

Construction of Meanings in Internet: Rethinking Chinese Internet Fictions, TV Series, and Cultural Landscape via the Case of the List of Langya (Langya Bang, 琅琊榜)

PENG Cheng¹

Abstract

There is no scholarly article written in English has ever tried to look into the cultural influence of the phenomenal TV series, *The List of Langya* (Or “*Nirvana in Fire*”, Langya Bang 琅琊榜), and its fiction since it was launched in 2015. That is despite this series being commented as “a new benchmark of Chinese historical TV drama” by Peking University² and inspiring approximately 32 Chinese scholarly articles³. This paper aims at depositing *The List of Langya* within Chinese digital and cultural landscape via Structuralism, so as to shed some light on the literary advantages behind this cultural spectacle aroused by the fiction and the TV series and therefore to introduce this fiction and its adaptation to more English-speaking scholars.

Keywords: Chinese Literature, Online Fiction, Media Studies, Structuralism, Cultural Phenomenon, Contemporary China

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1. Chinese Internet and Online Literature

1.1 Digital landscape

Being involved in the global proliferation of internet since 2000, a digital world in China has been accessible to almost everyone in a minute via computer or cellphone. Thousands of Chinese, regardless of gender and age, have transformed from citizens to netizen thanks to the affordable prices of made-in-China cellphones and monthly plans going hand-in-hand to enrich the entertainment life and cultural provision of the Chinese hybrid realm⁶.

¹ Senior Research Assistant, Department of International Education and Lifelong Learning, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SRA, China. Email: S1050022@s.eduhk.hk

² Refer to the full comments of *The List of Langya* from Peking University via http://pkunews.pku.edu.cn/xxfz/2015-12/24/content_292260.htm

³ This number has been collected until May 2018.

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⁵ This number has been collected until May 2018.

⁶ Other research outputs focusing on Chinese internet productions also list the prevalence of internet and affordability of digital devices as the premise and conditions for the flourish of Chinese internet. See studies of Heather Inwood, Michel Hockx, Jing Fen, Renren Yang, Elizabeth C Economy, and Gudrun Wacker.

Until January 2018, it has been reported that 772 million Chinese are officially recorded as netizen⁷. Another government announcement, delivered by President Jinping Xi, at the end of 2017, also echoed the prevalence of internet in China by reconfirming the fact that “the functioning of internet services has been enhanced (during the past few years)”, bringing an assertive and evident conclusion in policy-making level to highlight the existing infrastructure construction and competent manpower in service industries that also contribute to the virtual prosperity⁸. However, actively joining the inevitable global trend of internet prosperity shared by countries and regions across all continents in the 21st century, will China’s current economic capacity and intrinsic politics enable it to utilize virtual resources or to undertake new investments into the IT industry in a way unlike others?

1.2 Young Netizen

At the same time, due to a social mobilization trend since the 1990s, thousands of Chinese people, especially the youth (around 18 to 35), have been flooding into bustling cities from their small hometowns in the hope of searching for promising educational or employment opportunities. As Land Reform became a common memory to Chinese people born after 1940s, as Cultural Revolution was a shared experience to those born after 1960s, this massive social mobilization for seeking decent living constructs the ongoing general experience for the youth generation. As a recent population report published in October 2017 pointed out that 56.6% of Chinese floating population (245 million) were the youth born between 1980 to 1989, aged 27 to 36⁹. This tremendous mobilization forcefully propels the younger generation into the economic tide with thousands of challenges in a way the previous generations neither encountered nor even imagined, but also causes the collapse of the traditional support system by accident. This support system used to be constituted of region-bound relationships, e.g. families, neighbors, and classmates¹⁰. Online activities and communities, as a replica of traditional union or as an alternative of emotional support, provide handy comforts and instant entertainment, suppressing the limitations of geographical boundaries, tightly connecting Chinese-speaking netizen within clusters of cell communities. Even more, as a collective grassroots power, online activities and communities play a seminal role of generating the most frequently searched words or highly contentious social events of the year; so to some extent, it determines the future course of the popular cultural landscape of contemporary China. Conversely, the floating generation or the diaspora generation inserts online culture with their collective memory -- a not-too-fancy calling that is searching for individual uniqueness. The contents of the calling and its contributors will be elaborated in the second part of this paper.

1.3 Online Communities

Among countless online activities and communities, over the last few years, online literature and literature communities have attracted the most attentions since online fictions were once belittled as an unofficial and insignificant branch of Chinese literature¹¹, and a premature subculture only flourishing among young people¹², who are undergoing the social mobilization mentioned above. Now, thriving among netizen and non-netizen, “online literature has the largest increment and brand-new vacuum in Chinese literature¹³” after its rapid development for two decades.

⁷Statistic numbers come from the 41st *China Statistical Report on Internet Development* provided by China Internet Network System, an official department of Chinese government. The numbers used in this proposal are all quoted from the newest survey report, released on January 2018. <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfyzyj/hlwxyzbg/hlwtjbg/201801/P020180131509544165973.pdf>

⁸President Xi Jinping delivered an overview of Chinese past five years, from 2012 to 2017, at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, on 18th October, 2017.

⁹Released in November 2017, this population survey covers the average age of floating population (aged 29.8 in 2016), the gender ratio (48.3% were female), the increase of younger generation (65.6% of total population are aged 37 to 17).

¹⁰Statistic results from the 41st *China Statistical Report on Internet Development* concluded this tendency that 53.5% of internet users in 2016 are the young generation, from 20 years-old to 39 years-old, while 19.6% of total users are teenagers (from 10 years-old to 19 years-old).

¹¹Not until 2013, the wildly used textbook, *the Chinese Modern Literature History*, written for Chinese literature students in higher institutes, has opened a sub-category “New Media and New Literature Genres” under “Fiction of 2001-2013”.

¹²Some Chinese scholars (for example 蔡朝輝 CaiChaohui) extremely defined internet literature as a literature lack of writing spirit and social responsibilities, and what young readers of internet literature eventually search for online were superficial Utopian submersion.

¹³Quoted from Zhang Yiwu 張頤武’s study, on the relation between internet literature and movie/drama .

On 4th March, 2018, one member of the National People's Congress audaciously asserted that internet literature in China represented the fourth cultural phenomenon followed by movies in the USA, Anime in Japan, and soap dramas in Korea¹⁴. Leaving aside the question of its international impact, even the Chinese have not come to an agreement on how to regulate online literature, not to mention to anticipate fully what uncertainty and complexity online literature will add to the domestic environment, culturally or economically, in the predictable future.

1.4 Online Fictions

In Chinese fiction websites, Starting Point(起點中文網 Qidian Zhongwenwang) for example, published fictions fall into categories divided according to background setting, world views, symbolic systems, and writing styles as Eastern Fantasy (with martial arts), Western Fantasy (with Western magical elements, as a variation type of *The Lord of the Ring* or *Harry Potter*), Metropolis Story (a very broad category, roughly defining by setting the background of story in modern cities), Reality Story (setting the background in countryside, as a comparison type to the Metropolis Story), Military Story, Game Story, Hypothetical History (basically setting the background in some imaginative historical contexts¹⁵) and etc. Most of these categories serve male readers with masculine characteristics, while a particular channel called 'Special Zone for Girls' is carefully installed as an alternative choice, aligned with all male's categories. This separated girls' channel received near ten times clicks (around 660000) compared to the male's hottest category Eastern Fantasy (around 66000)¹⁶. The most eye-catching, profit-making, and buzz-creating 'Time Traveling Romance' mostly belongs to the girls' channel too.

1.5 The Adaptation of Online Fictions

What is more controversial is how most fictions written for girls are rewritten by professional playwrights (sometime the author would be employed as the playwright) and transformed to other media forms, received and enjoyed by a much larger number of audiences. This firstly transforming and secondly outspreading process resembles a cultural amplifier to disseminate the plots of the fictions to far more spectators, from a minority community to a majority circulation. It makes no efforts to name some of the commercially successful adaptations of this kind, e.g. *Scarlet Heart*(步步驚心 *BubuJingxin*) (2011), *My Sunshine* (何以笙簫默 *Heyi Shengxiao Mo*) (2015), *Nirvana in Fire*(瑯琊榜 *Langya Bang*) (2015), *Once Upon a Time* (三生三世十里桃花 *SanshengSanshiShiliTaohua*) (2016), *The Phoenix Prison* (鳳求凰 *Feng Qiu Huang*) (2018) and etc., whereas only a few fictions initially written for male readers or for male and female readers alike are strategically adapted in other forms. The best example of this kind could be *Ghost Blows Out the Lights* (鬼吹燈 *Gui Chuideng*) (2016), originally written for both male and female readers. One thing noticeable when looking into the novels adapted in other forms is that the greatest quantity of the novels selected by Chinese producers somewhat contain less or more historical factors, or I would rather call them as nostalgia fulfilment instead. Authors' writing preference too echoes the keen business sense of filmmakers and producers, as Heather indicated that "contemporary online romance authors nonetheless demonstrate an overwhelming preference for setting their stories in the historical past"¹⁷. Even one TV series *My Sunshine* (何以笙簫默 *Heyi Shengxiao Mo*), which could be labeled as one of the typical Metropolis Story, its Chinese name '何以笙簫默 *Heyi Shengxiao Mo*' pronouns as traditional and intangible as an odd quotation from an ancient poetry. Why can historical factors or nostalgia fulfilment still resonate with certain invisible trends of today's China in literature and in media, and how it integrates its uniqueness with cultural landscape of today's China as a whole to push the cultural landscape more open-minded and more retroactive while keeping being financially successful at the same time? In the following sections, I will use *The List of Langya* (Langyabang, 瑯琊榜) as a representative example to identify this question.

¹⁴See details of this news via http://news.cyol.com/content/2018-03/05/content_16991213.htm

¹⁵Sometimes an authentic prototype of the historical context could be identified or at least sensed if detecting details of the full text or other supporting information, for instance the author's writing incentive expressed in preface, interview, blog, or ect.

¹⁶Clicks were calculated on March, 2018.

¹⁷Quoted from *Review of Romancing the Web: Producing and Consuming Chinese Web Romance*, reviewed by Heather Inwood.

2. *The List of Langya* (Langyabang, 琅琊榜) and Its Inspiration in Chinese Digital Landscape

2.1 A Visual Phenomenon

Among the transmedia adaptations with nostalgia fulfillment, *The List of Langya* (2015), presenting high quality visual experience in almost every aspect, such as traditional aesthetics, historical projection, modernized reinterpretation, and storyline arrangement, deems to be the most recognizable and inevitable one of its kind. In Douban (豆瓣), which is a highly popular Chinese grading website for sharing information related to movies and TV programmes and uses the same marking standard and system as IMDB, audience grade *The List of Langya* 9.2, as high as top 10 of all the TV dramas, and leave 80672¹⁸ comments to express their enthusiasm for this drama. Initially written for female readers and specifically under both Hypothetical History and Boy's Love (or BL)¹⁹ categories suggest that just parts of the female netizen would choose to read *The List of Langya*; while other female readers might be openly or secretly against Boy's Love category, for it seems too radical and too bold in terms of moral concerns and physical restraints to witness a love story depicted intense interactions between the same sex of lovers. However, *The List of Langya*, after being transformed into a TV series, not only convinces female audiences that be it in the past or the present or whether they accepted the Boy's Love, also wins numerous accolades from a large number of male audience and the unambiguous appreciation of mainstream media, including the Chinese Central Television, which is considered as the only TV official representative of CCP.

2.2 A Political Exception

However, there are clear chances that *The List of Langya* might likely be banned by CCP like other TV series or movies, which not only to some extent involve with LGBT themes but also publicly discuss traumatic public memory. To my surprises, instead of condemning or banning this TV series, CCTV shows rare tolerance and explicit compliment to both the drama and the staff involved. Crowded with obvious and condensed political issues, the storyline and the protagonists of *The List of Langyan* aturally remind audience with others vindictive heroes, for instance, the *Hamlet* in English literature or the *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* in France literature, or an archetype of Cheng Ying²⁰ in historical records and Chinese literature, mainly concerning with the revenge driven by universal moral standards or individual sacrifice²¹. This vengeance prototype seems to be less seen and exceptional in traditional Chinese fictions, though the story of *The List of Langya* embeds its foundation in a hypothetical dynasty of Chinese history. Moreover, most of the impressive scenes of the *The List of Langya* took place in the imperial palace, the enemies that the Protagonists battles were skeptical Empire and wicked ministers, and the key strategies for the protagonists utilized to fight with their political enemies were political tactics. Hence, it is no surprise that the whole story looks extremely politically-oriented, especially when it repeatedly highlights to alter evil to righteousness, to sentence the sinful ministers to death, to grant the dead soldiers suffered from injustice a justice posthumous title and a grand memorial, and to force the king to openly confess to his past misconduct. In a nut shell, all the dramatic and symbolic conflicts in the storyline of *The List of Langya*, fiction or TV series alike, reveal straightforward political confrontations rather than merely obscure implications.

2.3 Continuing Influence

I think this familiar revenge probably interferes with memories of at least some audiences with almost identical events in Chinese modern history. As I emphasized in the previous paragraphs, *The List of Langya* currently is favorably received and sincerely appreciated by a large number of audiences, so it is not hard to infer that some of the audience, including the government, would be reminded by the some well-planted hints in the series with some political cases, e.g. the Massacre in Tianamen Square. However, surprisingly, this potentially politically sensitive TV series was premiered in Beijing Television channel Beijing, where the Massacre in Tiananmen Square happened and soon spread as a visual spotlight to the whole country, becoming one of the phenomenal series of the year (2015)²²

¹⁸ Mark and comments were calculated in July 2018.

¹⁹ Refer to Chapter 2 in *Romancing the Internet: Producing and Consuming Chinese Web Romance*, written by Jin Feng.

²⁰ Cheng Ying from *The Orphan of Zhao* is a typical tragic hero recorded in *The Commentary of Zuo*, who suicided after completing a revenge plan and killing his enemy. He exemplifies the Confucian sacrifice according to Jiang Zhuolang 江逐浪.

²¹ Abid.

²² Here, the *Nirvana in Fire* well represents the "impure nature" in intermediality study that Heather Inwood indicates in her insightful study that is "an ever-present dialectical crisis between the tendency of all artistic forms towards impurity and an awareness of the limitations of such impurity--a crisis that is political". I think the impurity in *Nirvana in Fire* relates to its

And “a milestone of Chinese TV drama industry” commented by the Jia Lei, a panel of the Flying Apsaras Award²³ and the Vice Principal of the Chinese National Academy of Arts.

Even more, two years later, when the short-term fever of other TV dramas seems to fall off after two years, in another phenomenal TV programme of the year (2017) designed and produced by China Central Television named *National Treasure* (國家寶藏, Guojia Baozang), one leading actor, one supporting actor, and one leading actress from *The List of Langya* got invitation to perform at different episodes by acting similar characters as they once acted in *The List of Langya*. Their excellent performances reconfirmed the recognition national-wide that the TV series attracted for its actors and actresses, not to mention that the awards the leading and supporting roles of *The List of Langya* have been nominated into and rewarded for during the past two years, other derivative performance given by other actors or actress in television and in other medias, and the sequel called *The List of Langya II* once again hit the television screen at the end of 2017. The continuing influence exuded by *The List of Langya* overwhelmingly confirms that “an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative – a work is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing²⁴.” In other words, though both TV series of *The List of Langya* and its original fiction share identical storyline and almost all of the major plots but vary in only a few minor plots, the former, having being translated into Korean and Japanese and marked higher than 9.0 in a Korean website, significantly surpasses the latter in terms of aesthetic value, political concerns, creation of characters, and plot capacity to be more capable of fertilizing Chinese and even Asian TV industry and Chinese cultural landscape. However, given that the fiction of *The List of Langya* is much less mentioned by media and the public, I argue that the fiction presents some convincing internal text-based advantages throughout that it outshines other online fictions, thus preparing a solid foundation for the success of its TV series.

2.4 Research Question

Due to the extreme excellence of the TV series, 30 papers and 2 thesis of master’s degree written in Chinese have placed *The List of the Langya* as research foci; most of these Chinese scholars paid close attention to the TV series, and only two out of thirty identified studies²⁵ far from articulated the vital foundation that the fiction laid for the TV series. Compared to the TV series, the fiction looks immature in writing techniques and superficial in creating characters at first glance. These two obvious flaws are interestingly common in most online fictions, but at the same time, these are the key appeals for young adults and the key reasons why online fictions are welcomed mainly by young netizen.

To response to questions such as “how can *The List of Langya* and its transmedia adaptation transgress its original homogeneous reader circle, namely circle teemed with young female or netizen, to convince more heterogeneous audience, especially male audience or those are not literature lovers or not netizen”, “how can *The List of Langya* push the public to rethink the cultural landscape of contemporary China or encourage TV industry to blur the existing standards of how to define a politically-correct TV series approved by the fact that it is wholeheartedly welcomed by majority of the audiences”, I propose three layers of questions to deconstruct the mesmeric influence of *The List of Langya* and its adaptation to shed some light on the way we interpret literature, media, and culture of modern China.

Born due to the unprecedented accessibility of the internet in China, refreshed and reinforced by the young blood associated with social mobilization in rudimentary stage, promoted and commercialized under the capital movements that underpin the attention-oriented economy²⁶, *The List of Langya*, like other adapted productions in modern China, could be analyzed thoroughly based on:

surrealistic vision and over optimistic attitude towards human nature, which at the first glance look foolish, but this foolishness surprisingly brings alternatives in dealing with reality back to its audience who correctly recognize the foolishness.

²³The Flying Apsaras Award 飛天獎 is a government-run award for TV series, holding annually.

²⁴ See Chapter 1 in *A Theory of Adaptation*, by Linda Hutcheon, Siobhan O’Flynn.

²⁵ Refer to *Spatial Narrative in Nirvana in Fire and Chinese Spirit of Arts* by SHEN Zhaohui & Su Tingping, and *The List of Langya, An Innovative Adaptation of Alternative Historical Fictions* by Wang Huiqi.

²⁶ Heather Inwood explained the “Attention-oriented economy” in her studies of Chinese online poetry community. The core and the motivation of the attention-oriented economy merely concern with clicks and eyeballs attracted online, directing “visits, fame and money” to topics or events that a large number of netizen pay their attention to.

1. the text of the novel, particular structure, signs, and plot types (as patterns) in its specifically created language system²⁷;
2. the narrative of the drama, namely the internal narrative and the external narrative²⁸;
3. the expansion of the cultural byproducts.

Due to the scope of this paper, I plan to concentrate solely on answering the first question, which particularly aims at analysing the text of the fiction by using Structuralism, to parallel what foundations the text has laid for the TV series with what previous Chinese researchers have neglected in separating the text and TV drama to explain what traits should popular online fictions potentially have to transcend its innate limits and to be transformed into something far more meaningful and valuable.

2.5 Texts as Foundation

In this section, I plan to use journal papers reflecting different facets of the success of *The List of Langya* written by Chinese scholars as navigators to pinpoint the original patterns in the fiction and to connect the text-based foundations the author, pen name Hai Yan (海宴), who never shows up to the public, has unintentionally but skilfully set for the TV series.

Three Chinese presses published four versions of the fiction; two in simplified Chinese (in 2014 and in 2018), two in traditional Chinese (in 2015 and in 2016)²⁹, all after the fever of the TV series except the first one printed in 2014. The original online version of the fiction has 7 scrolls and 173 chapters, while the printed versions have 66 chapters and 3 books as a trilogy, including the 2014 one, which was presumably reedited for the advent of the TV series. For the purpose of fully restoring its originality as an online fiction, in the following analysis, I will use the initial online version, which has been commonly circulated among BL fans and saved in amateurs' cell phones for years since its publication online years ago, to elucidate that the online fiction itself maintains certain convincing text-based quality before being re-organized by printed publishers and being covered by visual incitements, which should not be completely deleted or partly underestimated by Chinese scholars and international scholars who have interests in Chinese media or Chinese culture.

2.5.1 Overview of Writing Style

Some scholars attribute the success to Shandong Film and TV Group, who adapted, directed, and produced the TV series; however, none of the papers drew close attention to the platforms that the original fiction posted. If the Shandong Film and TV group as a container, modified visual capacity of the TV series, the online platforms for publishing the fiction would be a craftsman, who decide the aura and limit the text-based latitude of writing the fiction. Based on website records, the fiction of *The List of Langya* was published in Jin Jiang Literature City after the author edited the first draft in a small forum, and then was moved to Qi Dian Girl's Channel later, after the author signed a contract with the Qi Dian³⁰. Today, when browsing the Wikipedia or Baidu Baike (Chinese Wikipedia), the only online platform labelled under this fiction became the Qi Dian, removing the prelude of once being posted in the Jin Jiang and in a small forum.

What is interesting about the platform of posting threads is that Jin Jiang is wildly considered as a female-only literature base, meaning it contains or spreads strong or implicit elements of Boy's Love literature³¹. Compared to the latent BL elements, the Qi Dian Girl's Channel strategically promotes other specific genres for a wilder readership, for instance, Hypothetical History or Alternative History. To be specific, Qi Dian underlines Time Traveling fictions as its brand ambassador to maintain and then extend its literature kingdom. The change of publishing platforms to some degree explains why, though the fiction seemingly looks to have no explicit BL elements, it is classified under BL category by its book fans.

²⁷ Referred to *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, by Eagleton, T.

²⁸ Referred to *Visual Methods in Social Research*, by Banks, M., & Zeitlyn, D.

²⁹ A Korean press translated the fiction in Korean and published it in South Korea in June 2015.

³⁰ The information of detailed moving of posting platform was collected by and based on book fans' recall. For example, <https://www.zhihu.com/question/267349689>

³¹ Regarding Jin Jiang as an online platform for publishing BL fictions, refer to Chapter 2 in *Romancing the Internet: Producing and Consuming Chinese Web Romance*, written by Jin Feng.

It also further makes intelligible why readers out of the BL fan circle are surely pleased to accept the fiction as a nearly pure history-oriented novel while being blind to BL elements, for it immensely includes scenes, events, rituals, and names that without doubt point to an authentic dynasty, Liang Dynasty, that once existed in Chinese history for approximately sixty years (AD 499 to AD 557).

In this sense, changing platforms would be a brilliant decision because Qi Dian did the fiction a great favour to entice much more readers and to confirm that the author is knowledgeable in historical background information and somehow experienced with writing techniques. These two factors as first conditions imply that the fiction has a capacity for visible potential to reach out to more target audience with even more diverse and more particular appetites.

2.5.2 Dialogues in the Text

Another idea less mentioned by scholars, but apparently inevitable to the potential for the successful adaptation, would be the dialogues in the original fiction. As inherent limitations of most online fictions, working under high pressure of maintaining readership, therefore incomes³², majority of the online writers produce climax, conflicts, and suspense as fast as they can to feed their young adult readers with instant contentment while compromising some writing qualities or deleting literary devices so long as their writing performances are somewhat acceptable or even tolerable by readers. However, what they try to produce is rather spiritual fast food³³ and does not mean the food has completely no nutrition. If carefully reading from chapter 1 to chapter 173, one will find that besides some plots and characters that are directly removed from the TV series, in chapters reappeared in the TV screens, some speaking lines remain nearly the same as they do in the fiction.

For example, in a key plot that the Mei (Mei Changsu 梅長蘇, the protagonist) for the first time made his attempt clearly to associate with the Prince Jing (靖王, the Lord of the protagonist) secretly and to support the latter to rival two malicious princes for the crown, the former, in the fiction playfully explains his intent to support Prince Jing through the following text: Mei: By only using my personal power, to push someone unexpected to the crown, isn't that the best way to unveil my talent like a Qilin³⁴?

(梅長蘇：單憑我一己之力，將一位誰也想不到的人送上寶座，這才顯得出我麒麟的本事啊，不是嗎？)

In the TV series, the speaking line of this scene is as follows:

Mei: By only using my personal power, to push someone unexpected to the crown, isn't that better to foreground my tactics?

(梅長蘇：若是單憑我一人之力，就將一個大家都想不到的人送上寶座，豈不顯得我更有手段？)

The excerpts from the fiction and the TV episode convey the same idea that Mei claimed to be the only one capable of lifting Jing up to be the new king, though the reasons he used to support this argument varied. In the fiction, a metaphor poetizing Mei's key competence became his supporting evidence despite this metaphor indicating mysterious destiny with uncertainty because no one has ever seen a Qilin for real.

In the TV episode, Mei associates his authority with his past strategies to confirm his potential accomplishment, thus revealing political cruelty without any poetized romance. While the former elegantly keeps its classical romanticism, the latter dauntlessly faced the nasty interactions possibly coming shortly after the formation of an alliance.

These two sentences are both placed in a dialogue between Mei and Jing, and all the stories happening thereafter are derived from the political alliance that they form after this dialogue. In other words, this sentence is not only the breakthrough of the relation between Mei and Jing for the first time Mei declares clearly to hold up Jing, but also the breakthrough and the basis of the whole storyline the Mei-Jing alliance running as the moral centre conquers all evil in the kingdom and in the palace.

³² About the working conditions of online writers, refer to *Writing on the Assembly Line: Informal Labour in the Formalised Online Literature Market in China*, by Elaine Jing Zhao.

³³ Online fictions are parts of the fast-food culture, refer to *On the Transformation from Cyber – Novel Narrative to TV – Drama Narrative – Take “Lang Ya Bang” For Example*, by Song Rongrong and Deng Jiajia.

³⁴ Qilin indicates a Chinese sacred creature, which has mythical, but tremendous power, also commonly seen in other Asian cultures, for example, in Japan and in Korea. In this fiction, Qilin equals to a metaphor, emphasizing wisdom and mystery force Mei has that enable him to select and later support a King.

Given some of the speaking lines of this episode having changed compared to the dialogues in the fiction, the key sentence stayed alive in the TV drama, thus suggesting that the production crew may not have a more impressive way to express the main ideas in this sentence, thus proving convincingly that the author's initial creativity is embodied in her writing techniques and is in itself qualified for further transmedia adaptation. Although authors of online fictions must work fast to retain readership, attention³⁵, and earning, sometimes they keep their professionalism, and they sensitively direct pace and flow of the storyline.

As compared to monologue, regardless of inner monologue or stream of consciousness, dialogue functions more effectively in constructing meaning and pushing a story forward in a novel; at the same time, dialogue forms a major aspect of a drama³⁶. It is plain to see why recently, producers choose to rewrite Chinese online fictions instead of official literature or printed literary works. In most online fictions, to keep the pace of storytelling as intense as possible, most authors ceaselessly adopt dialogues to narrate the story, without giving any particular attention to environment, cultural implications, or relations with reality. Teemed with dialogues and even dialogues only, some online fictions are inevitably born to be a play script, including *The List of Langya*.

2.5.2 Snow, the Sign

However, compared to other fictions that authors have no spare efforts to pay any attentions to environment, weather, or cultural implication, *The List of Langya* has an author who always kept an eye on such subtle hints besides the main storyline. For example, the sign of “snow”, in both the fiction and the TV drama, internally connects almost all the characters and the scenes as a pleasing visual transportation. Two Chinese scholars sum up the aesthetics in TV episodes as “wrapped with classical beauty³⁷” or a “cultural folklore space³⁸”. I consider this compliment to be partly validated by the sign of “snow” that the author and production crew utilized to construct a bitter-sweet empathy that straddles between the virtual world and reality, externally connecting both producers and consumers.

The historical prototype of the kingdom is Liang Dynasty, as I previously pointed out. The capital city of this dynasty is now called Nan Jing (南京), but Jin Ling (金陵) in ancient days was a city with typical subtropical monsoon climate. It does not necessarily mean that the city would snow all year round; however, in the fiction, snow (雪) appears repeatedly, around 150 times, throughout 2603 pages, and 116 out of 150 times were predominately related to the protagonist Mei, thus to depicting his physical appearance, his experience, his house, and his revengeful actions. The rest of 10 times are mainly concerned with supporting or justifying characters, whereas the rest of the 24 times were used as an adjective or an adverb to refer to the weather or weapons. I classify all usages of “snow” for Mei (116 times) as follows:

Page	Sign	Meaning
36/103/362/359478/628/637/1457 344/494/882/7301416/1764	Changed-physical appearance of Mei: Snow-like <i>face</i> /snow colour <i>cloak</i> /snow-white fox-fur <i>robe</i> /a <i>smile</i> as cold as snow/snow-like <i>eyes</i> /icy <i>skin</i>	A visual symbol of the protagonist
117/121/121/121/121/122/139 140/142/152/153/153176/176 179/184/185/186/233/236/238 253/258/275/275/277/279/284 302/304/335/336/345/346/359 359/418/418/420/431/473/474 517/606/607/608/608/608/608 609/614/614615/902	House Mei lived in from chapter 8 to chapter 45: Snow Hub (雪廬) (Only in 902, the Snow Hub was mentioned as a memory.)	An intellectual hub for power establishment
343/422/463/607/651/1430 1679/17541833/2057	A mystic hill where Mei lost his father , friends, thousands of soldiers, and his health and previous physical appearance: Snow Hill (雪嶺)	The turning point of drawing light into darkness
823/1208/1209/1354/1463/1634 1665/1666/1682/1683/1843/1844 1847/1868/1935/1969/1975/1979 1981/1984/1988/1988/1989/1992 2024/2026/2027/2044/2048/2052 2025	Revenge: Vindicate (昭雪/洗雪/申冤雪恥/真相未雪/平雪/汙名被雪)	The dedication to turning darkness back to light
607-614/642/731/747/1397/616	Interaction with his friends: Comfort/reveal/clean (拂去雪/站在雪下/雪會停下的)	Protection of purity

³⁵ Attention directly relates to clicks and economic supports in internet. Refer to *Poetry for the People? Modern Chinese Poetry in the Age of the Internet*, by Heather Inwood.

³⁶ Regarding the function of dialogue in drama, refer to *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, by Chris Baldick.

³⁷ Refer to *Visibility and Invisibility in Langya List*, by ZHENG Congrong.

³⁸ Refer to *Spatial Narrative in Nirvana in Fire and Chinese Spirit of Arts* by SHEN Zhaohui& Su Tingping.

Two Chinese scholars articulate the aesthetics of space or the strategies of narrative of *The List of Langya*³⁹, but they fail to discern the snow as an internal linkage between two places that have significant meanings to transform Mei fully. Mei depicts himself as a half-dying person coming from hell and returning for vindication of those who tragically died in the Snow Hill, including half of Mei himself. The Snow Hill represents an irreversible turning point of Mei's identity, family, physicality and mental health status, destinies of thousands of soldiers, as well as the turning point of the kingdom, from when the injustice overshadowed justice, the evil governed righteousness. Instead of running from his horrible past, Mei chooses to bear every piece of painful memory in his mind as it fuels to mobilize his revenge plan. Not only does he wear snow-like cloak or rope, but also the author names the first place, where Mei lives in the capital city, as Snow Hub, to emphasize the interconnection between Mei's past and present, indicating that the half of Mei was destroyed by "snow" but the other half of him survived and restarted from "snow". This also resonates with another official name of *The List of Langya*, *Nirvana in Fire*, to highlight this rebirth of hope after catastrophe.

The other point of view that Chinese scholars underestimated is, "snow" as a message of sentimental circulation among Mei and his friends to reinforce both political ally and friendship ties. Mei, being the only decision maker of the revenge plan -- others were just passive but irreplaceable participants of the plan -- took full responsibility for the cost of the revenge, to pay for the prizes such as hurting a friend who was unintentionally involved in a vicious trick as much as he can, so long as the light could ever again shine on the palace and the kingdom. Hence, in the of rest the 2/3 of the fiction, to vindicate, which in Chinese also contains the word "snow", roughly meaning purifying dirty crime or making dirty thing as white as snow, was the only mainline of the rest of the story. Besides facing the accountability of his revenge plan, Mei as well provides protection to innocent characters by cleaning snow from his bodyguard's head, revealing his real identity to his fiancée in snow, and promising his brother the snow will cease someday. In these three examples, one can see that snow represents political conflicts that surround Mei. By cleansing snow from his loved ones, Mei, in fact, deliberately pushes their innocent away from the centre of the political conflicts, to confront with the evil alone.

When transforming the fiction into the TV episodes, the production crew completely respect the setting of the snow in the fiction, and they applied snow-white clothes and lipstick to the actor of Mei -- the clothes and the lipstick further highlights the mental fragility of Mei, and also builds a simple but decent yard and a palace covered with snow all-day-long to perform the majority of the episodes. Based on observation of fiction and TV series, we could confidently conclude that snow is as a sign in the storyline to accumulate and release intensity, to moisture interpersonal pressures, and to reshape transcendence of protagonist.

3. Conclusion

Through reviewing *The List of Langya*, we can see some facets of how internet fiction and its adaptations in other media develops and blossoms in Chinese cultural landscape, and some preliminarily hints of how the complex mixture of literature, media, and culture guides the market and visual materiality in contemporary China, and such mixture is, of course, not included in this paper yet and is awaiting further investigation.

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³⁹Refer to *Preliminary Analysis of Aesthetics Survive in The List of Langya*, by GENG Jingqi, and Investigation of Narrative Strategies of The List of Langya, by LI Na, respectively.