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`My double love of boys': Chinese women's fascination with `Boys' Love' fiction

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'My double love of boys':

Chinese women's fascination with 'Boys' Love' fiction

by

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ABSTRACT

Yaoi, also known as "Boys' Love," is a popular female-oriented romantic fiction genre in China. This study examines how Chinese women construct their *yaoi* fandom. In particular, this study addresses how "Boys' Love" romance enables female fans to make their own meanings and develop their ideological perspectives.

Four themes emerged from 15 in-depth interviews with *yaoi* fans, who articulated their experiences and practices surrounding this genre. The findings suggest that 1) *yaoi* fandom empowers female readers to place a voyeuristic gaze upon men; 2) fans appropriate Boys' Love texts to reinforce their desire for idealized heterosexual romance; 3) fans enjoy the pleasures of relaxation and escape through consuming *yaoi*; 4) and fans experience their *yaoi* fandom by interacting with other fans at both online and offline levels, and both collectively and individualistically.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first decade of the 21st century witnessed China's active role in globalization, especially after China became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2005. On one hand, China's economic growth has led to dramatic changes within the country; on the other hand, the influx of foreign values also has had a significant impact on Chinese culture. The consumption of external popular media culture, such as videos, movies, songs, fiction, comics, youth magazines, and idol worship from Japan, South Korea, the United States, and the United Kingdom, has influenced domestic values, social morality, and individual lifestyles, especially among young Chinese. Cultural values imported from Japan, particularly, by popular media have generated a localization of the "structure of pleasure" for Chinese audiences (Fung, 2009, p.290).

Yaoi fandom in China is an example of media consumption and localization of foreign culture. *Yaoi*, which originated in Japan in the early 1970s, is a popular term for female-oriented anime, manga (comics), dojinshi (self-published works), videogames, novels, and slash fiction (fictional *yaoi* stories of real-life celebrities), most of which are created by female writers and published online (Martin, 2012; Zanghellini, 2009; McLelland & Yoo, 2007; Welker, 2006). *Yaoi*, also known as Boys' Love (BL) or Tanbi (the worship and pursuit of aesthetic beauty), mainly features idealized homosexual romances, including not only man-man, but also boy-boy and man-boy relationships (Zanghellini, 2009). Compared with a traditional heterosexual romance, which is typically more hierarchical, the relationship between the two major characters in many *yaoi* stories can be read as relatively equal. Nonetheless, one of the major characters is often identified as seme (top, or attacker), while

the other is identified as uke (bottom, or receiver), which reinforces stereotypes related to gender and sexuality. The role of seme is much more aggressive and stereotypically masculine, while the uke sometimes manifests a "softer" masculinity. These two male characters are usually portrayed as very good-looking. In short, the pureness and perceived equality of these homosexual romances, along with the characters' handsome appearances, are characterized by fans as ideal love.

Although *yaoi* was born and popularized in Japan, the Internet has facilitated its expansion to other countries and areas, especially to neighboring countries. Global online and offline communities have been created by international fans to publish, share, and discuss *yaoi* works (McLelland & Yoo, 2007).

In China, *yaoi* is also known as Danmei (耽美), which was translated directly from the Japanese pronunciation of "Tanbi." *Yaoi* first emerged in the late 1970s with the importing of Japanese anime and comics in Taiwan (Maritin, 2012). By the late 1990s, *yaoi* expanded and blossomed in Hong Kong and then in the mainland of China (Liu, 2009). In 1999, the first monthly *yaoi* comic magazine *Danmei Season* was published in the mainland. A few years later, the earliest *yaoi* websites were born, such as lucifer-club.com and sun_sun.yeah.net, along with the advent and popularity of literature websites, online blogs and forums. Now many popular literature websites have specific columns for *yaoi* novels, where *yaoi* fans can consume, discuss, download, and even create *yaoi* works. Of course, readers are charged for original *yaoi* original stories on some websites, while some offer free *yaoi* content. Nonetheless, *yaoi* is becoming a business in China, and has generated some jobs for young women to produce *yaoi* content.

The prevalence of *yaoi* coincided with public awareness of homosexuality in China. Homosexuality was generally not recognized by the majority of mainland Chinese until the 1990s, a period when Western sexology was largely introduced to China (Chou, 2000). Before economic reforms in the 1980s, homosexuality was regarded as immoral and even a mental disease, for the Communist government imposed a rigorous social and moral order at that time (Chou, 2000). In 2001, homosexuality was eventually and officially removed from the list of mental illnesses by the *Chinese Classification and Diagnostic Criteria of Mental Disorders*, the third version of the legal psychiatric guide. Nonetheless, homosexuality is still a sensitive issue in mainland China. Homosexual people or homosexual-related content are still marginalized by mainstream media. In this respect, the consumption of *yaoi* seems to create possibilities for young people to learn about gender and sexuality outside of conventional texts.

With the popularity of *yaoi* content in China, a large readership group has been created. Unfortunately, due to the sensitivity of *yaoi* culture and the widely dispersed nature of its online communities, there are no official statistical data regarding the size of the *yaoi* audience. Nevertheless, it is true that more young heterosexual-identified women and teenage girls have become fascinated with Boys' Love stories. The earliest fans were scattered due to geographical constraints, and there was no organization connecting them together. They used to buy or rent *yaoi* works from bookstores and consume the content alone. At that time, *yaoi* fandom was in its beginning stages and seldom noticed by the public. More recently, the availability and accessibility of the Internet have promoted the formation of *yaoi* fan groups. Taking advantage of the openness, anonymity, and interactivity of the Internet, *yaoi* boasts a large online community of young women who are engaged in creating, disseminating, and

sharing the fictional erotic relationships of beautiful boys and men (McLelland & Yoo, 2007).

The age of *yaoi* readers in China mainly ranges from 11 to 30 years old (Song, & Wang, 2011). Among them, college readers make up the majority population, but the number of fans in junior and senior high school is rising. Many fans live in cities, where they have relatively free access to the Internet and to *yaoi* works. Based on preliminary interviews for this study, there is reason to think that *yaoi* not only functions as a form of entertainment in the fans' leisure time, but also serves as a liberal sphere in which they can express their eagerness for aesthetic idealized love and experiment with their interpretations of gender and sex.

Increasing concerns about the negative social effects of *yaoi* culture have fueled anti-BL activities in China since 2007 (Liu, 2009), based on fears that the genre's elements of unrealistic love, homosexuality, and sex depictions would corrupt the values and morality of the younger generation. This represents a prevailing negative image of *yaoi* fandom, whereas some of its fundamental merits have been made light of. For instance, as Welker (2006) argues, *yaoi* might offer a space for heteronormative female fans to "experiment with marginalized gender and sexual practices and has played a role in identity formation" (p. 843). In addition, given the taboo of homosexuality in China, *yaoi*'s potential role in promoting possible public openness to homosexuality in the society deserves a further examination.

This thesis aims to explore how Chinese women construct their *yaoi* fandom. Fans' interactions with the *yaoi* texts and with other readers are scrutinized to understand how unique meanings of love, gender, and sexuality inform and emerge from the women's

fandom practices. Further, this thesis tries to shed light on fans' fandom experience based on their participation in *yaoi* culture at both virtual and offline levels, and collectively and individualistically.

By investigating the *yaoi* fandom, this study provides a unique opportunity to explore how the Internet influences youth culture in China and gain insights into how young women utilize media texts to negotiate gender meanings via their subcultural activities. Ultimately, this analysis of female fandom tries to lay a foundation for future study to understand the combination of new media and popular culture young people employ to make their own meanings.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

A central topic of contemporary youth subculture is the practice of fandom (Bennett, 2004). Fandom study has been applied to diverse areas such as television, movies, music, sports, literature, and other forms of media texts. As Jenkins (2006a) defines it, fandom is "a vehicle for marginalized subcultural groups," such as women, young people, and gay men and lesbians, to "pry open space" to express their cultural concerns and different interests within dominant representations via appropriating and poaching media texts (p. 40). By participating in a certain fandom, fans get a chance to express their sense of self and cultivate an interactive relationship with peers (Brown, 1997). Fans also construct their own fandom world, where they subscribe to their own unique media substances, values and contexts and negotiate with the dominant culture (Chen, 2007; Fung, 2009). Therefore, fans obtain some entertainment and pleasures making their own meanings and constructing unique communities via participating in certain texts.

Fans' pleasure has been discussed in three ways. For some fans, the pleasure first arises from their identification and involvement with their chosen texts. In addition, as Fiske (1989) suggests, fans also gain pleasure from their evasion and productivity. The pleasure of evasion stems from "the loss of self and of the subjectivity that controls and governs the self"—that is, the self that is constructed by dominant ideological production and reproduction (p. 41). In other words, pleasure emerges from fans' evasion of dominant social ideologies and disciplines. For example, Radway's (1984) study of romance readers suggests that reading romance novels allows housewives to relieve tensions and to lose themselves "in a fantasy that provides them with good feelings that seem to endure after they return to their

roles as wives and mothers" (p. 95). Reading romance, in this sense, is an indulgent evasion of the ideologies of housewifery and femininity.

Second, fans' pleasure of productivity, as Fiske (1992) explains, centers on the politics of producing meanings and social identities, as well as on the social relations that fans construct. Three parts are involved in Fiske's definition of fans' productivity: semiotic, enunciative, and textual. Semiotic production "consists of the making of meanings of social identity and of social experience from the semiotic resources of the cultural commodity" (p. 37). In Fiske's definition, this is essentially an interior process. When fans start speaking about their meanings, or sharing with others in a public forum, this process becomes enunciative production. In other words, enunciative production can be seen as a way that fans articulate the meanings through dress, display, interaction with other fans, and other outside-text practices. Finally, fans may make their own texts, which Fiske calls "textual production."

Slash fiction, for example, is a telling illustration of fans' productivity. Slash originated as a genre of female fan writing that featured homosexual relationships between existing male characters from popular media programs. Jenkins (1992) argues that slash fandom is "a way of appropriating media texts and rereading them in a fashion that serves different interests" (p. 174). Penley (1992) defines slash fandom as female appropriation of popular culture, by which women "resist, negotiate, and adapt to their own desires this overwhelming media environment that we all inhabit" (p. 484). To some extent, slash fandom enables female fans to convey resistance toward dominant ideas about gender.

The resistant meanings found in many fan studies are described as empowerment for a subordinate group, which has found a tool with which to combat hegemony (King, 1997).

However, as King argues, it is also important to notice that fandom is always paradoxical, "encompassing elements of compliance and resistance simultaneously" (p. 342). His study of British lads' consumption of football reveals that as working-class fans, lads not only resisted the owners of capital clubs and the masculine toughness the football players represented, which they thought threatened a more sedentary masculinity expressed by working-class people, but also indicated a compliance with the "masculine desire for status and honor" (p. 343) stemming from their loyal support of a team and that team's success.

The other fundamental characteristic of fandom, Jenkins (2006b) argues, is fans' active participation. Departing from the notion of a passive audience, fans actively participate in chosen texts, creating their own meanings from the texts and articulating them through their daily displays, which include not only fans' behavior, but also a special language created from their fandom practices. Especially in today's convergence culture, where old media and the Internet collide, fans actively engage in interactions with their peers to formulate a new set of rules or shared knowledge, which helps to differentiate them from outsiders.

For Jenkins (2006b), fans' participatory culture emerges as a collective intelligence. Inspired by French cybertheorist Pierre Levy, Jenkins explains collective intelligence as a new knowledge culture, forged by fans in realms where "no traditional expertise exists" and where "knowledge communities form around mutual intellectual interests" (p. 20). However, these new communities are "voluntary, temporary, and tactical affiliations, reaffirmed through common intellectual enterprises and emotional investments" (p. 27). This is because the convergence culture makes possible for members to shift from one group to another as their emotional or intellectual needs change, to change their affiliation as the content of texts

changes, and to reaffirm and adjust their purposes and knowledge in new communities. In short, just as Bennett (2004) points out, "new fandom discourses" have flourished along with the development of the Internet (p. 169).

For example, Turkel (1995) argues that the computer and especially the Internet are changing the way people think, and in part the forms of their communities. Those changes allow individuals to practice fan cultures using a wider range of identities, which are no longer as clear as they once were because of the diminishment of stable, geographic groups in light of new virtual communities. The onset of digital media, along with an ever-increasing global consumerism, has facilitated all kinds of fragmentation and instability (Turkle, 1995; Hodkinson, 2007). In this environment, texts provide a focal center by which fans form their communities and perspectives online. Nevertheless, post-subcultural theorists point out that there is internal diversity within subgroups, and some participants might have multiple, fluid, and fragmented identities (Muggleton, 2000).

MacDonald (1998) extends this reasoning to suggest fans might occupy multiple positions simultaneously within computer-mediated communication (CMC) and "thus fans' positions within fandom are determined by their position within all possible hierarchies" (p. 138). Fan hierarchies exist in the amount of knowledge that fans acquire about their chosen texts, in the amount of fan participation, and their access to "inside" knowledge. In addition, leaders of different subgroups exercise authority, and fans exhibit a certain relationship to power in the roles they play at a fandom event (MacDonald, 1998).

Finally, gender also contributes to the diversity of fan culture. Jenkins (1992) recognizes that male and female fans practice their fandom differently. In a study of *Twin Peaks*, Jenkins finds that most male fans "focus on moments of character interaction as clues

for resolving syntagmatic questions" (p. 109). By contrast, female fans of the *Star Trek* series "focus their interests on the elaboration of paradigmatic relationships, reading plot actions as shedding light on character psychology and motivations" (p. 109).

Amid the burgeoning online fandom, more and more female fandoms are ripe for scholarly investigation (Bury, 2005). Women's articulation about gender and sexuality and their subcultural resistance to mainstream cultures are widely discussed in these investigations, which provide an opportunity to update older findings based on print media.

For example, Radway (1984) suggests in her study of romance fandom that women's romance reading can be interpreted as both combative and compensatory. She argues that women are combative in the sense of refusing their social role as a housewife through their encounters with romance fictions. In addition, romance reading is compensatory by providing women with a solitary space where they can withdraw from reality and fulfill their self-interest. However, Radway also pointed out that women's domestic role in patriarchal culture remains intact, and that the romance reading engenders no political resistance to patriarchal institutions.

Similarly, a great part of the discussion of *yaoi* fandom is grounded in its gender meanings. As Mizoguchi (2003) argues, *yaoi* fandom is actually a "female gendered space" (p. 65). A body of studies in Japan suggests that many Japanese female fans find the manipulation of male characters in a sexual fantasy world empowering (McLelland & Yoo, 2007; Mizoguchi, 2003; Nagaike, 2003; Jenkins, 1992). Welker (2006) comments that Japanese Boys' Love manga is a liberal sphere where writers and readers can work with and against the "heteronormative paradigm in the exploration of alternative" (p. 184). He also points out that female readers' identification with pretty male characters, which results from

the superficial objectification of boys in Japanese Boys' Love manga and its assumption of a female readership, has a far-reaching influence on "the construction of their sense of sexual subjectivity and identity" (p. 841).

The superficial objectification of boys and female readers' spectatorship, in other words, amount to a deconstruction of the male gaze. The notion of a "male gaze" derives from Mulvey's (1975) article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Mulvey argues that movies are actually a world ordered by sexual imbalance, where "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (p. 33). Mulvey indicates that as spectators, women viewers are forced to subject to the male gaze, since they must either identify with heroines who are always objectified by male desires or affiliate with the male characters to gaze upon the female protagonists. In contrast, in the viewing of *yaoi*, the female is the subject of the gaze, subverting the gender order by objectifying males under female spectatorship. Accordingly, *yaoi* might exert a significant influence on female readers' sexual subjectivity and identity.

In the context of Taiwan, Martin (2012) argues that the BL scene in Taiwan is "no feminist utopia or zone of unilateral sexual-political progressiveness," but "a participatory space created with immense imaginative energy and generative of great pleasure and intellectual as well as affective engagement for its largely female participants" (p. 365).

Liu (2009) studies *yaoi* fandom in terms of *yaoi* fans' resistance to the anti-BL activities in Hong Kong and mainland China. She found that the Internet plays a significant role in supporting *yaoi* fandom against the mainstream anti-BL discourse and in maintaining

yaoi's subculture status in both mainland China and Hong Kong, even as criticism of BL content has risen in recent years.

There is an abundance of studies published in English-language journals regarding the gender meanings of *yaoi*. However, due to language and other limitations, only few of them are related to the Chinese context, where the social culture is quite different from others. Perhaps because of the stereotyping of homosexual relationships in China's media (Zhou, 2012) and absence of homosexuality in China's legislation (Liu, 2011), the study of *yaoi* fandom has been neglected by Chinese scholars. Thus, there is a void in the literature regarding the study of *yaoi* fandom in the specific context of mainland China.

This thesis aims to lay out the first step for exploring *yaoi* fandom within a Chinese context. Grounded in the theories of fandom, this thesis strives to answer the following research questions:

Research Question: How do Chinese female fans construct their *yaoi* fandom subculture?

Research Question: How do Chinese female fans describe their *yaoi* communities?

Research Question: How does *yaoi* fandom inform Chinese women's perceptions and attitudes on homosexuality and gender?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

To study fans' own account of their fandom practices and experiences, in-depth interviews were employed in this study. As McCracken (1988) states, a long interview is one of the most powerful methods for taking the researchers into an individual's mental world to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. Furthermore, intensive interviews can provide more detailed and accurate responses than surveys regarding to respondents' opinions, values, motivations, recollections, experiences, and feelings about sensitive issues (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Accordingly, this research decided in-depth interviews would be the most helpful method for understanding fans' inner views of *yaoi* fandom.

Fifteen fans were interviewed intensively, using a semi-structured approach based on a list of prepared questions (see Appendix). It is an approach based on a pre-established set of questions that are asked to all informants, but it also allows a greater flexibility (Brennen, 2013). Instead of limiting the interviews to the questions on the list, the researcher followed up with extra questions based on the interviewees' responses. To accommodate the different contexts of interviews, not all interviewees were asked the same questions. Nonetheless, the interviews mainly focused on fans' reading behavior, their accounts of *yaoi* narratives, their social interactions with their peers, and their *yaoi* identification. Given the limitation of geography and the fact that *yaoi* fans often practice *yaoi* fandom online, all interviews were conducted on the Internet through QQ, the Chinese version of ICQ. Online interviews allowed the researcher, based in Ames, Iowa, to reach a wide geographic area and ensured the interviews could take place at the respondents' convenience. This format also offers

interviewees extra time and relatively more freedom to answer the questions (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Each interview lasted 1.7 hours, on average. In order to stimulate interviewees' active discussion and thus enhance the confirmability of the study, the researcher sometimes suggested some ideas based on interviewees' responses or shared her own thoughts or the thoughts of others regarding *yaoi* reading experiences.

All the interviewees were in their twenties; more than half of them were college students, and the rest were career women. The study focused on this age group because women this age typically enjoy more free time and greater opportunities to get access to and consume *yaoi* content, compared with high school students. In addition, many fans in their twenties have been cultivating their *yaoi* interest for at least four years, making it more likely they could offer more insight into their *yaoi* subculture. In order to protect the interviewees' real identities and personal information, this study will refer to them by aliases or online screen names, as shown in Table 1.

A snowball sampling technique was utilized to collect interview respondents. Given the relatively small size of *yaoi* fan groups and "because of the difficulty of locating the samples online" (Bortree, 2005, p.29), the researcher asked 6 friends who were fans of *yaoi* and early interviewees to recommend other potential informants. For example, Participant 1, 4, 9 and 14 were referred by researcher's Friend 1; Participant 2 and 8 were referred by Friend 2; Participant 3 and 7 were referred by Friend 3; Participant 5 and 15 were referred by Friend 4; Participant 10 and 11 were referred by Friend 5; Participant 13 was referred by Friend 6; Participant 6 was referred by Participant 4; Participant 12 was referred by Participant 11. Among these participants, two of them were the researcher's schoolmates and the researcher met one of them at a friend's party. Nevertheless, they were just

acquaintances. The study showed that the snowball technique was also a good way to build a

connection and trust between interviewers and informants, which helps to encourage more

active participation.

Table 1

Summary of the interviewees' information

Number	Alias	Age	Occupation	Duration of Fandom
1	Wang	20	Undergraduate	7
2	Yiyi	24	Graduate student	3
3	Faust	24	Secretary	9
4	Feng	22	Undergraduate	5
5	Su	25	Advertising designer	0.5
6	Fan	23	Graduate student	5
7	Kim	24	Media employer	10
8	Weiyi	23	Graduate student	3
9	Xin	22	Undergraduate	7
10	Simei	24	Self-employed	8
11	Xiao	24	Engineer	5
12	Leng	23	Quality engineer	6
13	Yu	25	Graduate student	6
14	Lu	22	Undergraduate	4
15	Echo	25	Graduate student	6
Total	15 Informants			

All the interviews were digitally recorded. A set of data was built for each

interviewee, including the interview transcriptions and the researcher's interview notes.

Around 117 pages of transcripts and notes were yielded and placed confidentially in the researcher's possession. Additionally, some observation notes were added as indispensable data to support the final conclusions. As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest, the use of field observations and existing documents along with interviews are important factors to build credibility in the findings. Thus, in order to better understand the *yaoi* fandom community and fans' social interactions in normal surroundings, the researcher conducted simple observations on public *yaoi* –centered websites, such as *yaoi* forums, fans' blogs, and on their Twitter-like accounts (Chinese Weibo).

During the process of data analysis, the researcher used open-ended coding. Some significant and remarkable responses, insights, meanings, concepts, and experiences from the transcripts were highlighted and categorized using several codes. Chinese social and cultural contexts were also taken into consideration to connect and integrate these categories. Along with these contextual explanations, various theories of fandom study were employed to conceptualize and interpret the patterns and themes that emerged from the data. As Gubrium and Holstein (2002) suggest, a theoretical perspective can help to organize, categorize, and interpret the patterns and themes from qualitative data. This is a process of dimensionalization, by which all the important attributes or characteristics of a category are defined and the irrelevant properties are taken out (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Ultimately, four main themes were revealed and addressed in this study. These themes were constructed in logic based on fans' articulations of texts, their social attitudes, and their social interactions and relations with other fans.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

As Fiske (1989) suggests, fans gain pleasure from consuming media texts and making their own meanings of their social identities and social relations. For *yaoi* fans, fandom first empowers female readers to pose a voyeuristic gaze upon homosexual men. This appears as a deconstruction of the male gaze, objectifying men to cater to heterosexual female spectators' desire. Second, it is found that *yaoi* serves as a contestable arena within which fans resist the heterosexual norms and the patriarchal gender orders while also manifesting compliance with the dominant social ideology. In other words, it seems that young female readers are appropriating Boys' Love content to reinforce their aspiration for idealized, equitable heterosexual relationships. Third, it is notable that fans' negotiation with gender crosses between the boundaries of fantasy and reality. Being aware of the differentiation between fiction and reality, fans maintain their symbolic resistance within the texts, within which fans enjoy the pleasure of escape and entertainment. Apart from constructing *yaoi* fandom through fans' interactions with texts, fans' social relations through online and offline interactions with other fans is also remarkable. Consistent with the diversity and fluidity of the Internet culture, *yaoi* fandom reflects both collective and individualistic characteristics. Accordingly, four main themes regarding fans' practices of *yaoi* fandom were categorized in this study: 1) voyeurism and the female gaze; 2) resistance and compliance; 3) entertainment and escape; 4) *yaoi* fandom: collective and individualistic.

Voyeurism and the Female Gaze

Through these in-depth interviews, it became clear that *yaoi* opens a window for fans to enjoy a sense of voyeurism due to its boy-centered content. In psychiatric texts, voyeurism has been regarded as a pathological illness, referring to individual exaggerated interests in viewing, observing, stealthily and erotically, preferred people who are naked or engaging in sexual activities (Metzl, 2004a). However, in the mediated environment, voyeurism is not necessarily only related to sexuality (Calvert, 2000). Just as Metzl (2004b) argues, voyeurism is a practice "imbued with power, gender, and other types of nonchemical imbalance" (p. 130). Especially in today's media environment, the enjoyment of voyeurism can arise from individual looking and eventually objectifying others with a determining and curious gaze (Blazer, 2006).

For example, *yaoi* first fulfills fans' curiosity about same-sex love. Many fans indicated that their first *yaoi* reading was driven by curiosity. Within the conservative Chinese social culture, homosexuality is marginalized and thus is unknown to a large number of people. Accordingly, it is conjecturable that *yaoi* opens a window for fans to learn about homosexuality. Participant 10, Simei, revealed a fresh feeling when she first learned from *yaoi* that romance can happen between two men instead of just between a man and a woman. Participant 4, Feng, also described her first encounter with *yaoi* fiction:

"That was an excellent work. Although the author was just 22, but I felt my horizon changed as reading the story. Because there was a detailed depiction of how a straight man became gay, I easily accepted *yaoi*."

Later on, in order to learn more about homosexuality, fans extended their voyeurism to gay people in real life, no longer just restricting themselves to the *yaoi* texts. Benefiting from

the development of technologies, fans were able to get more access to the subject of their fandom.

As Calvert (2000) suggests, the development of electronic media, such as blogs or other social networking websites, has led to new form of mediated voyeurism, which he defines as the "consumption of revealing images of and information about others' apparently real and unguarded lives, often yet not always for purposes of entertainment but frequently at the expense of privacy and discourse, through the means of the mass media and Internet" (p. 23). He further explains that electronic media offers a safe and convenient space for the common voyeur to gaze upon others. This is not necessarily related to sexual content, but also includes other details.

Accordingly, given the secure and private space that the Internet offers, it is evident that *yaoi* fans expand their voyeurism to the gay people on the Internet. The informants in this study, such as Participant 1, Wang, and Participant 6, Fan, reported a voyeuristic desire to observe gays online. Many of them are following some gays' Weibo (a Twitter-like account), blogs, or other social networking accounts. They described their observations as stealthy, without serious interactions with these gay people. However, the interviewees also described a group of young girls who are "cyber-stalking" gay people on the Internet. The interviewees said these young girls like to make online comments, make a show of supporting gay people, or even try to couple two males together without considering their real sexual orientations. The Internet and *yaoi* texts appear to empower some young women to pay intimate attention to the details of a sexual orientation that is not their own.

Furthermore, the voyeuristic appeal of *yaoi* also embodies female inquisitiveness about sex. As they get more into *yaoi* texts, same-sex copulation is not veiled for many readers. To

make the "same-sex love" more natural and authentic, these readers believe some degree of sexual description in *yaoi* fiction is necessary. Simen confessed that one of her criteria for attractive plots is sex description. She declared, "It is natural as the relationship develops. Moreover, sex is as normal as eating. *Yaoi* satisfies girls' sexual desire." Based on this belief, there is a tendency for female readers to embrace the sex depictions in *yaoi*. Participant 13, Yu, indicated that sometimes she would find *yaoi* from Xianwang.com, a website that contains more erotic *yaoi* content. However, the informants claimed that sexual description is by no means pornography. Only when it is a natural expression of love is it acceptable. Nonetheless, the erotic descriptions in *yaoi*, no matter how much of them and to what degree, do satisfy young women's curiosity about sex. At some point, this is a protest against the conservative patriarchal culture. Because sex has been associated with lasciviousness and immorality in traditional Chinese culture, any topics about sex would be depicted as obscene and taboo. Even with China's gradual openness to the Western world, sexual puritanism still dominates in social norms and values. In this sense, *yaoi* serves as a window for fans to peep at sex, fulfilling their desire for voyeurism.

Through fans' voyeuristic enjoyment, the power of a female gaze is produced. It is a subversion of the male gaze, for women become the subject of spectatorship, controlling the gaze at the male protagonists. Male protagonists instead are subject to the objectification of female desire.

According to Mulvey (1975), a male-gendered gaze is pervasive in the movies. Women exist on the screen merely as an object or a spectacle, subject to the determining gaze of male protagonists. As spectators, female audiences would be either "affected by a female character occupying the center of the narrative arena" (p. 29) or would identify with a male

protagonist's masculine view. In Mulvey's words, both heroines and female viewers would fall into an unstable sexual identity, for they are "torn between the deep blue sea of passive femininity and the devil of regressive masculinity" (p. 30). Men are always occupying the controlling position, from both sides of screen. Male viewers could achieve the pleasure of gaze by identifying with the active hero on the screen. Not only existing in movies, the male gaze also prevails in other forms of spectacle, such as television, advertisements, or fictional texts.

On the contrary, things appear differently in *yaoi*. Instead of occupying the controlling gaze, the male figures are actually being placed in a position that invites female readers to see them as the objects of the gaze. Female readers are empowered to enjoy a sense of subjectivity and fulfill their desire for attractive men. It is reported that few males identify as a fan of *yaoi*. *Yaoi* readership is made up of a large number of female readers. Without the existence of male fans, female readers feel free to regard men as the object of female desires. The relative lack of female characters in *yaoi* further rounds out this deconstruction of the male gaze.

When asked why fans read Boys' Love rather than Girls' Love, the interviewees reasoned that it was because they are not boys, and thus there was no need to identify with any hero in *yaoi*. As Participant 12, Leng, explained:

> "In the Girls' Love, it would be easy to cultivate a strong sense of identification with the heroines. Somehow I can't accept it. I am even OK with the incestuous setting of father-to-son in *yaoi*, because I am not a man, and hence there is not a sense of identification. And, of course, if it is a good story."

Yu regarded it as a way of having power over men. Because there is no sense of identification with male protagonists, female readers can get free from the determining male gaze and be empowered to objectify male figures to cater to their desires for men. They can

control the way they interpret and make meaning of the story, instead of internalizing the masculine views that male viewers and protagonists project onto women. At this point, female readers are somehow occupying a "highland" to gaze at men, which counters what Mulvey suggests is the dominant setting of the male gaze.

Furthermore, being fascinated with Boys' Love does not necessarily mean that female fans identify as homosexuals. In fact, many fans identify as a heterosexual. Female fans claimed that the reason they like reading *yaoi* is their affection for boys. Participant 7, Kim, said, "I am a fan of *yaoi*, but I still like boys. Maybe this is because I like boys that I turn to read the stories which concentrates on boys." Feng justified herself to her parents by saying, "I won't become homosexual. My affection for *yaoi* demonstrates my double love of boys." Therefore, as Participant 5, Su, concluded, "Reading *yaoi*, by nature, is a kind of appreciation and pursuit of boys." It is reasonable to conclude that female fans achieve pleasure from objectifying males in *yaoi* to fulfill their own desires.

Another piece of evidence demonstrating a female gaze is the lack of female figures in *yaoi* and hence the readers' lack of identification with women characters. Although there are several female archetypes in *yaoi*, the interviewees did not identify with them. Most female characters in this genre play the role of a third wheel to a homoerotic relationship or the mother of a gay protagonist who fiercely opposes her son's gayness. The existence of these female characters is designed to justify the true love between two males. For the purpose of highlighting the faithfulness and loyalty of the boys' love, these female characters are typically depicted as villains. However, the interviewees did not necessarily feel uncomfortable with these negative representations of women or imagine themselves in those roles because they believed they only exist for story development. As Yu elaborated, "A

female figure in *yaoi* is villain first, and then second as woman. Because she is designed as villain for plot development, she is being distorted by the authors." Participant 15, Echo, pointed out: "Only a few women are misrepresented in *yaoi* because the authors are all women, and they won't treat women harshly." The absence or limited representations of women appears to enables female fans to legitimate their subjectivity of gaze at men.

Overall, through *yaoi*, fans engage in a more or less open voyeurism in the way they gain the pleasure from a subversive female gaze at attractive male characters. *Yaoi* renders a private space within which female fans are empowered to gaze in detail at men, at homosexuals, and at their sexual behaviors. During this process of voyeurism, a traditional male-centered gaze is destabilized and shifted to women's control. By appropriating male characters as the object of spectacle, female fans appear to construct a sexual subjectivity and fulfill their desires for overpowering men. However, it is also notable that fans' empowerment is confined to *yaoi* fandom, as the researcher observed from *yaoi* websites that few male readers report an engagement with *yaoi*. In this sense, *yaoi* fandom constructs a purely women-centered world in which fans find empowerment through voyeurism.

Resistance and Compliance

A range of fandom studies has revealed that modes of resistance often arise from cultural practices. As Fiske (1992) argues, fandom is often related to "the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people, particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race" (p. 30). Jenkins (1992) also suggests that "fans operate from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness" (p.26). Admittedly, it is important to be clear what is meant by resistance. As King (1997) describes, a theory of

resistance often "focuses on subversion and opposition" (p. 330), turning a blind eye to "the potentially shared interests between dominant and subordinate groups" (p. 342). In other words, fandom might be characterized as a paradoxical subculture that involves fans' resistance and compliance simultaneously.

In the case of *yaoi* fandom, a dichotomy of resistance and compliance is detectable from fans' articulations and practices. On one hand, resistance emerges from fans' dialogues with homosexuality, gender hierarchy, and parental authority. A threefold power struggle might be envisioned: heterosexual fans versus homosexual content, female readers versus male figures, and youths versus parents. Self-identified as heterosexual, female fans appear to appropriate marginalized homoerotic texts to negotiate their interpretations of sexuality and to justify their desire for an independent, equal gender order. Through consuming *yaoi* texts, fans arrive at many thoughts and ideas that reflect their social identities regarding sexuality and gender, which, interestingly, run counter to the heteronormative paradigm and the normalized gender order. On the other hand, the implication here is that the embrace of homosexuality in *yaoi* ultimately serves to reinforce female desire for idealized heterosexual romance. Furthermore, as a youth culture, *yaoi* fandom indicates a certain deviance toward parental authority. Yet it is subject to commercialization at the same time.

Foremost among the unique meanings that fans produce is their negotiation with homosexuality, which is evident from their interactions with *yaoi* texts. In general, *yaoi* fans appear to hold a relatively liberal attitude toward homosexuality. Although some interviewees in this study reported a negative perception about same-sex love before being a fan of *yaoi*, they later changed their views and embraced homosexuality after being touched by the depictions of pure love. Su indicated an attitude change from rational understanding to

emotional support after she started reading *yaoi*. Feng also said, "A good *yaoi* work can help [me] learn more about the thoughts of homosexuals, which range from their dreams to their daily life. It is good to obviate prejudice." Beyond just supporting homosexuality, *yaoi* encouraged Echo to go further in thinking about more serious issues:

> "To put it simply, *yaoi* encouraged me to think about serious issues, including the history and social status of homosexuals, the possibility of legalized gay marriage in China, as well as the sexual perversion, and bisexuality. Right now I already have my own personal judgment, which I believe is an important part in my value system."

Apparent, fans' dialogue with *yaoi* texts leads them to negotiate their own articulations of homosexuality. These interviewees expressed a consensus of support for gay rights and personal autonomy – a challenge for a heteromative society, to some extent. In China, with its conservative heterosexual customs, same-sex love is taboo and marginalized by the mainstream society. Thus, it is understandable that homosexual groups are having great difficulty finding protection from legislation. For a majority of Chinese people, homosexuality is considered immoral and thus hard to accept, especially given the fact of one-child policy in China and parents' deep-rooted interest in procreation for the continuity of a family. If a child comes out as a gay, as Fan described her gay friend's case, it would be a dramatic challenge for the family. However, having learned more about same-sex love from *yaoi*, fans began to embrace homosexuality more liberally and supportively. In this respect, fans produce a rebellious meaning from *yaoi* to combat the dominant heteronormative paradigm.

Due to the social stigmatization of same-sex love, female readers' reading BL is labeled as "strange" as well. To maintain this resistant practice, some fans are forced to conceal their *yaoi* interest in public, or in front of their parents, to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding and prejudice. Consequently, the interviewees said they prefer to keep their resistance within the

fan group, emphasizing their personal privacy and autonomy. The informants insisted reading *yaoi* is just a personal matter, a private habit. Besides, these fans attributed their underground resistance to homosexuals' appeal for privacy, security, and quiet support. According to these informants, who have personal connections with gay friends, some young fans' high-profile attention to homosexual groups has been criticized by gay people. Many *yaoi* fans and homosexual groups call for less excessive attention for the purpose of protecting their resistance from public intervention. As Echo proposed,

> "The best way to treat homosexuals is—rather than discriminate or to pay over-attention—instead to protect their rights. We should just treat them as normal people like us, since they might have their own defects or bad habits as well."

Nonetheless, it is notable that fans' supportive attitude appears to extend only toward those who insist on true love and maintain their loyalty to each other, regardless of difficulties from the outside world. Surprisingly, with regard to the same-sex love in reality, these informants reported their own stereotypical perceptions of gay people. As discussed earlier, *yaoi* stimulates fans to train voyeuristic eyes on homosexuals in real life. Some of them follow gays' social networking accounts or register in gay forums or online communities. However, the more these fans learn about homosexuality in real life, the more disappointed they were. Simei stated frankly, "My love to BL is only limited to *yaoi*, because the real situation, especially the homosexuals in China, really disappoints me and even makes me feel disgusted." After following some gay forums or online communities, Simei decided gay people have serious issues with promiscuity and hook-ups or else conceal their sexual orientation for the purpose of marrying a straight woman. Unlike Simei, who made her observations online, some fans adopted their stereotypes of gay people from media coverage or websites. Some fans learned from the Internet that some people might pretend to come out

as gay in order to earn popularity. When asked whether they had verified the accuracy of the stories, surprisingly few of them really did check. In other words, to some extent, *yaoi* fans appeared to comply with the dominant stereotyping of homosexuality and domonstrated an unwillingness to change their stereotypes.

Fans seem to impose their stereotypes on homosexuals as a group or on other gay people they do not really know. These informants revealed a friendly, supportive attitude toward gay people they considered as friends. Kim claimed:

> "My gay friend and his partner have a commitment to each other, and their life is pretty good. Their life is as normal as ours, and they are not as promiscuous as others. So nothing is special. That is their life. It's acceptable and I can totally understand."

Because of their trust in their gay friends, some fans said they believed true love exists among gay people. However, these fans were hesitant to promise their full support if a member of their families was to come out as a gay. Some justified this contradiction by mentioning their consideration for the elders in the family and their concerns about sexual confusion. Fan stated:

> "If it happens to my family, I may not totally reject it, but I may reject it at some points. If my younger brother or little sister[1] come out, I can totally express my understanding, and listen to their voices, and would not reject them. But I would also think of the feelings of my uncle[2] and his wife. Because we are a family after all, so if it happens, I may feel sad about that, and reject it from my heart."

> Echo asserted, "First of all, I hope I could help him or her to analyze the situation, to learn deeply about themselves, and make clear whether they are homosexual, or bisexual, or transvestist. Second, if they have their own partner, I will be blessing for them, but I also hope for them to keep a low profile. If they don't have a partner yet, I will suggest they don't make friends promiscuously, and protect themselves well from the sex activities."

Although *yaoi* fans demonstrate their approval of homosexuality, a strong bias against homosexuality underlies the attitudes that come through in these interviews. According to Su,

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[1] The "brother" and "sister" here refer to Fan's younger male nephew and female niece.
[2] "Uncle" refers to Fan's mother's younger brother.

"Ultimately, a good man should get married with a good woman, make a happy family together, have babies, and get blessings from people." While these interviewees appreciate the courage of gays who strive for their true love, fans themselves are looking for the true love represented in *yaoi* from a heterosexual relationship. They support their gay friends but would be more hesitant to accept same-sex love from their intimate families.

In sum, *yaoi* fans' resistance to dominant heteronormative ideology is paradoxical. On one hand, they are in favor of the same-sex love within the *yaoi* texts, especially admiring the gays' courageous and pure love. Thereby, fans often stand with homosexual groups to strive for gay autonomy. On the other hand, they simultaneously yield to the mainstream stereotyping of homosexuality. Their fandom manifests a more complicated relationship with homosexuality than mere support since they also comply with the dominant heterosexual ideology. Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume that fans' opposition to a heterocentric paradigm is symbolically limited.

A second aspect of resistance concentrates on fans' negotiation with the patriarchal gender order through poaching the idea of equal love from the *yaoi* texts. In comparison to the strong hero and inferior heroine of a traditional romance, the relationship between two men in *yaoi* instead embodies a sense of independence and equality, which is echoed in women's desire for a new gender order. As Fan described:

> "Female figures in BG[3] is somehow idiotic and weak. But in BL, even as uke, he is also very strong and is capable to handle many things with seme. Anyway, he doesn't have to depend on seme, because he himself is strong enough."

Both Feng and Echo reasoned that the equality of Boys' Love results from the fact that they are both men, and thus there is no sex discrimination between them. Influenced by *yaoi*,

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[3] BG is short for Boys and Girls, referring to the traditional heterosexual romance genre.

fans somehow cultivate a "masculine" personality, which, in Fan's words, means learning how gay men overcome difficulties and work with an open heart as men. Likewise, Leng argued that women should be independent enough to have their own private social circle and career. Consequently, yearning for the equal and supportive love in *yaoi*, fans interpret their perception of ideal love as an equal, mutual understanding and a supportive relationship.

Significantly, under such a conservative patriarchal culture in China, fans' appropriation of the homoerotic relationships in *yaoi* to express their desires for independence and equality serves to voice their resistance to the male-centered gender order. Chinese women have been "highly dependent as daughter, wife and mother of men within a highly structured and hierarchical patriarchy" for thousands of years (Eng, 2004, p. 5). Even though modernizations and the influx of Western values have helped Chinese women achieve more social and economic recognition, the ideology of hierarchical patriarchy is still ingrained in the mainstream social discourse. Unsatisfied with the unequal gender order, more Chinese women voice their desires for more freedom and independence. This is also resonant with parents' high expectations of their children, a tradition in China by which sons are expected to become dragons and daughters are expected to become phoenix, both of which are the symbols of power and success in China.

Influenced by the representation of same-sex love in *yaoi*, fans define ideal love as "independent, equal, and mutually understanding and supportive." They look for this kind of love in reality. Echo stated: "The 'Plato's love' that arises from males' soulmate friendship in *yaoi* is something I really appreciate and try to seek." Nonetheless, female fans are clear that it is hard to find an independent, equal gender order in reality. As Leng said:

> "I am much more traditional. I believe women should be independent and should have their own career and life. Yet I would somehow like to see my man is much stronger

than me. He can give me suggestions or help me when I come across some problems. Both of us are equal to each other, but I can count on him sometimes."

Apparently, there is a similar paradox among *yaoi* fans with regard to the patriarchal gender order. On one hand, there is the *yaoi* female reader whose reading enables her to better assert her own rights within the structured patriarchal order. Fans resist the gender order by complimenting the independent, equitable same-sex love in *yaoi*. On the other hand, fans are aware that what they believe to be ideal love rarely happens in real life and even articulate a desire for protection from men. At this point, fans again fall back into patriarchal norms, with which they have been socialized from childhood. In conclusion, this study would argue that *yaoi* fandom is a way by which female fans appropriate Boys' Love content to reinforce their aspirations of an idealized heterosexual relationship.

A third form of resistance among *yaoi* fans is their defiance of parental authority. Participant 14, Lu, explained, "My parents oppose homosexuality. They thought kids who grew up from a healthy family should be heterosexual. I think it is kind of wasting time to explain to them. They can't change my mind, and I don't want to change theirs, either." For many parents, their only concern about their daughters' reading *yaoi* is whether their children would become homosexual. Once the fans assured their parents this was not the case, the parents did not intervene so much. The generation gap is also evident in Kim's case. Kim's mother sometimes would read some *yaoi*, but Kim refused to discuss *yaoi* with her to avoid embarrassment when her mother would ask something about gays' sexual behavior. In addition, fans are resisting parental authority by spending time on *yaoi* instead of studying. Attached to the high expectations they have for their kids, many Chinese parents expect their children will achieve success with their studies and then with their future lives. Consequently, they wish their kids would spend more time on their studies. Participant 2, Yiyi claimed, "My

parents won't stop me reading *yaoi*—only if it influences my studies or normal life."
Nevertheless, Yiyi, refused to tell her parents about her *yaoi* interest.

As a youth subculture constructed by young women, *yaoi* fandom suggests a departure
from the mainstream authoritative culture that is reinforced by their parents' generation. To a
large extent, *yaoi* fandom is devalued by mainstream culture. Admittedly, more and more
yaoi texts are proliferating online, which makes the texts more available and accessible. With
the popularity of *yaoi*, the Internet has pushed *yaoi* toward the foreground, forcing the digital
media to consider its commercial potential. As a result, y*aoi* texts are becoming a commodity
that fans can consume online. However, as Echo argued, the commercialization of *yaoi* is
constricted on the Internet. Given the sensitivity of homosexual content, it is challenging to
run a *yaoi* industry with official publicity. Because of the strict censorship in China, the
sensitive *yaoi* texts would have a serious problem being published or disseminated by official
mass media, such as by newspapers, broadcasting, TV, or official publications.

Furthermore, with regard to the *yaoi*'s fandom's resistance against heteronormative
ideology, the commercialization of *yaoi* instead seems to have a counterproductive effect. As
Fan pointed out, in order to cater to young female desire for "pretty boys" and to attract more
readers to *yaoi*, some authors have highlighted the "girly masculinity" of male characters,
which, by its nature, reinforces a gay stereotype. Second, to fulfill some young female
readers' curiosity and voyeurism, a subgenre of H BL came out. This is a sensitive and
underground *yaoi* subcategory, which involves numerous elements of pornography, such as
detailed descriptions of sexual organs and explicit depictions of intercourse. Worrying with
the inclusion of pornographic description, some fans disapprove of teenage girls'
consumption of *yaoi*. For instance, Feng did not want her younger sister to read *yaoi* because

she was worried *yaoi* would have a negative influence on her sister's perceptions of love and moral values and believed her sister was too young to handle it. The involvement of pornography in *yaoi*, on the other hand, would likely smear the merit of *yaoi*'s rebellious meaning and might aggravate the marginalization of *yaoi* culture.

Even if the commercialization of *yaoi* would facilitate the development of *yaoi* culture and create social openness toward homosexuality, that would not necessarily mean dominant heterosexual norms would be toppled. As Hebdige (1979) contends, although a youth culture may start with symbolic resistance, once the subcultural style is recognized for its profit-making potential, "they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions, by creating new commodities" (p. 96). This argument can be applied to *yaoi* fandom as well. In fact, as Leng acknowledged, "*Yaoi* would sustain developing, because it has to satisfy a small group of female readers' needs. Yet *yaoi* could not replace traditional romance. Traditional romance is always the mainstream, because the readership is much larger." Wang added, "*Yaoi* fans just occupy a small part of the total population, so it can't help homosexuality to be accepted by the whole society." In this sense, fandom ultimately loses its political importance and falls into compliance with the prevailing patriarchal heterosexual ideology.

In conclusion, *yaoi* fandom is paradoxical. It comprises elements of resistance and compliance simultaneously. On one hand, *yaoi* fandom resists the patriarchal heteronormative paradigm because it threatens to legitimate fans' own sexual and gender meanings. On the other hand, these fans acknowledge the existence of the dominant heterocentric norms and patriarchal gender order and have internalized them to a large extent. It is worth pointing out that there are some potentially shared interests between the

subordinate *yaoi* fan groups and the dominant majority population. In other words, *yaoi* fans

are poaching homosexual texts to comply with heterosexual ideology. Their resistance is

symbolically limited in many respects, and suffers from the possibility of eventually being

incorporated by the mainstream culture.

Entertainment and Escape

When the interviewees were asked what *yaoi* means to them, it is significant to note that

yaoi first serves as an "entertainment in leisure time" or "spice of life." Some fans first knew

about *yaoi* from other leisure activities. For instance, many informants first learned about

yaoi from Japanese comics, network literature, online idols fan forums or other social

networking accounts. Thereby, *yaoi* fandom seems to derive from other forms of

entertainment. The principal reason fans consume *yaoi* texts is to relax and pass time. As

Yiyi stressed, "It is an entertainment in the leisure time. If I have some study work or other

things, I won't read *yaoi*. It can be seen as a spice of life. But it's also OK if there is no *yaoi*."

Participant 3, Faust, regarded reading *yaoi* as the equivalent of playing games or browsing

social networking websites. However, the consumption of *yaoi* texts largely depends on the

amount of fans' spare time. Only if fans get free from their busy work or study can they turn

to *yaoi* to get some entertainment.

In this conceptualization, relaxation and formal work or study are opposed to each other.

As Radway (1984) puts it, relaxation suggests "a reduction in the state of tension produced

by prior conditions" (p. 90). Accordingly, through consuming *yaoi* texts, fans are able to

evade their normal duties as students or employees and thus enjoy a sense of escape.

Yaoi is also regarded as a substitute for traditional heterosexual romance. Traditional romance, which mainly features strong men and passive women, is no longer a source of pleasure for many female readers. Although many *yaoi* fans started with traditional heterosexual romance, they grew tired of the clichés. As Yiyi stated:

"Many romantic fictions nowadays are idiotic, and their plots or story writing are not as good as *yaoi*. I found it is easier to identify with the characters in the romance, and sometimes it is a little bit Mary Sue[4]."

Compared to traditional romance, *yaoi* instead offers another possibility, in which "there is less tears and less over-sensitivity," "the characteristics of two major characters are much stronger, and descriptions of emotional ambivalence is much more attractive," "two males are relatively straightforward, and hence understand each other much easier."

Participant 11, Xiao, commented, "The *yaoi* fictions I read are more about the stories that two males work together and support each other to get success, which differs from the model of strong men and ask-for-protection females in the romance."

Yu furthered, "Most of *yaoi* are setting under the real social environment. Because homosexuals are a minority group, gays in *yaoi* usually suffer a lot of pressure from society. Compared to those heterosexual relationships, *yaoi* can be seen as a resistance from adversity, just like a masterpiece usually comes from tragedy."

Because of the representation of forbidden love and a tragic setting in *yaoi*, fans enjoy a sense of aestheticism. Consistent with the definition of *yaoi*, which is derived from Tanbi in Japan, *yaoi* refers to the worship and pursuit of aesthetic beauty. Feng considered *yaoi* as an appreciation of beauty. She elaborated, "The *yaoi* fictions I like are based on the pure love that two males fall in love just for love. Those fictions, which reflect the relationships only driven by pure love, mutual understanding, are all good works, no matter if they are happy endings or tragedies." In Echo's understanding, the worship of pure love is a despairing

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[4] This term refers to an over-idealized female character with good graces, heart and mind, imagined by authors or readers.

aestheticism because same-sex love has been forbidden by social prejudice. Fan believed that compared to heterosexual romance, a love based on two males striving together to overcome the pressure and difficulties society imposes on them seems more like true love.

Fans' aesthetic pleasure not only develops from their emotional resonance with the aesthetic love between two gay men, but also gains pleasure from their appreciation of the characters' good looks. Influenced by the influx of Korean and Japanese "pretty boy" bands, girlish looks and demeanors have influenced the way young women perceive desirable masculinity in China and other Asian countries (Louie, 2012). For example, Participant 8, Weiyi, reported her first *yaoi* reading was driven by the slash about two handsome singers in Korean singing groups. Su described this aesthetic portrayal as eye-candy. Leng confessed, "I am much more appearance-oriented. After getting used to pretty boys in *yaoi*, sometimes I would imagine two handsome guys coupling when I saw them walking on the street." In short, the representations of pretty boys and the pure love between them in *yaoi* embody the most attractive features for young female perceptions of beauty.

Nevertheless, many *yaoi* fans underline a fundamental difference between fiction and reality. Participant 9, Xin, pointed out that the ideal love is rarely possible for a heterosexual relationship. Because of the gap between reality and fantasy, fans poach *yaoi* texts to carve out a space to escape the "ugly" reality. As Wang concluded,

> "Male protagonists and the same-sex love in *yaoi* are being beautified. The facial appearance of gays in reality usually is lower than fans' expectation. Many people think that boys' love is true love, whereas many gay relationships are based on sex and booty calls. This is the distinction of ideal world and reality. Because we can't make it in real life, people turn to look for it from the fiction. Many things portrayed in the *yaoi* fiction are not possible in reality. Since it is not possible, fans look for the possibility in a fictional world."

According to Radway (1984), reading to escape the present is not a new behavior; rather, it is normal in women's reading romance. Similarly, in the case of reading Boys' Love, fans underline a denial of reality and a favoring of this fictional world. By indulging in the *yaoi* texts, fans are able to free themselves from cruel reality and fulfill their desire for ideal love and aestheticism in the fictional world. However, Fiske (1989) argues, fans' pleasures of evasion "tend to center on the body; those of the production of contrary meanings center on the mind" (p. 56). *Yaoi* texts create a space for fans to withdraw from the present, but these fans must also negotiate the boundaries of fantasy and reality.

Apart from enjoying the pleasure of entertainment and escape, female readers get some gratification from the narratives of story. Consistent with Jenkins's (1992) finding that female fans are more likely to focus on the elaboration of paradigmatic relationships, character psychology, and motivations, Lu described *yaoi* authors' sophisticated way of writing about conflicts and a change in characters' feelings, which she believes are helpful to highlight the difficulties that homosexuals confront. Gradually, fans appear to develop a special inclination toward specific subgenres. For example, Echo preferred those involving the elements of detective, or Chinese martial arts chivalry, some of which she thought could even compete with classic literature. For these fans, the narrative of *yaoi* texts provides a great source of pleasure.

In Radway's (1989) argument, it is a strategy of compensation, which fills readers with "the illusion of movement or change achieved through informal acquisition of factual 'knowledge'" (p. 113). Through consuming the *yaoi* text, the fictional information—such as the subject of a story, a complicated narrative, humor, or tragic elements—may stimulate fans' sensibility or empathy and then produce insights, worldviews. For instance, these *yaoi*

readers articulated an achievement of knowledge about gayness. As Echo described, the ingenious plot designs and authors' sophisticated writing, alongside some advanced ideas and in-depth thoughts conveyed from the texts, help fans to enrich their perceptions about the *yaoi* and even influence their worldviews. In this sense, *yaoi* compensates fans with a particular kind of pleasure, which aids fans in evading the only choice of traditional heterosexual romance.

Over time, due to benefits and the pleasure of entertainment and escape, female readers' obsession with *yaoi* becomes a ritualized practice. Many informants indicated that reading *yaoi* has become a habit. After getting used to *yaoi*, many fans are no longer fascinated with traditional romance so much. In addition, with the advantage of the Internet and smartphones, the proliferation and variety of online resources enable fans to consume *yaoi* easily. As a career woman, Faust stated that she usually reads *yaoi* everyday via her phone, sometimes on the way to work or anytime she is free. As a student, Lu normally browses *yaoi* from the Internet for around half an hour every day, though she is busy with her studies.

In sum, reading *yaoi* can be seen, at least for these interviewees, as a strategy of entertainment and escape. Foremost, *yaoi* functions as entertainment for these fans. Readers engage their attention to get some relaxation and a break from performing their duties in reality. Second, *yaoi* fandom seems to carve out a space within which fans can deny their physical presence while enjoying an idealized, aesthetic fictional world. Immersed in the fictional world, fans negotiate contrary meanings inherent in the boundaries between the fantasy and reality. *Yaoi* also compensates readers with an alternative narrative. In comparison to the banal storytelling in heterosexual romance, fans achieve an alternative

pleasure and other knowledge system. Pleased by the *yaoi*'s function of entertainment and escape, female readers are motivated to practice their fandom ritually.

Yaoi fandom: Collective and Individualistic

A close examination of *yaoi* fandom has revealed that two distinctive *yaoi* perspectives emerge from fans' cultural practices. It is interesting to note that fans are either identifying as a member of a community or as an individualistic fan. By "community," it refers to the social grouping of individuals who share similar interests and are joined together through some form of membership. By "individualistic," it means *yaoi* fans demonstrate a distinctly, fluid and individualistic commitment to *yaoi* fandom. In both the construction of *yaoi* community, and the demonstration of individualistic perspectives, this study shows the Internet plays a significant role in the formation of *yaoi* fandom.

As Jenkins (2006b) suggests, in today's convergence culture, a participatory culture would develop as a collective intelligence. In a study of the television series *Survivor*, he illustrates how online message boards and forums become knowledge communities that structure and organize the fans' knowledge about a particular text. He also indicates that collective intelligence is built on the "ability of virtual communities to leverage the combined expertise of their members" (p. 27). Consequently, fans establish knowledge communities through gathering and processing specific media texts and by creatively appropriating and transforming them in their own way.

Accordingly, a collective intelligence, or a knowledge community, emerges from *yaoi* fandom. First, many fans suggest that they have been commenting in online *yaoi* forums and websites for many years and visit the forums regularly. Many of them first knew about *yaoi*

from the Internet. They are devoted to these online communities, including BBS (bulletin

board system), Baidu post bars[5] and other kinds of online forums, by exchanging *yaoi* texts,

sharing their ideas about certain plots or stories, and discussing *yaoi*-related topics with their

peers. In this sense, fans' commitment to *yaoi* communities first comes from a practical,

textual appreciation of *yaoi* content. For them, *yaoi* texts and related content are the principal

reason they are driven to participate in these virtual communities.

> Yiyi explained: "I seldom participate in any *yaoi* websites, except the *yaoi* section on
> my campus BBS. Some people would recommend *yaoi* fictions on the section, and I
> would search for some I was interested in."

> Kim also stated, "I am hardly involved in any *yaoi* online groups. I went to the forums
> and post bars only for reading *yaoi*."

Compared with the official dissemination of media texts, which is protected by

copyright, the Internet enables *yaoi* fans to reach and circulate *yaoi* texts more freely. There

is a huge black market online where fans can exchange and download *yaoi* texts for free.

Even though the original websites or online *yaoi* columns on which the fictions are first

serialized charge readers for money, many other forums or websites provide free texts that

readers can consume. This is other reason that readers become involved with certain online

groups.

> Faust described: "Jinjiang.com (a website where many original *yaoi* texts are serialized)
> often asks for VIP access, which charges money. Hence I always wait for the fiction to
> be finished and be uploaded."

> Leng added, "When I look for a *yaoi* fiction, I would go to the Baidu post bar. This is
> because it would update the newest chapters quickly and it is free. I am the person who
> prefers a pirated edition."

Within these communities, *yaoi* fans are seeking ways to maintain and prolong their

pleasurable engagement with their favorite *yaoi* content, and sometimes join together to

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[5] Baidu post bars are similar to online forums, provided by the Chinese search engine Baidu Company.

evaluate some specific *yaoi* texts and make a collaborative production. In addition, by engaging with these communities, fans also can obtain topics for their daily conversation with their peers or with the authors. For example, Xin described her daily routine on *yaoi*-related websites this way:

> "Browse some *yaoi* authors' Weibo [Chinese twitter-like account], search for some *yaoi* fictions, glance through some funny things that authors or other fans uploaded online, and sometimes talk with other fans about story plots and recommend books to each other."

In comparison to those who just pass by, Feng is involved in online activities more actively. She would comment on authors' tweets or "like" their posts. "Sometimes the authors would reply to me," she added, "for instance, when I was the first person who pointed out her well-designed details in the story, or my greeting evoked her resonance."

Over time, a new set of rules and shared knowledge concentrated on *yaoi* was created. Among these news rules and knowledge, *yaoi* terminology created by fans is the most distinguished. Many unique terms, such as "Gong (攻)," which is also known as "seme" (top, or attacker), and "Shou (受)," which is equal to "uke" (bottom, or receiver), were produced and developed from *yaoi* texts, and these were widely utilized in fans' social conversations. Sometimes "Gong" and "Shou" are replaced by "1" and "0," which symbolize the penetrator and receiver, respectively. From these two terms, many words were developed, such as "Nian Shang (年上)" and "Nian Xia (年下)," which refer to an older seme and a younger uke, respectively. The couple pairing of "seme" and "uke" is abbreviated as "CP." When "CP" demonstrates as "A*B," it represents that A is the seme and B is the uke. When "CP" becomes "ABA" or "BAB," it means that both male characters could be either seme or uke. When it comes to more explicit homoerotic descriptions, fans prefer to use "cucumber (Huang Gua, 黄瓜)" to represent "penis," and they replace "anus" with "chrysanthemum (Ju

Hua, 菊花)" in order to avoid improper speech in public. Another widely used term is "Ji

Qing (基情)," which describes the gay relationship. "Ji (基)" is derived from a homophone of

a Cantonese word, which pronounces "Gay" as "Ji."

These terms were generated from *yaoi* stories, from nicknames of the characters, or

from other relevant homophonic words, for the purpose of easy communication in public

spaces without provoking outsiders' aversion, especially when fans are talking about some

topics related to homosexual intercourse. Even as the popularity of *yaoi* and some *yaoi* terms,

such as "Gong (攻)," "Shou (受)," and "Ji Qing (基情)," have grown and become widely

used by outsiders, many particular terms are unknown to those who are not a fan of *yaoi*.

Meanwhile, many interviewees indicated an unwillingness to use these terms in their

conversations with outsiders.

> Yiyi explained: "I rarely used *yaoi* terms when I talked to someone who is not a fan. For
> one reason, they may not understand; for the other, some people may feel averse about
> that. My roommates (who are *yaoi* fans, too) remind me intentionally not to tell other
> people with whom you are not familiar that you are a *yaoi* fan. I think this is because
> some people may not have good impression of *yaoi* fans."

In brief, the Internet plays a significant role in empowering fans to maintain and fortify

their *yaoi* fandom experience because it provides an anonymous, private, and relatively

secure space where they can practice their "strange" fandom without worrying about some

unwelcome comments from outsiders. However, *yaoi* fans' connection with these online

groups is through weak social networks. Admittedly, *yaoi* fans draw a clear distinction

between *yaoi* fans and outsiders, based on their selection of texts, mutual interests and shared

knowledge. Yet fans' fluid and individualistic perspectives with *yaoi* are clearly detectable.

Just as Tulloch and Jenkins (1995) indicate in their studies of *Doctor Who* and *Star*

Trek, "the relationship between readers, institutions and texts is not fixed but fluid" (p. 265).

Especially in today's convergence culture, fans are able to transfer from one group to another as their emotional or intellectual needs change, and reaffirm and enrich their knowledge in new communities (Jenkins, 2006b). Likewise, fans' devotion to *yaoi* is not fixed. For example, Faust inferred that she would become obsessed with different subgenres in different periods, sometimes with light comedy or other unexpected plots. Echo also pointed out, "As I read more *yaoi*, or let's say, by different time, different subgenres, *yaoi* gives me different feelings, different perceptions and different emotional affections."

MacDonald (1998) argues that fan hierarchies exists in relation to the amount of fan knowledge, the amount of fan participation, the access to "inside" knowledge, subgroup leaders, and the venues in which fans can hold power. MacDonald's theory of fan hierarchy can also be interpreted as fans' internal diversity within the group. Accordingly, this study also found an internal diversity in *yaoi* fan group. The level of engagement and the degree of commitment varies among *yaoi* fans. Hence there appears to be a diverse, fluid, and individualistic perspectives from fans' fandom practices.

For instance, when asked whether they would participate in online interactions actively, most interviewees claimed they were not interested in discussing *yaoi* with their online peers and did not mention offline interactions. They used the word "diving" to describe this inactivity, many of them attributing it to their introverted personalities. Participant 14, Lu, further explained that she does not like talking to people whom she does not really know, and she thought that might be a disturbance. Many fans usually do not participate in online discussions unless something really interests them. For example, Echo indicated an intention to participate when a discussion involved her favorite characters or interesting plot designs. In this sense, individual fans vary in terms of their amount of participation, and thus the

amount of knowledge would differ as well. Because of their fluid interactions with different texts, different fans would have varied knowledge about specific texts.

Furthermore, *yaoi* fan diversity also reflects on their access to "insider" knowledge. As MacDonald refers, for TV fandom, the "insider" includes actors, producers of the show, production personnel, etc. In *yaoi* fandom, the "insiders" can refer to the authors of *yaoi* texts. According to the informants, fans' diversity regarding access to the authors is not necessarily obvious even if the degree of fans' involvement with "insiders" differs. Some fans implied a direct contact with authors via their social networking, but they also admitted that the authors rarely reply to their comments. Most interviewees felt distant from the authors, though they follow their social networking accounts. They believed the authors are all somehow far away from them. That is why most interviewees seemed indifferent to interaction with authors. The other reason that *yaoi* readers were unwilling to contact authors is, as Feng accounted:

> "Distance produces beauty. If I know the author personally, it seems strange when I read her books." She went further, "I also don't make any suggestions about her books, because I just want to read the story that the author wants to write from their hearts."

Due to their inactive involvement, these interviewees demonstrated less different in terms of a subgroup leader or the venue in which fans can hold power. Many of them were less active producers, to a certain extent. When asked whether they have tried to write their own *yaoi* fiction, only two interviewees indicated an attempt. Xin attributed it to her bad writing skills and logic. Feng thought it was too hard for her to handle a long, complicated story, hence she just wrote some small stories for her own entertainment, not to share with her peers.

Apparently, fans' identification with *yaoi* is fluid, diverse and somehow individualistic. By individualistic, it is arguing that this aspect of fans' fandom practices is opposed to their

collective grouping. For instance, most interviewees stressed that *yaoi* fandom is an individual thing, a personal habit.

When asked to what extent they would introduce *yaoi* to their friends or acquaintances, interestingly, many fans said they would refuse. Many of them showed indifferent about disseminating *yaoi* to outsiders, although others have tried to introduce *yaoi* in detail. Just like Xin explained, "*Yaoi* is controversial after all, and some people who are not very mature would have improper perceptions after touching *yaoi*." Yu added, "If I introduce *yaoi* to people who didn't read it before, I feel bothered if people keep asking. So I just let them search online by themselves."

Fans cited personal autonomy as their second reason for being unwilling to share *yaoi* with outsiders. As Kim clarified, "It is not so good to force someone to cultivate a same hobby with me. People have their own interests and preferences. We cannot force them." The stress of personal autonomy was indicated as well when the interviewees were asked whether they would correct others' prejudice about *yaoi*. As Faust put it, "Just let it go. At the beginning I tried to clarify, but I figured it out later that everybody had their own thoughts, so there is no need to ask everybody to agree on same thing." Xiao also emphasized, "It is a personal choice to be a *yaoi* fan."

Fans' individualistic perspectives also emerge in their interactions with peers in real life. Although they may discuss about *yaoi* with friends who also read *yaoi*, according to the interviewees, they did not discuss it frequently or deeply. Faust reasoned, "Even though many people are reading *yaoi*, the genres they like are different. Thus, they might not like to talk deeply about *yaoi*." Consequently, she thought it was good to enjoy reading alone. Simei

gave the similar response, "Reading *yaoi* is an individual small hobby. I think it is not necessary to announce in public. It is not cool to have a *yaoi* gathering."

Yaoi fans clearly differentiated among fan groups, as well. They drew a distinction between two fan groups: a more rational group, made up of their fellow friends in real life, and "those crazy fans" online. Because fans know their peers in real life very well, they believed their friends are mature enough to distinguish between reality and fiction. Therefore, this group of *yaoi* fans would not come out to support gays at the expense of disturbing their normal lives. This orientation is perceived to be very different from younger fans, who are immature, easily enraged by dissension online, and who would like to couple two males. This discrepancy among fan groups centers on the fans' different perceptions of homosexuality and their insistence on personal autonomy. The interviewees insisted that too much attention on gay would possibly result in some inconvenience and embarrassment and thus provoke some adverse comments about *yaoi* readers as a whole. As Yu concluded,

> "All the groups share some commonalities. For instance, many groups become cluttered when they get bigger. This is because of people in the group, rather than the group itself. For *yaoi* fan group, we have to admit that it is a minority culture, and not everybody would like to accept it. Nowadays the *yaoi* group appears to have a low-age trend. Many kids get into *yaoi* when they are too young to be mature enough. They are quick to take high-profile actions, sometimes even disturb others."

In sum, on one hand, the Internet offers the space and resources that allow *yaoi* fans to form a community. Though there appears to be discrepancies among *yaoi* fan groups, fans involve with certain *yaoi* groups with acceptance and tolerance. While sharing an interest in *yaoi*, fans can create a new set of rules and shared knowledge to form a *yaoi* collective intelligence. On the other hand, the web's potential for privacy and anonymity allows individual fans to engage in *yaoi* fandom with a large variety forms of practices. It is notable that fans maintain a fluid, diverse and individualistic *yaoi* perspectives. The diversity of *yaoi*

fandom is evidenced in terms of fans' amount of *yaoi* knowledge, the amount of fan participation, and the access to "inside" knowledge. Holding the belief that reading *yaoi* is a personal hobby and individualistic matter, though, many fans are less involve in group activities and peer discussions. A sense of personal autonomy underlies many fans' fandom practices.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Consistent with many previous studies that shed light on the meaning of fandom as a pleasurable evasion and production, along with the function of fandom as a resistant battleground, this study argues that *yaoi* fandom is a cultural arena within which fans experience *yaoi* through their interactions with the texts and with their peers.

First of all, *yaoi* fandom serves to empower female readers to take a voyeuristic gaze toward men. It fulfills young women's curiosity about men, homosexuality, and more or less about sex. This female voyeuristic gaze at men creates the possibility of deconstructing the traditional male gaze upon women. A sense of empowerment seems to accompany fans' enhanced subjectivity by introducing them to new ways of looking. Nonetheless, I argue it does not necessarily thwart the controlling patriarchal gaze on women. In fact, *yaoi* fandom is a women-centered environment, with hardly any male readers involved. While fans might imagine themselves to have power over men in this context, this sense of empowerment mainly exists within the *yaoi* texts.

Second, *yaoi* fandom is paradoxical, encompassing fans' symbolic resistance and their compliance with the dominant ideology. On one hand, *yaoi* functions as a contestable cultural arena where fans negotiate with the social norms of sexuality, gender and love; feel motivated to strive for gay autonomy; and enjoy a sense of independence and equality outside the patriarchal gender order. On the other hand, fans show compliance with the majority-held stereotypes of homosexual groups. They only support same-sex love between those who insist on true love and who are self-disciplined, as they define those characteristics. Interestingly, although *yaoi* indicates an implicit approval of homosexuality, most female

readers identify as heterosexual. The appreciation of Boys' Love in *yaoi* actually reflects young women's aspirations of independency and equality in heterosexual relationships. In this respect, privileged female fans are poaching *yaoi* texts, which feature marginalized relationships between two gay men, as a way to voice their desire of idealized heterosexual romance.

However, fans' compliance with the dominant ideology does not necessarily mean that there is no significant meaning underlying *yaoi* fandom. On the contrary, I propose they are making progress at least to some extent. Though fans' contestation stays in a symbolic imagination and there is no evidence of any radical behavioral activity started by fans, fans' awareness of gay right and homosexual autonomy is enhanced. Through consuming *yaoi*, fans imply a pursuit of "self" as independent and equal to men. In addition, the reading itself is an attempt to challenge the prevalent male gaze, and then, to offer an alternative spectatorship on popular texts. In this sense, a sense of feminist meaning emerges from *yaoi* fandom, though it is symbolically limited. Such contestation, while it may not lead to profound social change, is progressive in the sense of enhancing a young generation's awareness and enlarging their worldviews, which I believe brings a promise of future development.

Although there is the potential for commercialization in *yaoi* fandom, this also entails a positive vision by indicating greater acceptance of *yaoi* culture, of homosexuality, and of the feminist gender struggle. No culture is by any means fixed, but rather always evolving and blending with other cultures as it sustains itself and develops. With this belief, I have confidence in the favorable development of *yaoi* culture only if more positive management and regulation, but not strict censorship, join in hand to promote the whole industry.

Third, *yaoi* fandom appears to carve a free space where fans can relax and escape from the reality. *Yaoi* fans attach a greater entertainment value to their reading. In the process of relaxation, fans are able to escape from their normal duties and then indulge in a beautiful fantasy world. Nonetheless, fans are deeply aware of the distinction between reality and fiction. Discontent with reality, fans turn to the idealized *yaoi* world for compensation and for an outlet to express their own concerns. Thereby, it is arguable that fans are making another level of meanings, far more than limiting their negotiation of sexuality and gender.

Last but not least, this thesis also aims to examine fans' social interactions with their peers, both online and offline, and both at the collective and individualistic levels. There is evidence that the proliferation of online sources and accesses points make it possible for fans to bolster their affinity and bond to *yaoi*. This study also found that a collective intelligence emerges from fans' involvement with online communities, based on based on shared *yaoi* interest and fans' mutual tolerance and acceptance. A new set of rules and shared knowledge was produced and utilized by fans to maintain and solidify their *yaoi* commitment. Although there are physical and geographic limitations, a sense of fan community is still recognizable. This is because the Internet allows scattered fans to come together as a social group.

Though there is a sense of social allegiance with specific fan groups, the Internet also allows individual fans to maintain their fluid, individualistic perspectives. The level of fans' commitment and their degree of engagement with *yaoi* varies among different fans. There is an indication of fan internal discrepancy among fans' fandom practices. Fans differ in terms of their amount of participation, the amount of knowledge they have accumulated about *yaoi*, and their degree of interaction with "insiders". Additionally, *yaoi* fandom is marked by a

sense of personal autonomy and individualism. Fans prefer to regard their *yaoi* interest as a personal matter instead of asking others to agree with them.

In conclusion, I argue that *yaoi* fandom is compatible with Hills's (2002) idea of two modes of fandom: Fans are neither purely passive nor absolutely active and critical, but flow fluidly between the two poles. It is true that *yaoi* fans are making their own meanings by poaching the *yaoi* texts. These meanings, in so many ways, are positive and helpful for both fans themselves and the larger culture. Yet their participatory culture is not active enough to bring about political and revolutionary changes to larger portion of society. Their resistance is symbolically limited. However, it is also undeniable that *yaoi* fandom offers the possibility and outlet for women to raise their voices and thereby provides the potential of progressive social change. In short, *yaoi* fandom is making unique and progressive meanings, although it is a small and relatively closed subculture.

Admittedly, this study is limited in scope and cannot be applied to the universe of *yaoi* fandom. It leaves some questions for further investigations, both qualitatively and quantitatively. As mentioned earlier, there is no official statistical data about the readership of *yaoi* fans. Accordingly, I believe there is an academic void to be fulfilled in terms of demography. Second, given this study's small sample size, I suggest more fans should be recruited in the future, for the purpose of reaching a more comprehensive conclusion. In particular, the fluidness and discrepancy emerging among the fan groups deserve more examination because the informants in this study represent just a small part of *yaoi* fan groups.

A study of genre along with textual analysis should be considered in the future studies of *yaoi*. As the fans indicated, one of their pleasures is derived from the narratives of *yaoi*,

which indicates some difference from traditional heterosexual romance. Hence, a scrutiny of *yaoi* narratives might help address the reason that young women become fascinated with Boys' Love romance.

Finally, I think research combining a study of specific texts and fans' interpretations of those texts is necessary. From my personal observation, many academic studies are divided to either concentrate on the study of audience or to focus only on the messages or texts. This generates a void, with a connection needed between these two divisions. In the case of *yaoi* study, I believe a combination of textual analysis and an examination of readers' interpretations would better explain in detail how fans negotiate the meanings of sexuality, gender, and self-identification. As the interviewees implied, these texts might influence teenage readers differently from adult women. For this reason, future studies should try to shed on light on how *yaoi* influences younger fans perceptions and attitudes toward gender and sexuality. Perhaps then researchers will arrive at a better answer regarding future progress on these issues.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Reading Behavior

1. When did you start reading *yaoi*?

2. How did you first know *yaoi*?

3. Where do you usually get the *yaoi* fiction?

4. Under which circumstance, how much time do you spend on reading *yaoi* every day?

5. Describe your favorite type of *yaoi* fiction, and explain why.

6. What do you think are the most significant appealing to consume *yaoi*?

7. Have you written any *yaoi* fiction?

8. If any, have you published them? And where did you publish?

9. Please explain the reasons for your writing and why you publish.

10. Please describe the *yaoi* fiction you wrote.

Resistance

1. In your mind, what is difference between the traditional romance and Boys' Love? Why do you prefer to consume Boys' Love, instead of traditional heterosexual romance?

2. Some people think that the relationships of Boys' Love are similar to heterosexual romances. What is your opinion?

3. Compared to the relationships in the *yaoi*, how do you think about the relationships of both heterosexuals and homosexuals in real life?

4. Please describe your understanding of ideal partner and ideal love.

5. Does *yaoi* fiction influence your perception of an ideal partner or ideal love?

6. To what extent you would like to look for a partner according to the characters in *yaoi*?

7. To what extent you would ask your partner to behave like the characters in *yaoi*?

8. What is your opinion about the relationship between men and women? To what extent you think it is different from the reality?

9. What is your opinion about the female characters in the *yaoi* fiction? To what extent you think it is different from the reality?

10. After being a *yaoi* fan, what is your opinion of homosexuality? Did it change from before?

11. Through which way, you would learn about the homosexuals in the real life?

12. Do you think *yaoi* culture can help society to be more open to homosexuality?

13. To what extent, would you likely tell your parents or someone older than you about your *yaoi* interest? Please explain the reason.

14. To what extent, would you likely tell others that you are a *yaoi* fan? Please explain the reason.

15. Under which circumstance, would you introduce *yaoi* to your friends, who are not fans? How would you introduce *yaoi*?

16. Do you have special terms you use in the *yaoi* world? If any, how did you create them? Do you use them in your daily conversations with your peers?

17. Some people say that *yaoi* exerts a negative effect on social values, morality standards and people's perception of gender. What is your opinion?

Interaction & Relationship

1.   Are you a member of any online *yaoi* communities? If you are, what kinds of

communities are you attending?

2. Why do you attend these communities?

3. How often do you participate in these communities?

4. How do you interact with the people in your communities? What topics do you discuss most?

5. How often do you interact with your group members?

6. Have you made friends with them? If so, to what extent would you interact with them privately both online and offline?

7. What are the topics in your private conversations?

8. Do you attend any offline *yaoi* activities?

9. How do you know about these activities? How often do you attend these activities?

10. In your real life, do you have any friends who are also *yaoi* fans? If any, how do you interact with them?

11. How do you define *yaoi*?

12. How about *yaoi* fans and *yaoi* culture?

Basic Information of Interviewees

1. Name/ Nickname

2. Occupation

3. Age

4. Duration of interest