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IDS 404 - *Popular Culture*

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### 5-2 Final Project Milestone Three: Popular Culture, You, and Society

#### Speaker Notes

I. A. *Mo Dao Zu Shi (MDZS)* (2016) is a xianxia novel (Chinese historical fantasy) written by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu (MXTX). It has its own separate fandom, simple *MDZS*, but as MXTX has two additional popular works that a majority of fans also step into, it's also categorized under the MXTX fandom. Being a novel, *MDZS*'s pop culture origin genre falls under books. Its growth as a pop culture artifact with fans caused a supply and demand chain that spawned numerous adaptations and derivatives that fall under various other pop culture genres (Delaney & Madigan, 2016).

I. B. *MDZS* has an interesting relationship with pop culture as it can also be considered a part of the danmei genre. Danmei, meaning indulgence in beauty, is a genre that deals with the beauty of romance between men. In a society with continuous struggles for the LGBTQ rights and a dearth of representation, a well-written, plot-oriented novel with the central couple being gay became a huge hit. Fandoms, fanart, and fanfiction have long been an outlet for queer representation and the *MDZS* fandom today is no exception that that (Duggan, 2017).

I. B. (cont.) While not everyone in fandoms are representative of the LGBTQ community, there is a lot of content created for it. The need to preserve that content created the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW), "a nonprofit organization established by fans to serve the interests of fans by providing access to and preserving the history of fanworks and fan culture in

its myriad forms,” and An Archive of Our Own (AO3), one of the largest fanfiction sites today (*What We Believe*). It currently houses more than 33,000 LGBTQ *MDZS* related works and has helped develop an open-minded online community where fans interact.

I. C. This demand for quality LGBTQ media turned *MDZS* into a pop culture phenomenon as its fan base grew. With a manhua and donghua (comic and cartoon, respectively); audio drama; live-action TV series (*The Untamed*), its soundtrack and a massive celebrity fan following; an audio drama; merchandise; and an online fanbase, *MDZS* has crossed into seven pop culture genres. Nine if counting an audio drama as radio and the celebrity fan following merging over into their other movies. If a pop culture phenomena is categorized as being in six or more genres, *MDZS* certainly qualifies (Delaney & Madigan, 2016).

II. A. Having been a part of various fandoms for about two decades now, I’m quite familiar with a lot of aspects as well as the general history of fandom as a whole. Witnessing the impact of GeoCities’ shutdown (Yahoo, 2009) on LGBTQ and fandom content has certainly given an appreciation for today’s tight knit community with things like the OTW’s Open Doors project to move in danger fan content over to its various platforms. While this was something I was already aware of, focused analysis of *MDZS* and its community have made me realize just how close and personal people are in this fandom. The years of struggle have allowed for the freedom of expression and open-minded consideration of others we see in this fandom today.

II. B. Analyzation of pop culture can and does influence my current field of study, writing and publishing. Looking at the current pop culture trends shows what books would currently be a good fit for the intended audience. For example, the *House of Night* series (2007) written by P.C. Cast (and edited by her daughter, Kristin Cast) came to be because her agent, in the wake of the

2000s *Twilight* induced young-adult vampire frenzy, mentioned a “vampire finishing school” (Cast & Cast). Additionally, pop culture has an influence on my next field of study, linguistics. Pop culture trends are what write the dictionary. Lexicographers follow what words and definitions everyday people are using and write dictionary entries based on that (Curzan, 2014).

III. A. Being able to critically analyze pop culture adds value to interactions through a better understanding of cultures and societies. It gives better understanding to the dynamics behind why a certain artifact became popular when and where it did, as well as general insights into the culture the artifact is from. Critical analysis of *MDZS* from the four lenses lets non-Chinese fans interact with Chinese fans under a better understanding of each other’s cultures. For instance, a reading and research of *MDZS* through the humanities would allow fans to share conversation about Daoist references like Si Xiang, the four auspicious beasts, and what they represent in Chinese culture (Deng et al., 2000).

III. B. Analysis of pop culture trends in literature is an essential part of creative writing and publishing. Not only does it create an archive of literature trends for historical purposes, but it can also help predict what sorts of themes would be popular in which genres and which language style to use in it. This could include anything from perusing online shopping trends, going into bookstores and looking through the shelves, to digging up histories of literature. It can also affect day-to-day responsibilities and questions that crop up with publishing and marketing. Things like book covers and ad designs are influenced by pop culture trends as well.

IV. A. As with everything else, pop culture in its various forms comes with its share of benefits and challenges. One of which is simply just trying to incorporate pop culture into another aspect of life to gain a benefit from that popularity. It runs the risk of flopping if the

audience isn't interested enough or fading quickly when the artifact in question turns out to be a minor trend. One aspect that struggles with this constantly is physical fitness. A vast majority of people do not enjoy fitness and as such there is a multitude of workouts incorporating the newest gadgets and trends to make it more fun and inviting. There is a running app in the iOS Apple store that lets you run with audio that generates a zombie apocalypse story. Better run fast! Another idea is using *Pokémon Go!* to teach children about geocaching and how to use it for increased outdoor activity (Bruno, 2018).

IV. B. Understanding pop culture comes with the benefit of heightened interactions both in a professional and personal setting. It gives people the ability to better understand the trappings of society and how to best incorporate that into their careers, like hopping on the latest novel trends in publishing or graphic design trends in marketing. Personal interactions also gain the benefit of culturally diverse dialogue backed by the understanding of an artifact through the four lenses. Whether at home online or at work in the office, analysis of pop culture affords people the information needed to synthesize society's trends and bolster their social interactions.

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