

How Chinese online literature bridges cultures, captivates global readers

FUZHOU: When former US diplomat Lai Jingping founded Wuxiaworld.com in 2014, a platform sharing English translations of Chinese martial arts novels, few anticipated that a decade later, Chinese online literature would emerge as a global cultural phenomenon.

Today, Chinese online literature has captured the imagination of some 200 million active overseas readers across more than 200 countries and regions, captivating audiences and gaining growing recognition from writers, experts and industry insiders alike.

This recognition was evident as literary professionals gathered Sunday in Quanzhou, a historic port city in east China's Fujian Province, for the 2025 China Online Literature Forum.

The three-day event organized by the China Writers Association (CWA) brought over 200 delegates to Quanzhou, which is widely believed to have been the starting point of the ancient Maritime Silk Road.

A key focus of this year's forum was international communication, with a sub-forum dedicated to global writing strategies, overseas platform development, and the application of AI in supporting the industry's expansion.

Global resonance

The "new trio" — Chinese online literature, video games and web series — has resonated keenly with overseas audiences and become an important part of the global pop-culture landscape, CWA President Zhang Hongsen said at the forum.

He called for a deeper recognition of the role online literature plays in fostering cross-cultural understanding, and for the creation of more works that reflect humanity's shared aspirations.

This emphasis on universal values was echoed by popular online literature author Mo Shu Bai (pseudonym), who called on writers to "engage deeply with the emotions and ideas of individuals and communities in our time, and to explore new values through these experiences."

The "Destined" web series, which was adapted from Mo Shu Bai's novel of the same name, is now available in 10 languages, including English, Thai, Korean, Japanese and Spanish, sparking lively discussion on international social media.

Hu Huijuan, vice president of prominent online literature platform Jinjiang Literature, also highlighted the importance of cross-cultural perspective-taking. She encouraged writers to "stand in others' shoes," suggesting that a more market-oriented approach to cultural exchange would help

Chinese stories resonate more organically overseas.

As more Chinese writers and platforms embrace cross-cultural storytelling, the global influence of Chinese online literature continues to rise.

In November 2024, the British Library expanded its Chinese collection by adding 10 online novels written by Chinese authors, following its 2022 inclusion of an initial selection of Chinese online literature.

Creativity & inclusivity

Beyond its global appeal, the steady growth of Chinese online literature is also driven by its distinctive creative mechanisms, said Shao Yanjun, a professor of Peking University's Department of Chinese Language and Literature.

Shao pointed to a production model that facilitates economic rewards for authors and fosters large-scale literary creation.

According to the China Online Literature International Communication Report 2025, data from 50 major domestic online literature platforms shows that by the end of 2024, the total number of Chinese online literary works had exceeded 33 million — up 7 percent year on year.

This highly dynamic creative ecosystem has rapidly established a vast "content reservoir" for Chinese online literature, Shao noted, adding that its overseas spread "has not been a top-down initiative, but a spontaneous movement driven by fan translations."

In recent years, Chinese online literature platforms have evolved from mere content exporters into international hubs fostering original multilingual creation. International authors are now using these platforms to adapt and reinterpret stories through their own cultural perspectives and value systems — a process Shao described as an "open-source" model of cultural creation.

For instance, on online reading platform WebNovel, original works by overseas authors outnumbered translated Chinese novels by a factor of 100 by the end of last year.

This inclusive, collaborative approach also extends to adaptations of online intellectual property.

Hu said that Jinjiang Literature has been actively promoting the adaptation of online literature into other art forms such as film and television, aiming to cater to diverse audiences around the world.

"When promoting online literature overseas, we should not create content in a vacuum," Hu said.

"It is essential to understand the reading preferences and needs of international readers."

— Xinhua