyan.com

Genres	No.
历史·军事 History/military	17
武侠·修真 *Wuxia*/Taoist	42
游戏·同人 Game/character	62
都市·侦探 Metropolis/detective	71
科幻·灵异 Sci-fi/monster	102
特约·其他 Specialty/others	123
短篇·散文 Short story/prose	179
校园·青春 School/youth	254
奇幻·玄幻 Fantasy/mystery	265
Total	**1115**

Note. Data were collected from eManyan.com on 21 February 2020

Table 10

Chinese genre novels in Thailand

	Titles	Author	Publishers/ platforms	First published in (year)	Genres	Views
1	ดวงใจพยัคฆ์ (Duangchai-payak)	ปาท่องโก๋ (Patongko)	B2S	2019	Time-travelling	1,967,447
2	หลานสาวกุนซือมาร (Lansao-gunsue-man)	หนูน้อยตัวไหม (Noonoi tuamai)	Inktreebook	2018	Xianxia	808,440
3	จอมราชันผงาดฟ้า (Jom-rachan-pa-ngad-fah)	ลิ้วลม (Liwlom)	Dek-D.com	2019	Wuxia	269,525
4	ห้วงเวลาแห่งรัก (Huang-weala-heng-rak)	วสันต์จันทรา (Wasant Chandhra)	Punruk	2009	Romance fantasy	48,113
5	ห้วงรักเหนือกาลเวลา (Huang-rak-hnua-kan-weala)	นิจนิรันดร์ (Nijnirand)	Self-publising	2016	Romance fantasy	67,546
6	ดวงใจไร้กาล 永恒之恋 (Duangchai-rai-kan)	Liangling	คำต่อคำ (wordforword)	2005	Romance fantasy	223,304
7	ยอดดาราเคียงใจ 星星和我心 (Yod-dara-keuang-chai)	กัญฉัตร (Kanyachad)	Self-publising	2019	Action romance	422,527
8	ราชบุตรเขยเจ้าสำราญ (Racha-butkuey-chao-samran)	BiscuitBus	Amarin	2013	Action romance	454,483
9	ตุ๊ดทะลุมิติ (Tut-talu-miti)	นปภา (Napapha)	Sataporn Books	2014	Gay comedy	532,302

10	มือพิสดาร (Mue-pee-saat)	Matsuo Masahito	Self-publising	2007	Wuxia	217,611
11	นางใน 宫女 (Nang-nai)	ธาดาพร (Thadaporn)	Nawanita	2016	Inner palace	7,574
12	ซวยล่ะสิ! นางร้ายอย่างข้ากลายเป็นฮองเฮา (Suay-lasi! Nangrai-yang-kha-klaipen-honghao)	Justnormal	Hommuenlee	2018	Fantasy	365,132
13	อสูรมังกรฟ้า เล้งซาน (Asun-mangkorn-fah Leng-san)	Free-J	Kawebook	2019	Action fantasy	3,250,000
14	เหนือพิภพ สยบสวรรค์ (Hnua-pipop Sayob-swan)	อาณาจักรหมี (Anajakmee)	Kawebook	2018	Action fantasy	2,240,000
15	บุปผาพิศวาส (Buppa-pisawat)	ยาหยัง (Yayang)	Kawebook	2019	Romance fantasy	2,120
16	จินหวังเฟย (Jin Wang Fei)	โม พิมพ์พลอย (Mo Pimploy)	Kawebook	2019	Fantasy	16,600
17	ยุทธจักรบู้ลิ้ม ออนไลน์ (online) (Yuttachak-boolim online)	เด็กหล่ายดอย (Deklaaidoy)	Kawebook	2019	Xianxia/gaming	119,490
18	ส่งจอมยุทธไปต่างโลก (Song-jomyut-pai-tanglok)	ภาณุวัตร เสมเพียร (Phanuwat Sempien)	Kawebook	2018	Xianxia	86,130
19	เฟิงชิง..ไร้พ่ายจอมใจประมุขน้ำแข็ง (Feng-qing…Raipai-jomchai-pramuk-namkeng)	โม่ลี่ฮวา (Molihua)	Fictionlog.co	2020	BL	13,500
20	小乔 ทะลุมิติมาเป็นศิษย์พี่หญิง (Xiao Qiao Talu-miti-mapen-sit-peeying)	กวีหญิงกินปิ้งย่าง (Kaweying kinpingyang)	Fictionlog.co	2020	Xianxia	60,500

21	เซี่ยวหลานอัจฉริยะข้ามภพ (Qiao Lan Atchariya-kham-pop)	นามอนันต์ (Namanan)	Feihui	2019	Romance fantasy	330,800
22	เหอซือเมี่ยว (He Shi Miao)	Sarabiya	Fictionlog.co	2019	Romance fantasy	278,100
23	杨貴琳 บุปผาเหนือวิญญาณ (Yang Gui Lin Buppa-hnua-winyan)	Hallucinations	Feihui	2020	Xianxia	25,600
24	[淑仙] บันทึกรักจอมนาง (Shu Xian Bantuek-rak-jom-nang)	SweirFeng	Inktreebook	2019	Fantasy	176,000

Note. Data were collected from Dek.D.com, Kawebook.com, Fitionlog.co in April 2020

Table 11

Webnovel.com: Top 20 translated novels

	Titles	Chinese title	Genres	Status	Chapters	Views (Million)	Author	Translators	Origin
1	Full Marks Hidden Marriage: Pick Up a Son, Get a Free Husband	許你萬丈光芒好	Contemporary Romance	Completed	2,165	367	Jiong Jiong You Yao	EndlessFantasy Translation, Henyee Translations	Malaysia, Global
2	Lord of the Mysteries	序列的戰爭	Fantasy	22/week	894	14	Cuttlefish That Loves Diving	Atlas Studios	Singapore
3	Library of Heaven's Path	天道圖書館	Eastern Fantasy	14/week	2,049	150	Heng Sao Tian Ya	StarveCleric	Singapore
4	Perfect Secret Love: The Bad New Wife is a Little Sweet	密愛 00 分： 不良鮮妻有點甜	Contemporary Romance	23/week	1,939	98	Jiong Jiong You Yao	Henyee Translation	Global
5	It's Not Easy to Be a Man After Travelling to the Future	穿越未來之男人不好當	Sci-fi Romance	15/week	908	37	Madam Ru	Henyee Translation	Global
6	My Youth Began With Him	青春從遇見他開始	Contemporary Romance	37/week	2,593	74	Baby Piggie	Noodletown Translation	US
7	Reincarnation of The Strongest Sword God	重生之最強劍神	Video game	23/week	2,329	95	Lucky Old Cat	Hellschythe_	Global

	English Title	Chinese	Genre	Rate			Author	Translator	Region
8	Trial Marriage Husband: Need to Work Hard	試婚老公，要給力	Contemporary Romance	Completed	1,274	257	Passion Honey	Yunyi	Global
9	Goodnight Kiss from My Rumored Husband	吻安，緋聞老公	Contemporary Romance	14/week	26	0.5100	Slight Uplifting	EndlessFantasy Translation	Malaysia
10	The Beautiful Wife of the Whirlwind Marriage	閃婚嬌妻：老公，深深愛	Contemporary Romance	18/week	790	21	Bath Robey	Atlas Studios	Singapore
11	Abe the Wizard	巫師亞伯	Fantasy	14/week	37	1	The Mass of Eating Melon Seeds	Exodus Tales	Australia
12	Cultivation Chat Group	修真聊天群	Magical Realism	7/week	1,125	42	Legend of the Paladin	GodBrandy	Global
13	King of Gods	主宰之王	Eastern Fantasy	10/week	1,517	60	Fast Food Restaurant	Thunder07	New Zealand
14	Reincarnation of The Businesswoman At School	豪門崛起：重生校園商女	Contemporary Romance	19/week	364	9	Warm Color Su	Henyee Translation	Global
15	The Legendary Mechanic	超神機械式	Video game	13/week	640	21	Qi Peijia	Atlas Studios	Singapore
16	The King's Avatar	全職高手	video game	Completed	1,729	112	Butterfly Blue	Nomyummi	Global

17	National School Prince Is A Girl	國民校草是女生, 帝少心頭寵：國民校草是女生	Teen	9/week	986	28	Warring Young Seven	Henyee Translation	Global
18	Young Master Mo, Are You Done Kissing?	青春誰笑	Contemporary Romance	17/week	302	7	Qingqing Who Laughs	Henyee Translation	Global
19	Super Gene	超級神基因	Sci-fi	16/week	1,993	69	Twelve-Winged Dark Seraphim	Nyoi_Bo_Studio	US
20	The Most Loving Marriage In History: Master Mu's Pampered Wife	史上第一宠婚：慕少的娇妻最新章节列表	Contemporary Romance	21/week	890	16	Bei Chuang Yun Shang Jin	EndlessFantasy Translation	Malaysia

Note. From Webnovel.com's "Top 20 Novels Ranking", data was collected on 22 January 2020

Table 12

Fans' comments on Pantip.com

Web series	Actors	Anime & manga	Novel	Discussions on characters	Discussions on content	Discussion on differences between drama and novel	Fan meeting Fandom	Music	Fan arts/works	Cosplay	Request for translation	Total
113	51	12	65	65	81	12	25	29	9	6	8	476

Note. Data were collected from Pantip.com, under a tag of "ปรมาจารย์ลัทธิมาร" from 4 May 2019 to 8 May 2020 in a total of 476 threads.

Table 13

Drama Adaptations of CIL

	Drama Adaptations	Original author	SG	MY	TH
1	風中奇緣 Sound of the Desert	Tong Hua	2014 and 2016	2015 and 2016	N/A
2	偏偏喜歡你 Destinated to Love You	Tong Hua	2017	2016	2016
3	大汉情缘之云中歌 Love Yunge From the Desert	Tong Hua	2015	2016	N/A
4	煮婦神探 A Detective Housewife	Tong Hua	2018	N/A	N/A
5	放棄我，抓緊我 Stay With Me	Tong Hua	2017	2017	N/A
6	步步驚心 Scarlet Heart	Tong Hua	2012	N/A	2015
7	最美的时光 Best Time	Tong Hua	N/A	2014	N/A
8	金玉良缘 Perfect Couple	Tong Hua	N/A	2014 and 2016	2016
9	那片星空那片海 The Starry Night The Starry Southeast Asia	Tong Hua	N/A	2017	N/A
10	烈火如歌 The Flame's Daughter	明晓溪	2018 and 2019	2018	N/A
11	小女花不弃 I Will Never Let You Go	椿椿	2019	2019	2019
12	三生三世十里桃花 Eternal Love	唐七公子	N/A	2017 and 2018	2018
13	瑯琊榜 Nirvana in Fire	海宴	2016	2016 and 2017	2018
14	花千骨 The Journey of Flower	Fresh 果果	N/A	2017	2016
15	杉杉来了 Boss & Me	顧漫	2015	2015	2015
16	何以笙箫默 My Sunshine	顧漫	N/A	2016	2016
17	微微一笑很傾城 LOVE O2O	顧漫	N/A	2016 and 2017	N/A

| 18 | 擇天紀 Fighter of the Destiny | 貓膩 | 2018 | 2017 | N/A |
| 19 | 媚者无疆 Bloody Romance | 半明半寐 | 2019 | 2019 | 2019 |

Note. Data were collected from various online bookstore websites in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand

Table 14

CIL web drama adaptations on WeTV.vip

	English titles	Chinese titles	Author	Genres	Original novels	Published in Thai
1	A Love So Beautiful	致我们单纯的小美好	Zhao Qian Qian 趙乾乾	Teen romance	same title	O
2	Put Your Head on My Shoulder	致我們暖暖的小時光	Zhao Qian Qian 趙乾乾	Urban romance	same title	O
3	Our Glamourous Time	你和我的傾城時光	Ding Mo 丁墨	Urban romance	same title	O
4	When We Were Young	人不彪悍枉少年	Yi Lan Shan 易闌珊	Teen romance	same title	X
5	The Story of Ming Lan	知否知否應是綠肥紅瘦	Guan Xin Zhe Luan 關心則亂	Historical fiction	海棠依旧	To be published
6	Suddenly This Summer	忽而今夏	Ming Qian Yu Hou 明前雨後	Coming of age	same title	X
7	Moonshine and Valentine	結愛・千歲大人的初戀	Shi Ding Rou 施定柔	Romance fantasy	結愛：異客逢歡	O
8	The Eternal Love	雙世寵妃	Fan Que 梵缺	Historical fiction	爺我等你休妻	O
9	*Le Coup de Foudre*	我只喜歡你	Qiao Yi 喬一	Urban romance	我不喜歡這世界，我只喜歡你	O

10	Tomb of the Southeast Asia	盜墓筆記少年篇：沙海	Nan Pai San Shu 南派三叔	Mysterious adventure	盜墓筆記	O
11	The King's Avatar	全職高手	Hu Die Lan 蝴蝶藍	Gaming	same title	O
12	The Untamed	陳情令	Mo Xiang Tong Xiu 墨香铜臭	Xianxia	魔道祖师	O
13	The Sweet Love Story	致我們甜甜的小美滿	Zhao Qian Qian 趙乾乾	Urban romance	same title	O
14	Beautiful Reborn Flower	彼岸花	Anni Baby 安妮宝贝	《盜墓筆記少年篇：沙海》		X
15	As Long As You Love Me	愛情的開關	Fei Wo Si Cun 匪我思存	Urban romance	same title	X
16	Joy of Life	慶余年	Mao ni 貓膩	Romance fantasy	Thankful for the Remaining Years	O
17	Ever Night	將夜	Mao ni 貓膩	Fantasy	same title	O
18	Love Is Deep	淺情人不知	Shi Xiao Zha 師小札	Urban romance	same title	X
19	Held in the Lonely Castle	清平樂	Milan Lady 米兰 Lady	Historical period	Serenade of Peaceful Joy	O
20	Dreaming Back to the Qing Dynasty	夢回大清	金子	Historical period	same title	O
21	All I Want for Love is You	滿滿喜歡你	魔女恩恩	Teen romance	三年級二班	X

22	Master Devil Do Not Kiss Me	惡魔少爺別吻我	Jin Xia Mo 錦夏末	Urban romance	same title	X
23	Candle in the Tomb	鬼吹燈之精絕古城	Tian xia ba chang 天下霸唱	Mystery	Ghost Blows Out the Light	O
24	Fairyland Lovers	蓬萊間	Lu Han 路寒	Urban romance	same title	X
25	The life of the white fox	白狐的人生	Jiu Ye Hui 九夜茴	Romance fantasy	same title	X
26	Love of Aurora	極光之戀	王千赫	Urban romance	same title	X
27	You are a Dead Man, Long Riyi	龍日一，你死定了	小妮子	Urban romance	龍日一，你死定了	X
28	The Dark Lord	夜天子	月關	Romance fantasy	same title	X
29	Dr. Qin Medical Examiner	法醫秦明之幸存著	秦明	Mystery	幸存著	O
30	The Fox's Summer	狐狸的夏天	Shen Changmei 沈滄眉	Urban romance	When the President Falls in Love 當總裁戀愛時	X
31	Here to Heart	溫暖的弦	An Ning 安寧	Urban romance	same title	X
32	Ice Fantasy	幻城	Guo Jingming 郭敬明	Romance fantasy	same title	X
33	Darker	暗黑者	周浩暉	Mystery	死亡通知單	To be published

34	Addicted	上癮	Chai Jidan	Boys' Love	你丫上癮了	O
35	The Reborn of Superstar	重生之名流巨星	青羅扇子	Urban romance	same title	X
36	Just an Encore	八分鐘的溫暖	夏茗悠	Urban romance	same title	X

Note. Data were collected from various online bookstore websites in Thailand

Table 15

Mainland BL novelists and their novels' availability in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand

	Authors			Malaysia Popular Online	MY Kinokuniya	SG Kinokuniya	Thailand
1	柴雞蛋	Chai Jidan		X	X	X	O
2	Priest		Jinjiang	O	O	O	O
3	墨香銅臭	Mo Xiang Tong Chou	Jinjiang	O	O	X	O
4	夢溪石	Meng Xi Shi	Jinjiang	O	O	O	O
5	風夜昕	Feng Ye Xin	Jinjiang	O	O	O	O
6	非天夜翔	Fei Tian Ye Xiang	Jinjiang	X	O	O	O
7	蛾非	E Fei		X	X	X	O
8	流玥	Liu Yue	jinjiang	O	X	X	X
9	風流書呆	Feng Liu Shu Dai	jinjiang	X	O	O	O
10	熒夜	Ying Ye	TW	O	X	O	O

Note. "O" is available; "X" is unavailable.

Table 16

Chinese BL novels' availability in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand

	Novels	Authors	Malaysia Popular	Publisher	MY Kino	Publisher	SG Kino	Publisher	Thailand	Copyright	Age Restriction
1	上癮 Are you Addicted?	Chai Jidan	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	LCreading 連城讀書	18+
2	镇魂 Guardian	Priest	O	贵州人民	O	葭霏文創	X		O	Jinjiang	
3	六爻 Liu Yao	Priest	X	X	X	X	O	北京时代华文	O	Jinjiang	
4	魔道祖師 Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation	Mo Xiang Tong Xiu	O	平心	O	平心	X	X	O	Jinjiang	18+
5	成化十四年 Chenghua Shi Si Nian	Meng Xi Shi	X	X	O	平心	X	X	O	Jinjiang	18+
6	千秋 Qian Qiu	Meng Xi Shi	O	长江文艺	O	葭霏文創	O	葭霏文創	O	Jinjiang	
7	制服別亂脫之冰山管家啾一下 Zhifu bie luan tuo zhi bingshan guanjia jiu yi xia	Feng Ye Xin	X	X	O	邀月文化	O	邀月文化	O	邀月文化	18+
8	妖怪美男聯盟 Yaoguai meinan lianmeng	Feng Ye Xin	O	邀月文化	O	邀月文化	O	邀月文化	X		

No.	Title	Author									Age
9	皇上的小公館 Huangshang de xiao gongguan	Feng Ye Xin	X	X	O	邀月文化	O	邀月文化	O	邀月文化	18+
10	金牌助理 Jinpai Zhuli	Fei Tian Ye Xiang	X	X	O	平心工作室	X	X	O	Jinjiang	18+
11	靈魂深處鬧革命 Ling hun shen chu nao ge ming	Fei Tian Ye Xiang	X	X	O	平心工作室	X	X	O	Jinjiang	18+
12	圖靈密碼 Tuling mima	Fei Tian Ye Xiang	X	X	O	平心工作室	X	X	O	Jinjiang	18+
13	醉醒卖身 Zui xing mai shen	E fei	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	鮮歡文化	18+
14	青花鎮 Qing hua zhen	E Fei	X	X	O		O		O	鮮歡文化	18+
15	鳳霸天下 Feng ba tian xia	Liu Yue	O	木馬 (TW)	O	木馬 (TW)	O	木馬 (TW)	X		
16	快穿之打臉狂魔 Kuai chuan zhi da lian kuang mo	Feng Liu Shu Dai	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	Jinjiang	
17	愛你怎麼說 Ai ni zhe me shuo	Feng Liu Shu Dai	X	X	O	晴空出版	O	晴空出版	X		

Note. "O" is available; "X" is unavailable.

Figures

Figure 1

Percentage of Internet users in China, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand

Note. From Wolrdbank, 2019,
(https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=MY-SG-TH)
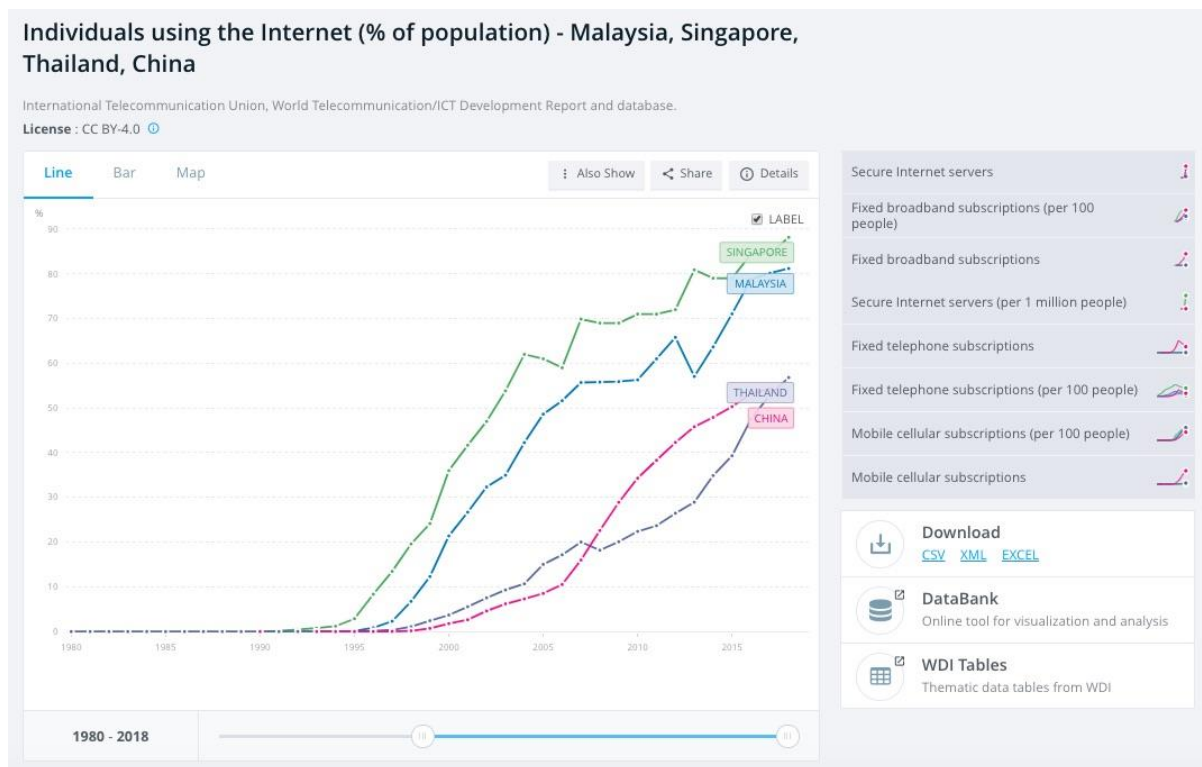
Figure 2

Chinese novel genres in Thailand 2000–2005

Chinese novels genres

| Genre	2000-2002	2003-2005
Erotic	1	0
Wuxia	38	83
Romance	1	6
Drama	2	3
Mystery	1	0
Three Kingdoms		3
Classic	6	2
Historical	4	16
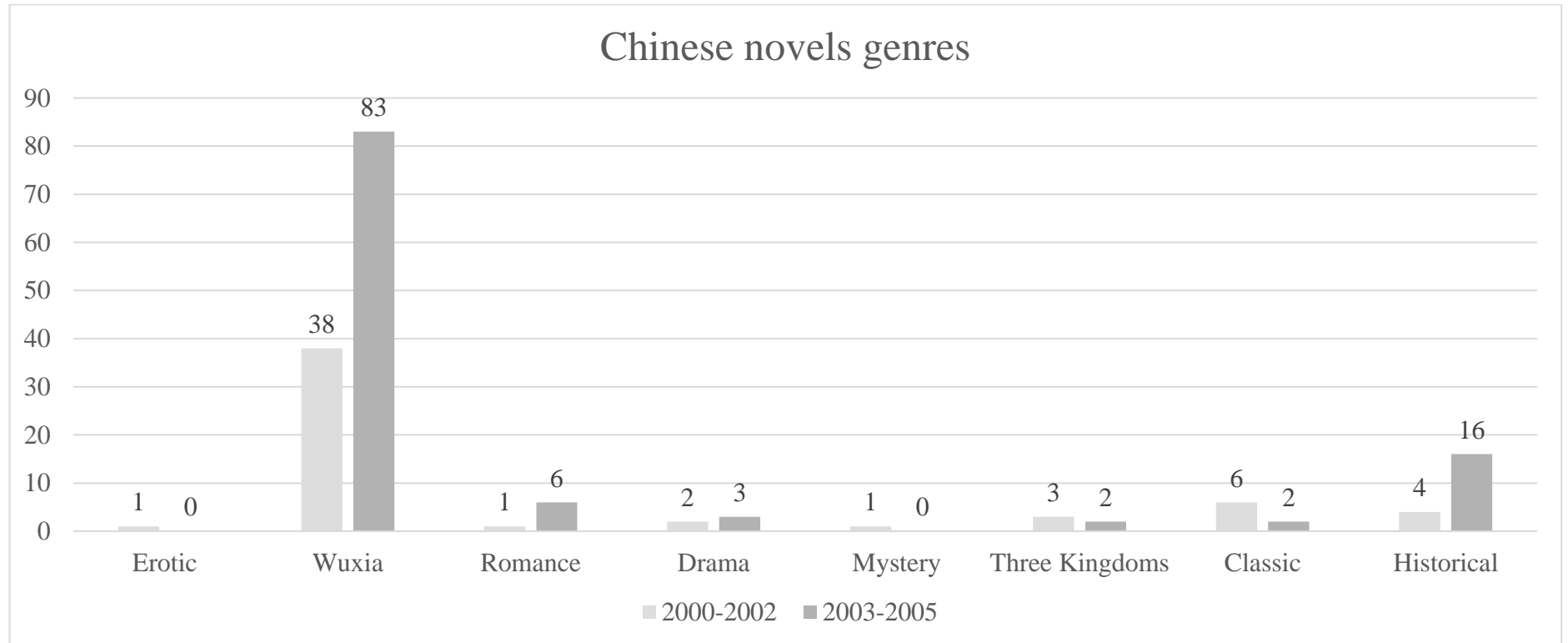
Note. This figure demonstrates Chinese fiction genres in Thailand between 2000 and 2005. Data were gathered from the National Library of Thailand.

Figure 3

*Chinese novel genres in Thailand 2006–2010*
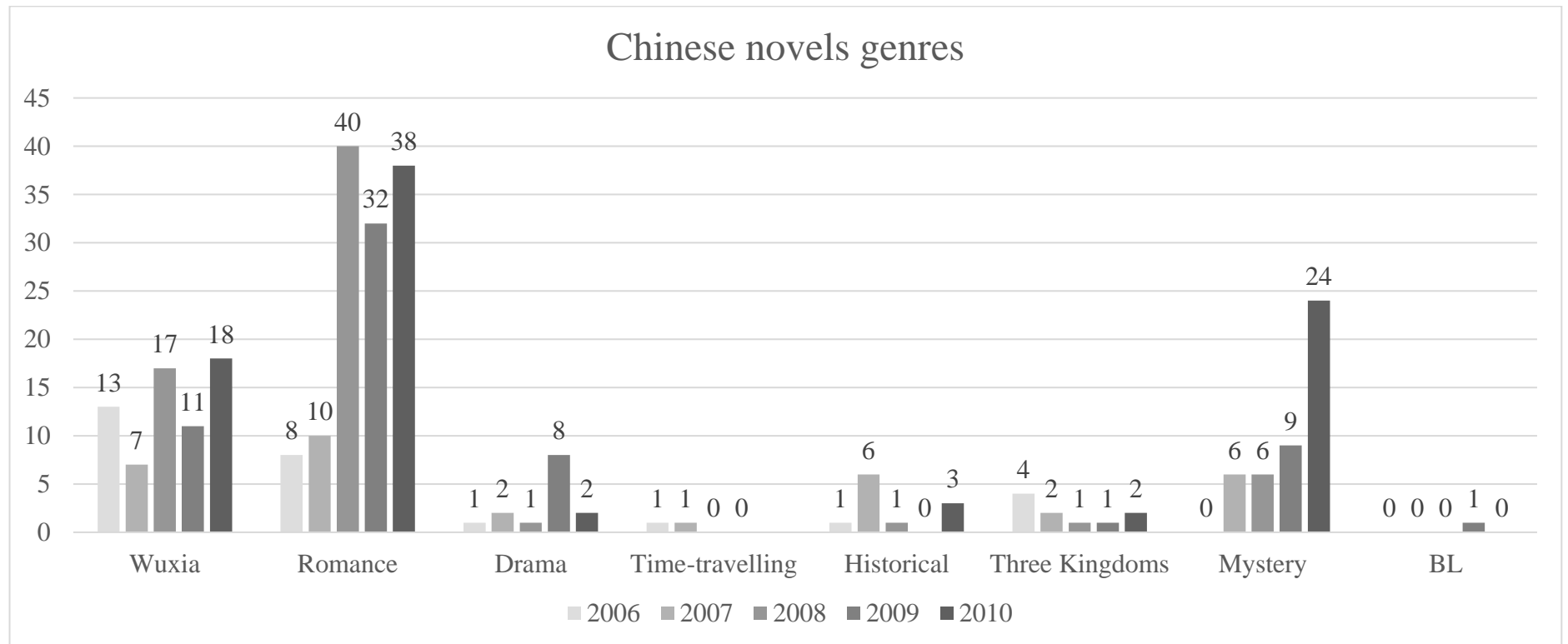
Note. This figure demonstrates Chinese fiction genres in Thailand between 2006 and 2010. Data were gathered from the National Library of Thailand.

Figure 4

Chinese novel genres in Thailand 2011–2015
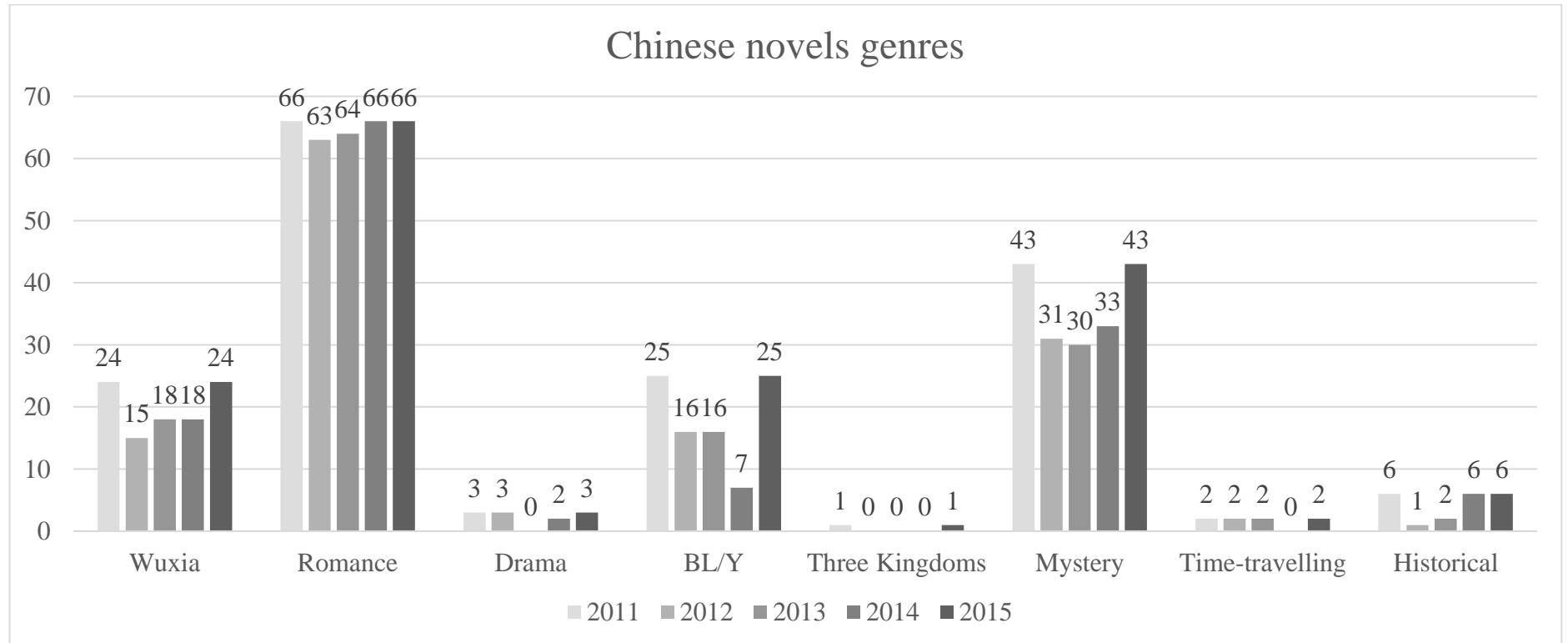
Note. This figure demonstrates Chinese fiction genres in Thailand between 2011 and 2015. Data were gathered from the National Library of Thailand.

Figure 5

Chinese novel genres in Thailand 2016–2018

Chinese novels genres
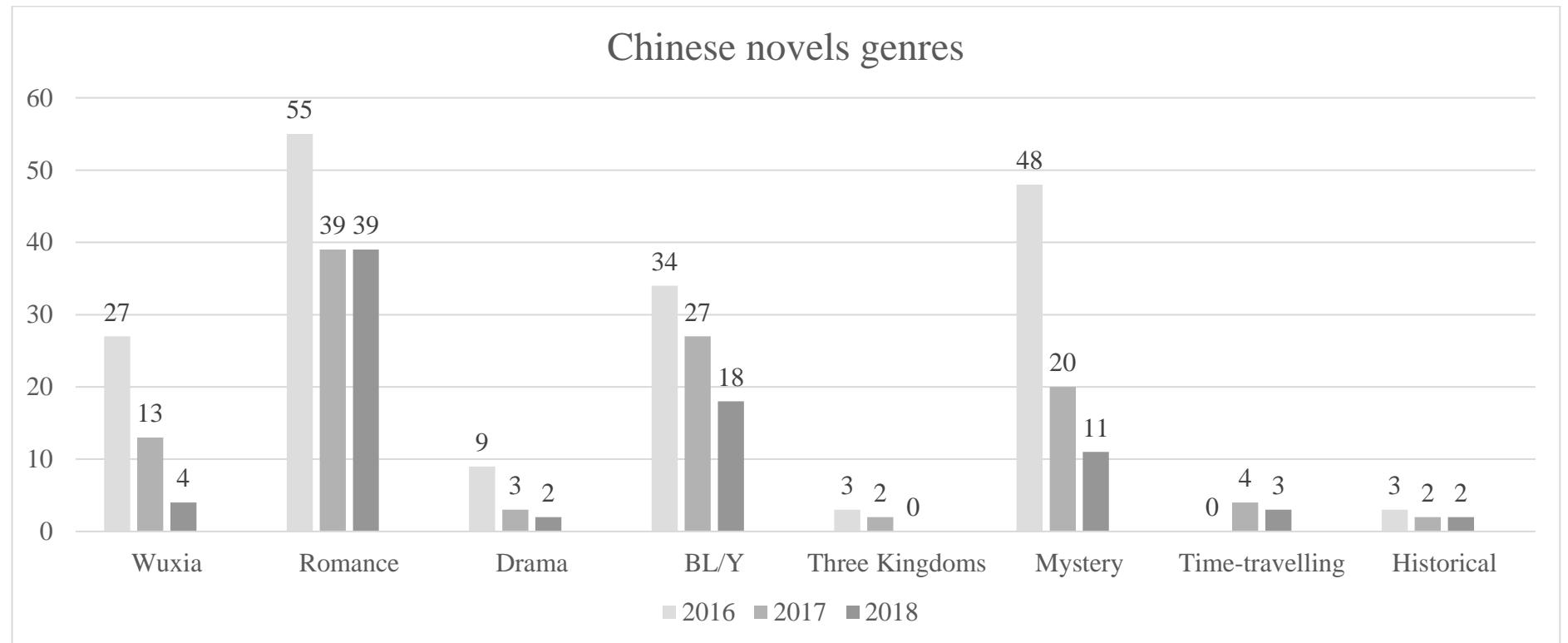
Note. This figure demonstrates Chinese fiction genres in Thailand between 2016 and 2018. Data were gathered from the National Library of Thailand.

Figure 6

*Romance novels authors selected by Jamsai Publishing between 2006 and 2010*
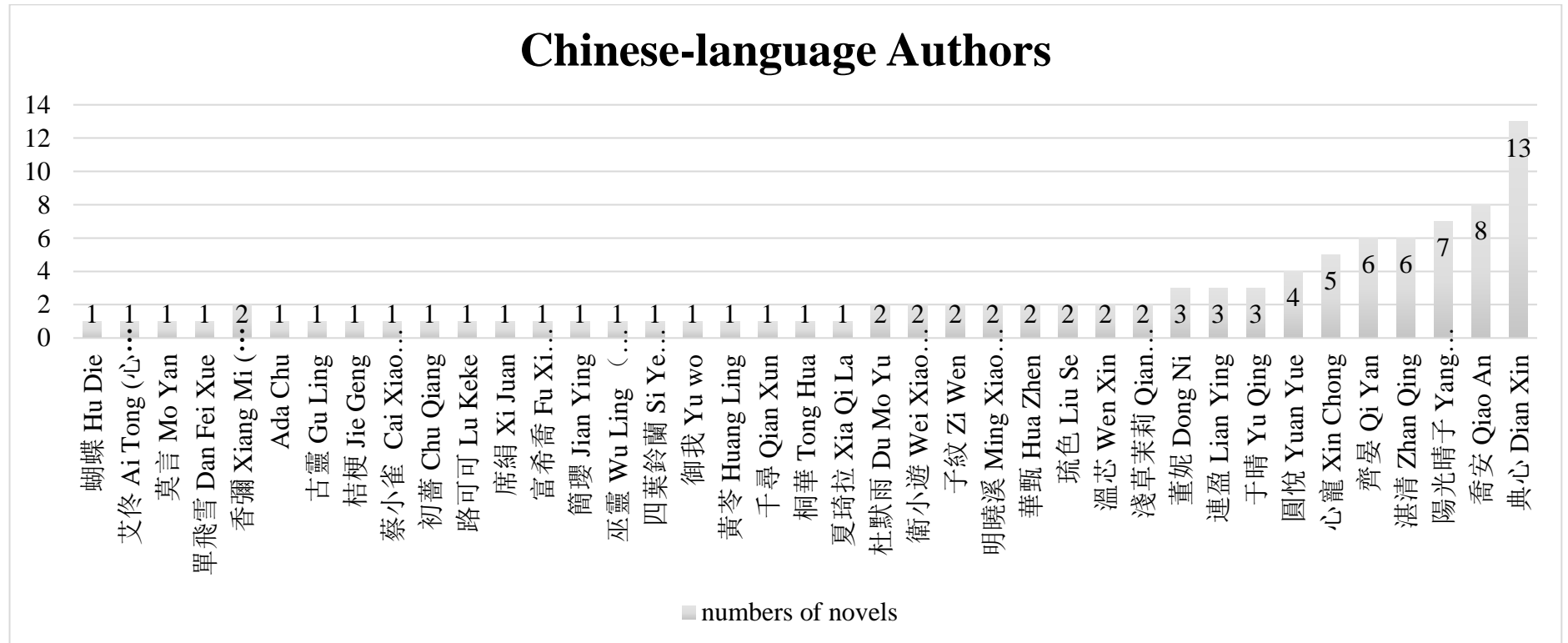
Note. 96 Chinese-language romance novels of 39 Chinese novelists were published by Jamsai Publishing between 2006 and 2010.

Figure 7

Origins of Jamsai Chinese Romance Novels

N=96

Online
22%
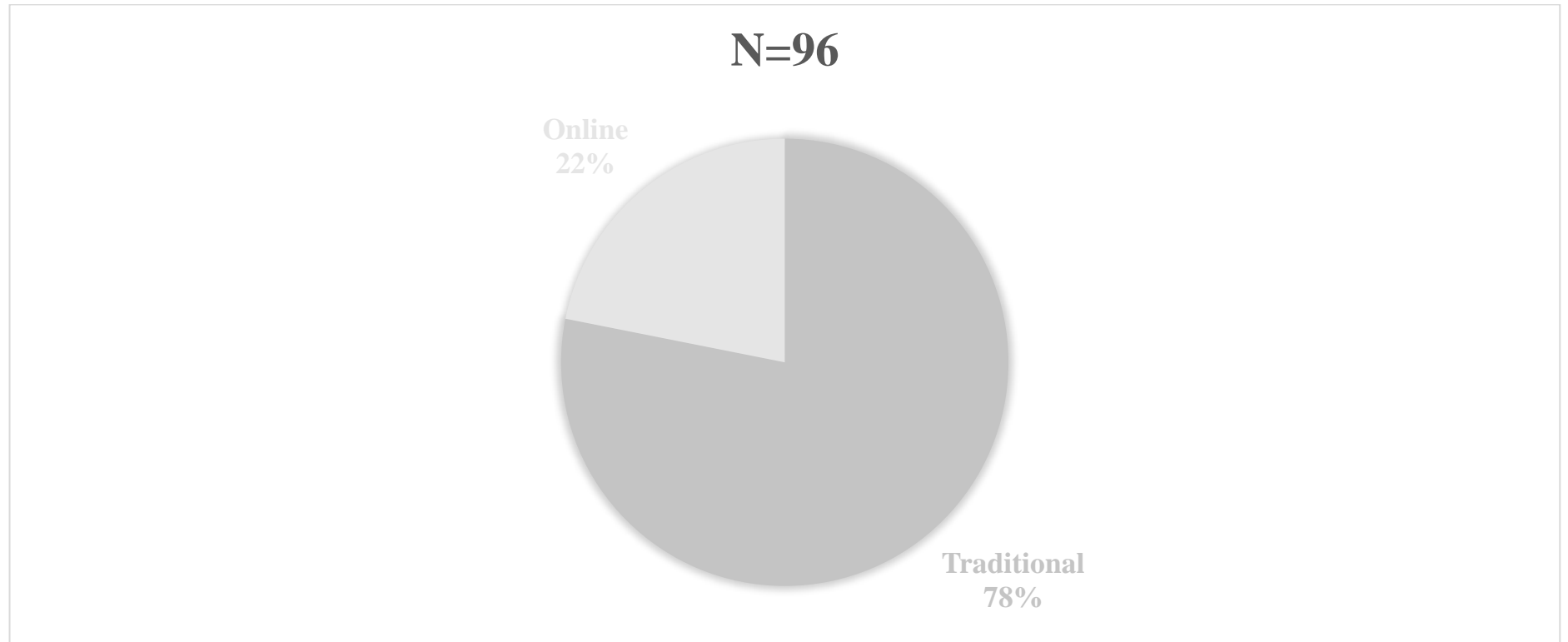
Traditional
78%

Note. This figure shows that 78 per cent of Jamsai Publishing's Chinese romance novels between 2006 and 2010 were from traditional

print books.

Figure 8

Webnovel.com: Comments on translations

Cultivation Chat Group (N=28) — 18 / 10
The King's Avatar (N=24) — 23 / 1
Super Gene (N=25) — 6 / 19
Abe the Wizard (N=22) — 14 / 8
Full Marks Hidden Marriage (N=25) — 21 / 4

■ Positive critiques and compliments on novels and translations
■ Negative critiques and compliments on novels and translations
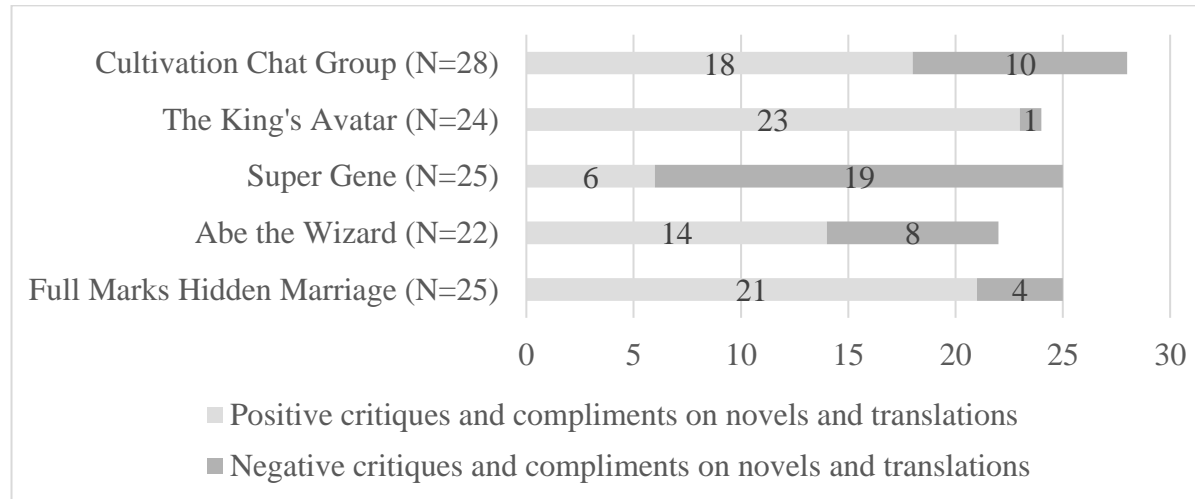
Notes. Date was collected from Webnovel.com in April 2020.

Figure 9

Webnovel.com: users' comments
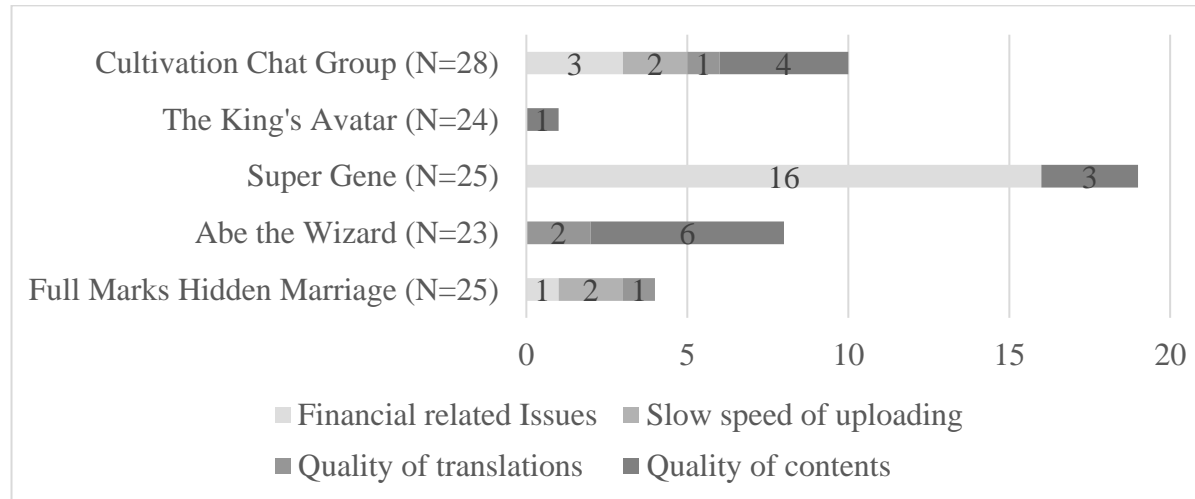
Notes. Date was collected from Webnovel.com in April 2020.

Figure 10

Tunwalai.com: Freemium (Support System)

Figure 11

Tunwalai.com: Users' comments
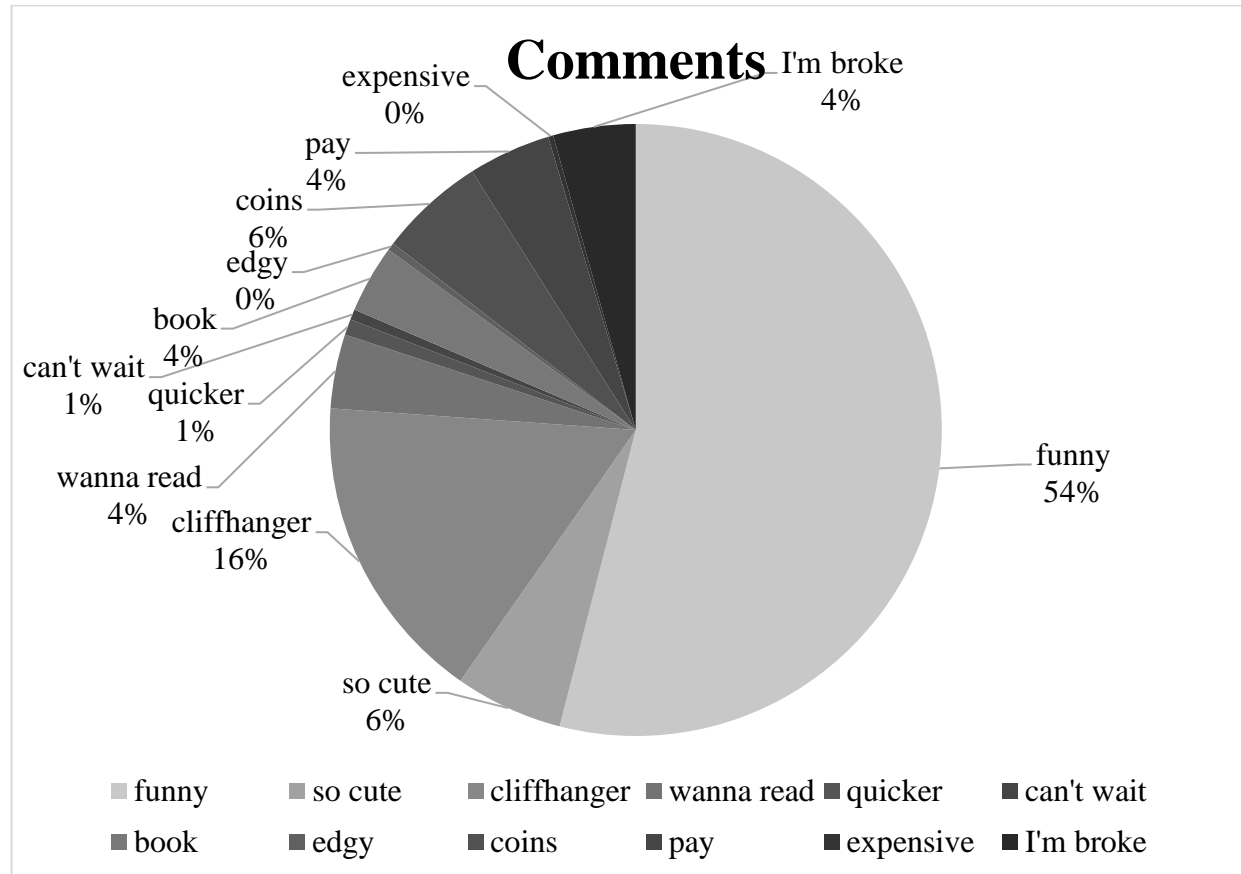
Note. 5,257 comments of *Full Marks Hidden Marriage: Pick Up a Son, Get a Free Husband* between 1 November 2018 and 28 June 2019 were gathered in September 2019.

Figure 12

Webnovel.com: Translations process
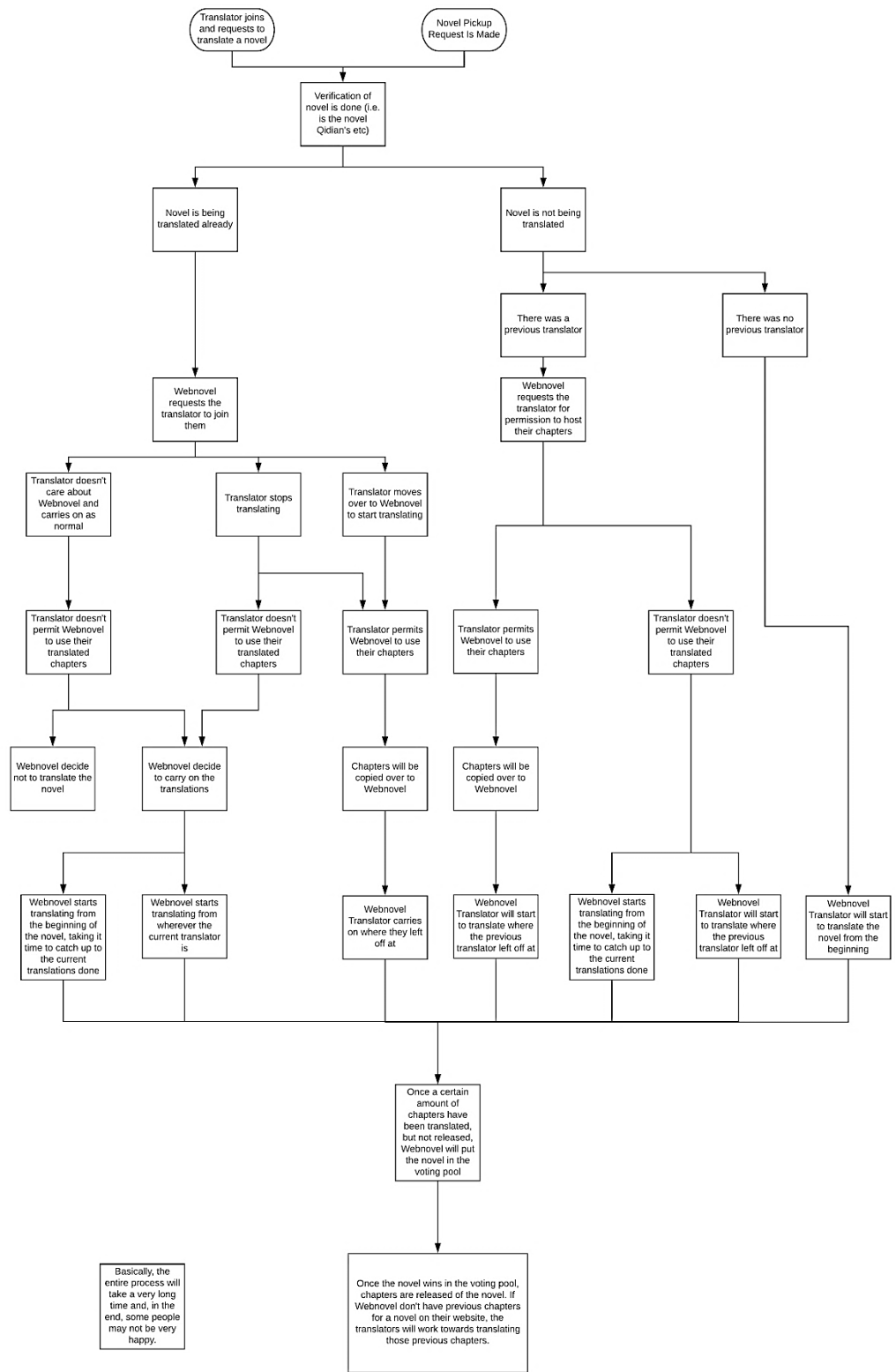
Figure 13

Content rating and age restriction on Chinese BL novel's cover (Thailand)

Figure 14

Content rating and age restriction on Chinese BL novel's cover (Thailand)

Figure 15

Content rating and age restriction on Chinese BL novel's cover (Taiwan)