From "Gacha Commodities" to "Desiring Subjects": A Transnational Feminist Analysis of Female Fanfiction Practices in Genshin Impact

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines how female/female (F/F) fanfiction writers on AO3 and LOFTER reinterpret the hyper-feminized characters of *Genshin Impact* (miHoYo 2020) within the affective economies of digital capitalism. The game's gacha system structures anticipation, scarcity, and emotional attachment as forms of productive value (Woods 2022), positioning female characters such as Ganyu and Raiden Shogun as affective commodities. Against this backdrop, women's fanfiction becomes a space where gendered meaning is reorganized. Rather than reinforcing the game's logic of docility, eroticization, or emotional service, fan writers construct alternative configurations of intimacy, care, and desire that complicate how feminine subjectivity is imagined within platform capitalism. These rewritings form the basis for interpreting fanfiction as feminist affective labor: creative work that negotiates the absorption of women's emotional investments into digital economies while simultaneously generating relational value and agency.

Building on scholarship on Chinese fandom, digital labor, and the circulation of desire (Hou 2014; Li and Yang 2015; Yang 2023; Yuan 2024), the study addresses a gap in existing research. While prior work examines Chinese fan culture and the gendered logics of digital gaming, little attention has been given to how F/F fanfiction reconfigures female characters across different platform ecologies or how these rewritings enact feminist agency through affective transformation. This study contributes to that gap by analyzing how AO3 and LOFTER—two platforms shaped by divergent sociotechnical environments—produce distinct feminist possibilities through which women reinterpret the affective labor embedded in *Genshin Impact*.

Methodologically, the project conducts close readings of sixteen F/F fanfictions across two dominant pairings: Ganyu/Keqing and Ei/Yae Miko, selected based on their visibility, narrative completeness, and circulation within each platform's F/F fandom ecology. The comparison focuses on how writers redistribute emotional labor, reframe bodily vulnerability, reorganize intimacy, and construct queer desire in relation to each platform's expressive norms and governance structures. AO3's anti-censorship ethos and liberal queer infrastructure support explicit articulations of erotic autonomy, temporal refusal, and embodied vulnerability. LOFTER's censored and relationally oriented environment encourages coded intimacy, soft authority, and

emotional apprenticeship, producing a quieter but equally meaningful feminist grammar. Together, these sites illustrate how feminist creativity adapts to platform constraints, shaping the emotional and political possibilities available to female fans.

The analysis finds that AO3 narratives consistently reconstruct Ganyu and Ei through forms of agency centered on desire, mutuality, and the rejection of disciplinary temporalities. Through scenes that emphasize bodily sensitivity, erotic confession, and relational reciprocity, AO3 authors position feminine subjectivity as grounded in embodied need and shared affect. These portrayals reinterpret exhaustion, desire, and vulnerability as resources for rethinking what feminine autonomy can look like within digital capitalism.

LOFTER narratives, shaped by censorship, moral expectations such as suzhi, and community risk-management norms, articulate a different constellation of feminine agency. Here, intimacy is expressed through tenderness, jealousy softened into insecurity, metaphor, and emotional calibration. Rather than direct refusals of discipline, LOFTER texts foreground mutual reliance, coded desire, and the cultivation of emotional safety. Feminist meaning emerges through relational negotiation and incremental trust, not through explicit transgression. These differences reflect the unequal expressive conditions that structure Chinese digital publics and highlight how F/F fanfiction becomes a site where women practice coded labor to sustain queer attachment.

Placing the two platforms in dialogue demonstrates how transnational feminist analysis can explain the movement of gendered meaning across global infrastructures. Following Grewal and Kaplan (2001) and Tsing (2011), the study conceptualizes AO3 and LOFTER not as cultural opposites but as distinct epistemic regimes that structure how feminist knowledge becomes thinkable. Feminine agency is thus produced through friction: erotic autonomy on AO3, relational caretaking on LOFTER. Both modes unsettle *Genshin Impact*'s canonical construction of feminine docility, yet each does so through platform-specific affective grammars shaped by geopolitical, technological, and linguistic asymmetries.

Taken together, these findings suggest that F/F fanfiction offers a lens for understanding how gendered meaning is negotiated within the uneven conditions of global digital capitalism. Rather than positioning fan creativity as inherently resistant or transformative, the analysis highlights how affective labor circulates across platforms in ways that are shaped by their infrastructures of visibility, regulation, and relational practice. The contrast between AO3 and LOFTER points to how different sociotechnical environments invite distinct articulations of intimacy, agency, and desire, allowing fan authors to reorganize affective attachments in ways that matter within their specific contexts. While the study focuses on two characters and two platforms, it outlines a platform-centered approach for examining how feminist meaning-making emerges through the interplay of narrative, emotion, and digital governance in transnational environments. This perspective emphasizes the situated nature of fan authorship and offers a grounded way to understand how feminist possibilities are shaped, limited, and reconfigured within contemporary digital cultures.

BIO

Luyao Liu is a Master's student in Women's Studies at Ewha Womans University, South Korea. Her research orientation is feminist cultural analysis, focusing on gender norms and body politics in contemporary social practices. Her core interests include female subjectivity and agency within sexuality practices and technological

environments. Her work explores the intersections of technology, sexuality, and power dynamics in contemporary culture.

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