

From Audiovisual Rewriting to Literary Fandom: Muyu Shuixin's Hongloulou Series across Bilibili and YouTube

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Abstract

This paper examines how platform-based secondary creation reshapes the dissemination of Chinese classical literature in the digital age through a case study of Muyu Shuixin's commentary video series on Hongloulou. By comparing the circulation and reception of the same series on Bilibili and YouTube, the study explores how language, platform mechanisms, cultural familiarity, and audience participation shape the formation of literary fandom. It argues that secondary creation is not merely a derivative cultural practice but an important form of literary mediation that recontextualises canonical texts for contemporary viewers. The findings show that the series successfully fostered a recognisable literary fandom on Bilibili, but failed to generate a comparable fan community on YouTube. This contrast reveals both the possibilities and the limitations of platform-based secondary creation in the cross-cultural circulation of Chinese classical literature.

Keywords: Secondary Creation, Literary Fandom, *Hongloulou*, Muyu Shuixin, Cross-platform Adaptation.

Introduction

Chinese classical literature now circulates through more than reading, adaptation, or classroom transmission. In the platform age, it is also retold through commentary videos, edited clips, and other forms of online secondary creation. This shift matters because it changes not only how a literary work is presented, but also how it is approached, interpreted, and shared. A classic text is no longer

simply adapted into another medium and then received as such. It can be cut apart, reframed, and rewritten again for platform audiences.

*Honglouloumeng*¹ offers a revealing case. As a major Chinese classic, it² carries high cultural prestige, yet it can also feel difficult to enter because of its length, linguistic density, and symbolic complexity (Xiong, 2024). Secondary creation seems to reduce that distance. It can condense narrative material, foreground emotional conflict, and provide interpretive guidance through voice, music, and editing. But easier access does not necessarily lead to deeper reception. A video may gain visibility and still fail to produce sustained engagement. The more important issue, then, is not simply whether a classic can circulate online, but what kind of reception that circulation actually generates.

This article approaches that issue through Muyu Shuixin³'s *Honglouloumeng* series. It asks four related questions: how does the series rewrite *Honglouloumeng* for platform viewing? How does it help form a recognisable literary fandom on Bilibili? Why does the same series receive much weaker engagement on YouTube? And what does this contrast reveal about the possibilities and limits of cross-

¹ It refers to the eighteenth-century Chinese novel *Honglouloumeng* (红楼梦), usually attributed to Cao Xueqin and widely regarded as one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature. In English-language scholarship and translation history, the work has appeared under such titles as *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, and *The Story of the Stone*. However, through translation, adaptation, and cross-media circulation, it has developed a rich textual and cultural afterlife beyond any single translated title. For this reason, this article uses the pinyin form *Honglouloumeng* throughout, except where a specific translation or adaptation is under discussion.

² Unless otherwise specified, the discussion of the source text in this article is based mainly on the Cheng-Gao version of *Honglouloumeng*. The term "Cheng-Gao version" refers to the 120-chapter printed edition conventionally associated with Cheng Weiyuan and Gao E, two Qing-dynasty figures generally understood to have played a key role in bringing the novel into its earliest complete printed form. Although the textual status of this edition has long been debated in *Hongxue* scholarship, it has remained one of the most influential and widely circulated versions in the modern reception history of *Honglouloumeng*, especially in relation to popular reading and later adaptations. The audiovisual materials discussed in this article are drawn primarily from the 1987 television adaptation.

³ Muyu Shuixin (木鱼水心) is a well-known Chinese video creator on Bilibili, a major Chinese video-sharing platform comparable in many respects to YouTube, though more strongly shaped by youth culture and interactive features such as bullet-screen comments.

cultural literary dissemination through secondary creation? By comparing the circulation and reception of the series across the two platforms, we argue that secondary creation can open a new path for the contemporary dissemination of Chinese classical literature, but its effectiveness depends on far more than simple online availability.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Adaptation and the Contemporary Dissemination of Classical Literature

The dissemination of Chinese classical literature has long been tied to adaptation, especially film and television (Chen, 2012). Adaptation, in this context, is not just a matter of moving a plot from page to screen. It involves selection, reshaping, and reorientation. Hutcheon (2013) makes this point clearly by treating adaptation as a process of transformation rather than simple reproduction. This is also close to how Chinese literary adaptation has often been discussed. Qin (2003), for example, stresses the constitutive elements involved in adapting literary classics, while Ma and Zhang (2009) argue that screen adaptations of the Four Great Classical Novels have helped renew their cultural presence in modern society. Seen this way, adaptation is not a secondary cultural appendage. It is one of the main routes through which canonical literature continues to circulate in new media environments.

Research on other literary works points in the same direction. Wang (2007), in discussing screen adaptations of Jin Yong's fiction, shows that adaptation opens up new aesthetic spaces for literary reception by turning reading into an audiovisual experience. Liu (2012) likewise shows that television adaptation broadens access to canonical texts by making them more visible and emotionally immediate for wider audiences. Jenkins's (2006) account of convergence culture helps explain why this process matters even more today: once media forms begin to overlap and recirculate across platforms, literary texts are no longer confined to a single channel of transmission. They move through a wider network of reuse, remediation, and audience participation. Taken together, these discussions suggest that adaptation has become one of the most

important modern pathways through which literature enters popular cultural life.

In the case of *Honglouloumeng*, attention has mainly gone to stage, television, and other performative adaptations. Shen (2007) reflects on the return of *Honglouloumeng* to the screen and the difficulties of presenting the classic to contemporary viewers. Wang (2024) examines recent stage adaptations and shows that they involve ongoing negotiations between spirit and form, while Xiong (2024) highlights the continued vitality of the novel in performative genres and related cultural events. What these discussions make clear is that *Honglouloumeng* has never remained only a printed literary text. It has continued to generate new forms of cultural expression and public engagement across media.

At the same time, most of this work still treats adaptation in a relatively conventional sense. The focus remains on complete films, television dramas, stage productions, or other formal performance genres. Much less attention has been paid to what happens after adaptation, when audiovisual materials are reused, reorganised, and interpreted again on digital platforms (Chen, 2024). That later stage matters more and more in the platform era, especially once convergence culture makes recirculation, fragmentation, and recontextualisation part of ordinary media life (Jenkins, 2006). It is precisely this post-adaptation stage that this article takes up.

1.2. Secondary Creation as Platform-Based Audiovisual Rewriting

With the growth of platform culture and online video production, literary dissemination increasingly takes forms beyond conventional adaptation. Commentary videos, edited clips, and other user-generated audiovisual forms have become visible ways of recirculating literary and screen texts. In the Chinese digital context, many of these practices are grouped under the term “secondary creation”. Rather than offering a completely new adaptation, they reuse existing audiovisual materials and reshape them through selection, recombination, narration, sound design, and interpretive emphasis. In this sense, secondary creation can be understood not

only as a platform practice but also as a form of audiovisual rewriting. At the same time, once these rewritten materials begin to circulate through platform interaction, they also enter the broader field of participatory culture, where audiences are not merely receivers but active interpreters, reusers, and recirculators of media texts (Jenkins, 2013).

The notion of audiovisual rewriting is useful because it emphasises transformation rather than simple transfer. It captures the way moving-image materials are re-authored through commentary, editing, framing, and sequencing. Recent work in audiovisual translation has also moved beyond narrow, subtitling-centred models. Zabalbeascoa (2024) presents audiovisual translation as a broad field shaped by verbal, acoustic, visual, and contextual elements. Likewise, Bakiev (2026) stresses the diversity of current AVT practices, including subtitling, revoicing, and accessibility-oriented forms, while also pointing to the field's growing concern with audiences, reception, and sociocultural context. These developments make it possible to view platform commentary videos not as informal derivatives, but as multimodal acts of reframing and rewriting (Bakiev, 2026; Zabalbeascoa, 2024).

From this perspective, secondary creation is audiovisual rewriting in at least three ways. First, it rewrites the narrative structure of the source by selecting some scenes, omitting others, compressing plotlines, and redistributing emphasis. Second, it rewrites the interpretive horizon of the source by adding voice-over explanation, emotional cues, and evaluative framing. Third, it rewrites the mode of reception by turning long-form literary or televisual texts into platform-native units designed for serial viewing, recommendation, commentary, and circulation. What emerges is not simply an abridged retelling, but a newly mediated text shaped by platform temporality and audience expectation. This last point matters because rewriting on platforms does not stop at textual transformation. It also anticipates a certain kind of audience activity. In fan studies, audiences are not usually treated as passive consumers. They are understood as participants who appropriate, discuss, and remake media materials in ways that are social as well as interpretive (Booth, 2018; Jenkins, 2013).

This view also aligns with recent scholarship on framing. Li's study of video news framing shows that audiovisual translation does not merely carry meaning across languages, but can actively shape emphasis, salience, and interpretive uptake (Li, 2022). Although Li examines news rather than literary commentary, the point is still relevant here: audiovisual mediation can reorganise how audiences perceive and interpret a source text. In platform-based literary commentary, secondary creation does not simply "explain" a work. It reframes it through a new hierarchy of scenes, emotions, and meanings.

Recent work on didactic audiovisual translation further broadens the discussion. Talaván and Fernández-Costales's systematic review of DAT shows that audiovisual translation is increasingly understood as a productive and pedagogical practice, not only as a professional transfer activity (Talaván & Fernández-Costales, 2026). A related quantitative exploratory study by Marzá i Ibáñez and Cerezo Merchán (2025) also indicates that DAT-based practices may contribute to the development of plurilingual competence. These studies do not address literary fandom directly, but they support a broader claim: audiovisual transformation can function as a mode of interpretation and learning, rather than merely as a secondary supplement to an original text. This is especially relevant to classical literature, where platform-based rewriting may lower barriers to entry and reshape reception for viewers who might not otherwise approach the source text.

Chinese-language studies on media convergence and commentary videos help situate this point more specifically. Wang (2015) shows that literary circulation under media convergence increasingly depends on cross-media interaction and changing conditions of screen production. Yuan (2024) likewise demonstrates that literary works can be regenerated through intermedial transformation and new audiovisual arrangements. More directly, Zeng (2022) argues that Bilibili commentary short videos represent a distinctive mode of secondary creation because they do not merely review a prior work, but reconstruct it through voice-over narration, montage, and narrative compression. Read together with recent AVT scholarship, these studies suggest that secondary creation should be treated as a

genuine form of audiovisual rewriting: it rewrites not only what is shown, but also how the text is organised in time, processed affectively, and circulated socially.

This social dimension also brings secondary creation closer to fandom. Fan studies have long shown that fandom involves more than simple liking. It includes forms of identity, affective investment, shared interpretation, and cultural practice (Hills, 2002). Fiske's discussion of the cultural economy of fandom is especially useful here because it shifts attention from individual preference to the circulation of meanings, values, and forms of participation within a community (Fiske, 2002). For the present study, this matters in a very practical way: the question is not only whether platform-based rewriting makes *Honglouloumeng* easier to approach, but whether it can move from scattered appreciation to more sustained communal engagement. That distinction becomes crucial later in this article, where the contrast between Bilibili and YouTube is discussed in terms of recognition, participation, and the uneven formation of literary fandom.

This framework is especially useful for Chinese classical literature. Compared with many ordinary popular narratives, canonical works often involve denser language, longer narrative arcs, and heavier cultural presuppositions, which can make them less immediately accessible to contemporary readers and viewers (Coe & Steven, 2022; Guillory, 1993). Platform-based audiovisual rewriting may therefore offer a distinctive form of mediation. By extracting dramatic episodes, foregrounding emotional relations, and layering explanation onto image and sound, secondary creation can turn difficult literary material into accessible platform narratives. Yet such rewriting is never neutral. It selects, frames, and prioritises. It may open classical literature to new audiences, but it may also redirect reception by privileging certain affects, characters, and interpretive pathways over others (Hutcheon, 2013; Sanders, 2015). This double function is precisely why Muyu Shuixin's *Honglouloumeng* series should be examined not simply as online commentary, but as a case of platform-based audiovisual rewriting.

1.3. Literary Fandom and Participatory Culture

The question of dissemination is not only about access. It is also about participation. A literary work may be widely visible and still fail to generate deep or lasting engagement. This is why fandom matters here. In digital culture, audiences are not just passive receivers of meaning. They respond, circulate, annotate, repost, and build shared attachments around texts. From this angle, fandom is more than admiration for a work. It is a participatory form of cultural attachment shaped by interaction, repetition, and collective recognition. Wang (2020) is useful on this point, but the broader fan studies tradition also makes the same move. Jenkins (2013) treats fans as active textual users rather than passive consumers, Hills (2002) pushes fandom toward questions of identity and affect, and Booth (2018) shows how media fandom can be approached as an organised field of participatory practice rather than a loose collection of preferences.

This perspective becomes even more important on Bilibili. The platform is not simply a place where videos are uploaded and watched. Its participatory environment is shaped by youth culture, bullet comments, recommendation logics, and strong habits of user interaction. Yin and Fung (2017) describe Bilibili as a site of youth online cultural participation, while Mei (2021) shows how bullet chats function as a distinct mode of linguistic and social interaction on the platform. Chen and Yang (2023) add another layer by showing that Bilibili's user environment is also shaped by platform governance and what they call "bidirectional mediation". Taken together, these studies suggest that Bilibili is not just a neutral hosting site. It is a structured participatory space in which reception is already social, visible, and cumulative.

This is highly relevant to the dissemination of *Honglouloumeng* through commentary videos. If secondary creation only attracts occasional clicks, its role in literary transmission remains limited. If, however, it generates repeated discussion, emotional recognition, and shared modes of participation, then it begins to form what may be called a literary fandom. In that sense, fandom is not an accidental by-product of dissemination. It is one of the clearest signs that a work has entered the interactive life of platform culture.

Fiske's account of the cultural economy of fandom is especially helpful here because it shifts attention from individual liking to circulation, value-making, and community practice. That shift matters for this article. The key issue is not simply whether users appreciate a rewritten literary text, but whether that appreciation thickens into a participatory formation.

At the same time, this participatory process is not confined to one platform or one language. Tian (2023) shows how Chinese fandoms on Bilibili are shaped by practices of banyun, cultural porting, and recirculation. Zheng (2023), from a translation angle, examines how YouTube comments are translated and recontextualised on Bilibili, which makes the platform a site of user-generated mediation across linguistic and media boundaries. These studies are not about *Hongloumeng* itself, but they matter for the present argument. They show that platform participation often involves carrying content across spaces, reframing it for new audiences, and turning reception into further circulation. This is very close to what happens when a literary classic is rewritten through a commentary video and then placed in different platform environments.

What remains less fully explored is whether canonical literary works can generate this kind of participatory attachment on video platforms, and whether that process travels evenly across platforms. Much fan research still centres on popular media, idols, lifestyle content, or youth-oriented entertainment communities. Far less attention has been paid to how Chinese classical literature might produce similar forms of attachment in digital settings. The question becomes sharper in cross-platform comparison, because different platforms do not support participation in the same way. A work may be visible on both Bilibili and YouTube, yet only one of those environments may turn scattered viewers into something closer to a fandom. It is this gap that makes literary fandom a necessary lens for the present study.

1.4. Research Gap

Taken together, the existing scholarship offers three important insights. First, adaptation has long been a major channel for the modern circulation of Chinese classical literature (Qin, 2003; Ma &

Zhang, 2009; Liu, 2012). Second, digital platform culture has created new forms of audiovisual reworking, among which commentary videos represent a particularly visible mode of secondary creation (Wang, 2015; Zeng, 2022; Yuan, 2024). Third, participatory culture research suggests that sustained reception depends not only on visibility but also on the formation of audience communities and shared identities (Wang, 2020).

However, the connection between these three lines of inquiry remains underexplored. Existing research has paid much more attention to adaptation itself than to post-adaptation reworking (Qin, 2003; Wang, 2007; Liu, 2012). It has also said relatively little about how secondary creation contributes to the dissemination of Chinese classical literature, and even less about how such dissemination differs across domestic and overseas platforms (Liu, 2009; Liu, 2024). In particular, few studies have examined whether the same secondary creation content can generate literary fandom under different linguistic, cultural, and platform conditions.

What remains insufficiently examined is not only how a classic is rewritten for platform audiences, but how specific rewriting strategies travel unevenly across different linguistic and platform settings. Thus, we address that gap through a case study of Muyu Shuixin's *Honglouloumeng* Series commentary series on Bilibili and YouTube. By comparing the circulation and reception of the same series across the two platforms, it explores not only how secondary creation mediates classical literature but also how literary fandom is enabled, limited, or left unformed in different media environments.

2. The Case of Muyu Shuixin's *Honglouloumeng* Series

Methodologically, this article adopts a descriptive-comparative case-study approach. It combines platform-visible circulation data with qualitative analysis of representative features, including serial structure, title design, commentary style, musical cueing, and selected patterns of audience response. The purpose is not to build a large-scale corpus or to produce statistical generalisation, but to examine how specific rewriting strategies operate differently across two platform environments.

Muyu Shuixin’s commentary video series on *Honglouloumeng* offers a representative case for examining how secondary creation reshapes the dissemination of Chinese classical literature on digital platforms. As a well-known content creator on Bilibili, Muyu Shuixin has developed a distinctive style of audiovisual narration that combines plot retelling, literary interpretation, emotional guidance, and rhythmic editing. In his *Honglouloumeng* series, he mainly draws on the 1987 television adaptation as visual material while taking the Cheng-Gao version as the principal narrative basis. The series consists of twelve major commentary instalments, supplemented by several additional videos on related topics such as the ending of the Cheng-Gao version, the debate between the evidential and allegorical schools of *Hongxue*⁴, *Furong Nü’er Lei*⁵, and the so-called *Guiyou manuscript*⁶. These videos were later gathered under the “Muyu Mini Theatre” (木鱼微剧场) section on his Bilibili channel, where they accumulated more than 20 million views in total⁷. The structure of the series and its relation to both the 1987 television adaptation and the Cheng-Gao version are summarised in Table 1.

No.	Commentary Video Title	Corresponding Episodes in the 1987 Television Adaptation	Corresponding Chapters in the Cheng-Gao Version	Primary Rewriting Function
1	通灵宝玉入红尘·宝黛初会续前盟 (The Sentient Jade Enters the Mortal World, and Baoyu and Daiyu Meet Again to	Episodes 1-3	Chapters 1-7	serial opening / narrative framing

⁴ Hongxue (“Redology”, 红学) refers to the long-standing field of scholarship, commentary, and textual research centred on *Honglouloumeng*.

⁵ *Furong Nü’er Lei* (芙蓉女儿谏) is a celebrated elegiac passage in *Honglouloumeng*.

⁶ The *Guiyou manuscript* (癸酉本) refers to a controversial manuscript version linked to *Honglouloumeng*.

⁷ All platform data cited in this article were collected up to April 2026.

Zhong Zhenhao & Zhao Chaoyong

	Renew Their Former Bond)			
2	探宝钗黛玉含半酸， 王熙凤协理宁国府 (Visiting Baochai, Daiyu Shows Half- Concealed Jealousy; Wang Xifeng Assists in Managing the Ningguo Mansion)	Episodes 4-6	Chapters 8-15	character reframing / conflict intensification
3	大观园试才题对额， 荣国府归省庆元宵 (In the Grand View Garden, Inscriptions Are Composed for the Newly Inscribed Plaques; in the Rongguo Mansion, the Lantern Festival Is Celebrated during the Imperial Visit)	Episodes 7-9	Chapters 16-20	world-building condensation / narrative transition
4	听曲文宝玉悟禅机， 埋湘冢飞燕泣残红 (Listening to Songs, Baoyu Awakens to Buddhist Insight; at the Xiang Mound, Beauty Weeps over Fallen Blossoms)	Episodes 10-12	Chapters 21-28 (partly)	emotional foregrounding / symbolic intensification
5	撕扇子作千金一笑， 含耻辱情烈死金钊 (Tearing the Fan for a Smile Worth a Thousand Gold; Jinchuan Dies in Humiliation and Passion)	Episodes 13-15	Around Chapters 27-28	emotional intensification / tragic condensation

From Audiovisual Rewriting to Literary Fandom ...

6	<p>刘姥姥二进荣国府 · 鸳鸯女誓绝鸳鸯偶 (Granny Liu Pays Her Second Visit to the Rongguo Mansion; Yuanyang Swears Never to Accept a Forced Match)</p>	<p>Episodes 16–18</p>	<p>Chapter 36; Chapters 39 to the first half of Chapter 47</p>	<p>parallel plot compression / moral reframing</p>
7	<p>勇晴雯病补雀金裘 · 芦雪广争联即景 (Brave Qingwen Mends the Peacock Feather Cloak While Ill; at the Reed Snow Cottage, Verses Are Composed in Friendly Contest)</p>	<p>Episodes 19–21</p>	<p>The second half of Chapter 47 to Chapter 56</p>	<p>character-centred rewriting / lyrical intensification</p>
8	<p>憨湘云醉卧芍药裯 · 寿怡红群芳开夜宴 (Xiangyun Lies Drunken among the Peony Petals; at the Yihong Courtyard, the Beauties Hold a Night Banquet)</p>	<p>Episodes 22–24</p>	<p>Chapters 57–63</p>	<p>scene-based condensation / festive affective framing</p>
9	<p>酸凤姐大闹宁国府 · 琏二叔偷娶尤二姐 (Jealous Xifeng Creates Chaos in the Ningguo Mansion; Second Uncle Lian Secretly Marries You Erjie)</p>	<p>Episodes 25–27 (first half)</p>	<p>Chapters 63–72</p>	<p>conflict amplification / plot-line restructuring</p>
10	<p>俏丫鬟抱屈夭风流 · 痴公子杜撰芙蓉诔 (A Pretty Maid Dies in Grievance and Youth; the Infatuated Young Master Composes <i>Furong Nü'er Lei</i>)</p>	<p>The second half of Episode 27 to most of Episode 29</p>	<p>Chapters 73–78</p>	<p>tragic reframing / interpretive supplementation</p>

11	伤离别探春远嫁·大 观园诸芳流散 (In Sorrowful Parting, Tanchun Is Married Far Away; the Beauties of the Grand View Garden Drift Apart)	The second half of Episode 29 to the first half of Episode 33	Synthesised from Zhiyanzhai's annotations, verdict poems, parts of the Cheng- Gao version, and later <i>Hongxue</i> scholars' conjectures	serial closure / speculative extension
12	大观园诸芳流散·白 茫茫厚地高天 (The Beauties of the Grand View Garden Drift Apart; beneath the Vast White Earth and High Heaven)	The second half of Episode 33 to Episode 36	Synthesised from Zhiyanzhai's annotations, verdict poems, parts of the Cheng- Gao version, and later <i>Hongxue</i> scholars' conjectures	serial closure / interpretive reconstruction

Table 1. Titles of Muyu Shuixin's Commentary Videos and Their Corresponding Episodes in the 1987 Television Adaptation and Chapters in the Cheng-Gao Version of *Honglouloumeng*

Before turning to the cross-platform comparison, it is useful to note three recurrent rewriting strategies in the series. First, the source narrative is broken into serial units that are easier to follow on a video platform than in long-form reading. Second, the titles do not merely label episodes; they reframe them by concentrating plot, emotion, and character conflict into chapter-like phrases. Third, commentary and music work together to redirect reception, guiding viewers not only through what happens, but also through how particular scenes should be felt and remembered. In this sense, the series rewrites *Honglouloumeng* at the levels of structure, framing, and affect.

What makes this series especially noteworthy is that it does not simply popularise the plot of *Honglouloumeng* in a simplified way.

Instead, it reworks the literary classic through a dual logic of explanation and retelling. On the one hand, the videos “explain” the source material by clarifying plot relations, emphasising key emotional tensions, and introducing interpretive perspectives for viewers who may not be familiar with the novel. On the other hand, they “retell” the story through selective editing, voice-over narration, and affective pacing, thereby producing a new mode of reception that is shaped by platform culture rather than by literary reading alone. In this sense, the series should be understood not as a conventional review but as a typical form of secondary creation that reorganises an already adapted work into a new audiovisual narrative.

The title design of the series is one of its most distinctive features. Muyu Shuixin gives each instalment a highly literary title modelled on the parallel and chapter-like style associated with classical Chinese fiction. Titles such as “通灵宝玉入红尘·宝黛初会续前盟” (The Sentient Jade Enters the Mortal World, and Baoyu and Daiyu Meet Again to Renew Their Former Bond) and “撕扇子作千金一笑, 含耻辱情烈死金钗” (Tearing the Fan for a Smile Worth a Thousand Gold; Jinchuan Dies in Humiliation and Passion) condense plot, emotion, and character conflict into compact and rhetorically balanced expressions. This strategy does more than label individual videos. It recreates an atmosphere of classical narration, evokes the stylistic memory of the original novel, and appeals both to existing readers of *Honglouloumeng* and to general viewers attracted by dramatic tension and poetic phrasing. In this way, the titles serve as an important bridge between literary tradition and platform visibility.

Another important feature of the series is its use of music, especially the repeated insertion of “Qingwen Ge”⁸ from the 1987 television adaptation. In these videos, music is not merely a decorative background sound. It functions as an affective and

⁸ “Qingwen Ge” (晴雯歌) is a well-known song associated with the 1987 television adaptation of *Honglouloumeng* and is often recognised as one of its most memorable musical motifs.

intertextual device that connects the commentary to viewers' prior memories of the television series. For audiences already familiar with the 1987 adaptation, the repeated use of this song activates nostalgia, reinforces emotional identification, and deepens immersion in the tragic world of *Honglouloumeng*. More broadly, the interaction between commentary, image, and music turns secondary creation into a multimodal form of literary mediation. Rather than presenting literary meaning through text alone, the videos generate an audiovisual experience in which interpretation is inseparable from sound, rhythm, and emotional atmosphere.

The significance of Muyu Shuixin's *Honglouloumeng* series also lies in its platform circulation. On Bilibili, the series achieved strong visibility and active audience engagement, with viewers responding through bullet comments, comment sections, reposts, and other interactive forms. By contrast, the same group of videos performed much more weakly on YouTube. The substantial contrast in views, likes, comments, and shares suggests that the success of secondary creation cannot be explained solely by content quality or literary value. Rather, it depends on a broader set of factors, including language accessibility, cultural familiarity, serial organisation, and the interactional affordances of different platforms. It is precisely this sharp contrast that makes the case analytically valuable for the present study.

As a result, Muyu Shuixin's *Honglouloumeng* series provides an especially useful case for understanding how secondary creation mediates Chinese classical literature in the platform era. It shows how a literary classic can be transformed into a new audiovisual object through commentary, editing, music, and serial packaging. At the same time, it also reveals that such mediation does not automatically travel across platforms or cultures with equal effectiveness. The case, therefore, allows us to examine both the productive potential and the practical limits of secondary creation as a pathway for the contemporary dissemination of Chinese classical literature.

3. Weak Reception on YouTube: A Cross-Platform Contrast

A striking feature of Muyu Shuixin's *Honglouloumeng* series is the sharp contrast between its reception on Bilibili and on YouTube. Although the same or largely similar videos were uploaded to both platforms, their dissemination outcomes were far from comparable. On Bilibili, the series achieved high visibility, strong viewer participation, and sustained discussion. On YouTube, however, the same series received much weaker engagement, with far lower numbers of views, likes, comments, and shares. This contrast suggests that the circulation of secondary creation is shaped not only by the content itself but also by the cultural and technical environments in which that content is received. The contrast between the two platforms is first visible in the basic circulation data, as shown in Table 2.

Platform	Views	Likes	Comments	Shares
Bilibili	20,290,000	585,600	14,700	10,900
YouTube	46,700	<1,000	<1,000	<1,000

Table 2. Comparative Platform Data for Muyu Shuixin's *Honglouloumeng* Series on Bilibili and YouTube

The gap is substantial across all four indicators and immediately suggests that the same rewritten literary material entered two very different circuits of reception. Rather than repeating the figures in full, it is enough to note here that Bilibili far outperformed YouTube not only in visibility but also in forms of audience response such as likes, comments, and shares. The difference is too large to be treated as incidental.

The first point concerns the linguistic condition of rewriting across platforms. On Bilibili, the series works within a Chinese-language environment in which commentary, pacing, and verbal cues remain immediately usable. On YouTube, the same rewriting remains linguistically localised, since the videos are not systematically supported by multilingual subtitles and the commentary stays in Chinese. On YouTube, Muyu Shuixin's

Honglouloumeng videos were not systematically equipped with multilingual subtitles, and the commentary remained in Chinese. This means that the videos presupposed a certain degree of Chinese-language competence on the part of overseas viewers. Such a condition may not pose a major problem on Bilibili, where the platform is primarily oriented toward Chinese-speaking users, but it significantly narrows the accessible audience on YouTube. In other words, although the videos were technically available on a global platform, they were not equally accessible in linguistic terms. Their circulation abroad, therefore, depended heavily on viewers who had already been drawn to *Honglouloumeng* and who also possessed enough Chinese-language knowledge to follow the commentary.

A second point concerns title-based rewriting. On Bilibili, the highly literary and chapter-like titles function as an effective framing device. On YouTube, however, the same title strategy travels less successfully because its rhetorical compactness depends on a degree of familiarity with classical Chinese expression. As noted in the previous section, the titles of the Bilibili series are highly literary, concise, and rhetorically patterned in ways that resonate with the stylistic memory of classical Chinese fiction. This title strategy works effectively for domestic audiences because it compresses plot and emotion into familiar forms of literary expression. Yet its appeal does not travel easily across platforms and cultures. On YouTube, where many viewers are less familiar with classical Chinese narrative conventions, the cultural density of such titles is more difficult to decode. What functions as an attractive and evocative entry point on Bilibili may therefore become a barrier to immediate comprehension on an overseas platform.

A third point concerns serial rewriting. On Bilibili, the *Honglouloumeng* videos are not encountered as isolated uploads but as part of a recognisable and relatively complete sequence. On YouTube, by contrast, the same rewriting appears in a more fragmented form, with weaker serial organisation and less interpretive accumulation. On Bilibili, the *Honglouloumeng* series was organised as part of the recognisable “Muyu Mini Theatre” section and was supplemented by related videos on such topics as *Furong Nü'er Lei*, the debate between evidential and allegorical approaches

in *Hongxue*, and the ending of the Cheng-Gao version. This gave the series a stronger sense of continuity, thematic coherence, and channel identity. On YouTube, by contrast, the uploads were less complete and lacked the same degree of organised packaging. As a result, viewers were less likely to encounter the series as a coherent body of content, and the possibility of sustained serial viewing was correspondingly weakened.

A fourth point concerns affective rewriting. On Bilibili, repeated cues such as “Qingwen Ge” function as an emotional shorthand that links commentary to prior adaptation memory. On YouTube, the same cue no longer carries the same density of recognition, which weakens one of the series’ key affective mechanisms. In the Bilibili series, the repeated use of “Qingwen Ge” from the 1987 adaptation works as a powerful emotional signal. For viewers who grew up with that adaptation or who are already familiar with its cultural status, the music evokes nostalgia, collective memory, and emotional recognition. These associations contribute directly to viewer immersion and encourage active participation in comments and bullet-screen responses. On YouTube, however, this layer of meaning does not automatically carry over. Without contextual explanation or adaptive framing, the soundtrack’s symbolic value is much less legible to viewers outside the original cultural horizon. What is effectively dense on Bilibili may thus become relatively opaque on YouTube.

The contrast between the two platforms is also reflected in audience response. On Bilibili, user comments and bullet-screen messages often express strong identification with both *Honglouloumeng* and Muyu Shuixin’s interpretive style. Comments such as “I cannot finish the original novel, but I cannot stop watching these videos” or “Muyu has brought me closer to a full score in the college entrance examination” indicate that the videos function not only as entertainment, but also as interpretive mediation and participatory cultural experience. On YouTube, by contrast, audience response is much more limited and fragmented. The available comments show a more divided reception, and the scale of interaction is too small to support anything like the communal energy visible on Bilibili.

Taken together, these differences show that the weak reception of Muyu Shuixin's *Honglouloumeng* series on YouTube cannot be explained simply by saying that overseas audiences are not interested in Chinese classical literature. The problem is more specific. It lies in the misalignment between content and platform environment: between Chinese-language commentary and a multilingual audience base, between culturally dense title design and cross-cultural readability, between symbolic music and uneven affective recognition, and between serial packaging on Bilibili and incomplete organisation on YouTube. The same secondary creation content, therefore, produced two radically different modes of circulation, making this contrast central to any serious discussion of literary dissemination in platform culture.

4. Literary Fandom and Its Limits: From Audience Recognition to Community Formation

The contrast between Bilibili and YouTube becomes clearer when examined through the lens of literary fandom. In the present study, fandom does not refer simply to admiration for a literary work or interest in a video creator. Rather, it refers to a more sustained form of collective participation built on recognition, emotional investment, repeated interaction, and the sharing of interpretive pleasure. From this perspective, the success of secondary creation should not be measured only by views or visibility. A more important question is whether it can foster a stable community of viewers who engage with the text, with one another, and with the creator in an ongoing way. It is precisely at this level that Muyu Shuixin's *Honglouloumeng* series reveals a marked difference between the two platforms.

On Bilibili, the series clearly benefited from conditions that were favourable to the formation of literary fandom. The platform's user culture encourages interactive viewing through bullet comments, threaded discussion, and various forms of participatory response. More importantly, these interactions were not random reactions to isolated clips. They were shaped by a shared cultural horizon in which *Honglouloumeng*, the 1987 adaptation, classical-style expressions, and emotionally charged scenes already carried

recognisable meanings. Viewers did not merely consume the videos as summaries of an old literary classic. They responded to them as occasions for memory, interpretation, emotional exchange, and communal recognition. Under such conditions, secondary creation became a mechanism through which literary attachment could be collectivised and continually renewed.

This process can be seen in the ways Bilibili users responded to the series. The title design, for example, activated familiarity with the stylistic world of *Hongloumeng* while also creating suspense and emotional appeal for viewers who may not have read the full novel. The repeated use of “Qingwen Ge” reinforced shared memory and affective identification, especially for those already familiar with the 1987 television adaptation. The commentary style itself also contributed to fandom formation. Muyu Shuixin’s narration did not position the audience as passive recipients of literary knowledge. Instead, it invited viewers into an ongoing act of collective reinterpretation, where understanding the text and sharing one’s response became intertwined. In this sense, the videos did not simply introduce *Hongloumeng* to audiences. They helped create a participatory environment in which a literary fandom could take shape.

On YouTube, by contrast, some viewers may still have appreciated the content, but this appreciation did not develop into a comparable community structure. This is where the distinction between audience recognition and fandom formation becomes crucial. A viewer may enjoy a video, recognise its quality, or even develop a positive impression of the literary work behind it. Yet such recognition does not automatically lead to repeated interaction, communal discussion, or collective identity. In the case of Muyu Shuixin’s *Hongloumeng* series on YouTube, what appeared was not a complete absence of interested viewers, but rather a condition in which interest remained scattered, isolated, and weakly connected. In the terms suggested by the Chinese version of this study, one may say that some viewers “became fans” of the content, but they did not “become a fandom”.

Several factors explain this limit. First, linguistic barriers reduced the range of viewers who could engage deeply with the commentary. Second, the title design, while highly effective on Bilibili, did not carry the same immediate force in a cross-cultural environment where the rhetorical and literary texture of classical Chinese expressions was less readily available. Third, incomplete serial organisation on YouTube weakened the continuity necessary for repeated viewing and cumulative community formation. Fourth, the cultural symbols embedded in the series, including the affective function of “Qingwen Ge”, did not automatically become meaningful to viewers without the relevant background knowledge. Together, these factors prevented the same videos from moving beyond momentary reception toward a more durable form of collective participation.

This distinction also sheds light on the broader mechanism of literary dissemination in platform culture. The formation of literary fandom is not simply a by-product of good content. Nor is it guaranteed by platform visibility alone. It depends on a dynamic interaction between textual familiarity, cultural memory, technical affordances, and audience practice. Bilibili provided a setting in which these factors could reinforce one another. The platform’s recommendation system, interactive features, and user culture allowed *Honglouloumeng* to be received not only as a classic to be explained, but also as a shared cultural object around which communal feeling and participatory attachment could gather. On YouTube, by contrast, these enabling conditions were much weaker, and the videos remained closer to isolated acts of viewing than to the collective life of fandom.

Seen in this way, Muyu Shuixin’s *Honglouloumeng* series does more than illustrate the success of one creator or the popularity of one literary classic. It reveals a structural issue in the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese classical literature through secondary creation. Platform-based audiovisual reworking may indeed lower the threshold of access and attract new viewers, but access alone is not enough. Unless that access is accompanied by the conditions necessary for shared recognition and sustained participation, the result may remain at the level of fragmented appreciation rather than

organised literary fandom. The key challenge, therefore, is not only how to make Chinese classical literature visible abroad, but also how to make it collectively inhabitable in new cultural and platform environments.

From this perspective, the concept of literary fandom offers a more precise way to evaluate the real effects of secondary creation. It helps distinguish between simple exposure and meaningful reception, between scattered interest and communal participation, and between the temporary circulation of content and the longer-term formation of a cultural public (Livingstone, 2005). The case of Muyu Shuixin's *Hongloumeng* series suggests that the cross-cultural future of Chinese classical literature depends not only on adaptation or translation in the narrow sense, but also on whether new forms of mediation can create the affective and participatory conditions under which a literary fandom may genuinely emerge.

Conclusion

This paper has examined Muyu Shuixin's *Hongloumeng* commentary series as a case study of platform-based secondary creation in the contemporary dissemination of Chinese classical literature. By comparing the circulation and reception of the same series on Bilibili and YouTube, we argue that secondary creation is not merely a derivative cultural practice, but an important form of literary mediation in the digital age. Through commentary, editing, title design, music, and serial organisation, a literary classic can be recontextualised for contemporary viewers and made newly accessible within platform culture.

At the same time, the study also demonstrates that the effectiveness of such mediation is highly uneven across platforms. On Bilibili, Muyu Shuixin's *Hongloumeng* series successfully generated strong audience participation and helped foster a recognisable literary fandom. On YouTube, however, the same content failed to produce a comparable degree of engagement or collective identification. This difference cannot be explained simply by the quality of the videos themselves. Rather, it reflects the combined influence of language accessibility, cultural familiarity,

symbolic legibility, serial packaging, and platform-specific interactional mechanisms. What differs across the two platforms is not only the level of audience response, but also the effectiveness of the rewriting mechanisms themselves, including title framing, serial organisation, linguistic accessibility, and affective cueing. In this sense, the weak reception of the series on YouTube should not be understood as a general lack of overseas interest in Chinese classical literature, but as evidence of the difficulty of transforming scattered recognition into sustained community formation in cross-cultural platform environments.

The case, therefore, highlights a key distinction between audience recognition and fandom formation. Secondary creation may attract attention, lower the threshold of reception, and introduce literary works to new viewers, but such outcomes do not automatically lead to the emergence of a literary fandom. What the comparison between Bilibili and YouTube reveals is that the international circulation of Chinese classical literature depends not only on whether content is made available, but also on whether the cultural, linguistic, and participatory conditions necessary for shared attachment can be established. The issue, in other words, is not only whether audiences can encounter *Honglouloumeng*, but whether they can inhabit it collectively as a meaningful cultural space.

From this perspective, literary fandom provides a useful analytical lens for evaluating the real effects of platform-based literary dissemination. It helps distinguish between temporary exposure and sustained participation, and between individual appreciation and communal engagement. Muyu Shuixin's *Honglouloumeng* series suggests that secondary creation can indeed serve as a promising pathway for renewing Chinese classical literature in the digital age, especially among younger audiences. Yet it also shows that the cross-cultural effectiveness of such a pathway remains limited unless creators and platforms address problems of subtitle support, cultural explanation, symbolic translation, and platform-sensitive organisation.

More broadly, this case indicates that the contemporary “going global” of Chinese classical literature cannot rely on textual prestige or platform visibility alone. If classical literature is to circulate

meaningfully across cultures, it must be mediated in ways that are not only accessible but also capable of generating participation, recognition, and community. In this regard, secondary creation has significant potential, but its success ultimately depends on whether literary classics can be transformed from objects of distant admiration into shared sites of cultural interaction.

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Zhong Zhenhao & Zhao Chaoyong

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