CHAPTER TWO

ADICTED TO BEAUTY

It does not matter whether you are a man, woman, dog, cat, plant, or machine; if I fall in love with you, then so be it.
–Words spoken by the hero in Absolute Love, a Japanese danmei manga

Although not the largest Chinese literature website, Jinjiang Literature City (www.jjwxc.net) is one of the earliest and most influential women’s literature websites; it has established an almost exclusively female readership that is famous for its enthusiasm, loyalty, and powers of articulation.1 Launched in Jinjiang, Fujian 福建, in 1998,2 it has since developed into an elaborate organization consisting of an e-bookstore, a discussion forum, and a users’ feedback forum, as well as a website for publishing creative works, Creative Writing Net (Yuanchuang wang 原创网). Judging by their self-introductions, the majority of authors and readers are fairly well-educated women whose ages range from the late teens to early forties.3 Only a few are full-time writers. Most have other occupations such as students, teachers, and accountants. The majority of them reside in mainland China; a significant number appear to be living abroad but are nevertheless eager to participate from their various locations in the Chinese diaspora.4 The age, education, and occupation of Jinjiang users fit the national profile of users of Chinese literature websites. Most are between eighteen and thirty years old and possess the “three highs”: high salary, high level of education, and high social status.5 Jinjiang users are thus perhaps more likely to be highly educated, urban, and politically liberal than the small-town romance readers discussed by Janice Radway.

5 Yang, “Wangluo, gaibian de bu jinjin shi yuedu.”
Jinjiang does not depend on the main Internet portals on the Chinese Web, such as Wangyi or Xinlang, but rather frequently changes and enhances its Web features to make itself more user friendly. Compared with other Chinese literature websites, Jinjiang not only almost exclusively answers to contemporary Chinese women’s interests and concerns, it also boasts interactive features conducive to candid, sophisticated, and in-depth discussions among its users (more about this later). It thus emerges as an invaluable source of accounts of how Chinese women experience the Internet because of its user profile and its responsiveness to user needs.

However, Jinjiang by no means exists in a vacuum isolated from the rest of Chinese society. Founded mostly on volunteer labor, with limited funding from advertisements, it experienced financial hardships, legal crises, and ownership changes before finally finding an investor in Shanghai Shengda Internet Development Company in November 2007. Shortly afterwards, it followed the example of Starting Point (Qidian), the first of Shengda Literature’s acquisitions, and began charging a fee for VIP access to certain works. This practice reflects not only the increasing importance placed on profit by Jinjiang but also the power of big capital in Web publishing.\(^6\) It has also caused controversy and deep disappointment among former readers, who consider this move a sell-out and a betrayal of Jinjiang’s core values of volunteerism and equal sharing.\(^7\)

So far, Jinjiang works have been published in printed form mostly by newly founded houses known for their lists of popular fiction, rather than the large state-run publishers specializing in serious literature.\(^8\) But more and more mainstream Chinese publishers have begun to cash in on the rise of popular fiction, and they have especially targeted female romance readers as a profit-generating consumer base.\(^9\) Additionally, by utilizing a print-on-demand service, authors can have their Web works published in print by specialized publishers and sold to subscribers who collect hard copies as souvenirs.\(^10\)

Among the various genres available on Jinjiang’s Creative Writing Net, romance, especially time-travel romance, is the most popular. Most

\(^10\) These publishing houses are located in both mainland China and Taiwan.