

“Rotten Culture”: from Japan to China

by

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Bachelor of Arts, University of Victoria, 2016

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Abstract

A new sub-culture, “Rotten Culture (腐文化)”, evolved from Japanese Boys’ Love (BL) manga, has rapidly spread in China and dramatically influenced many areas of Chinese artistic creation. “Rotten Culture” is an extension of Boys’ Love, which indicates that Boys’ Love elements not only existed in manga, but emerged in anime, movies, TV series, and so on. As a start of an analysis of this phenomenon, this thesis will focus on the core of “Rotten Culture”, Boys’ Love, which exists in Chinese manga and web fiction. The central issues addressed by this thesis are: exploring the circulation of Boys’ Love from Japan to China; examining the aesthetics and themes of some of these works; and analyzing the motivations that explain why such a huge amount of people, both professional and non-professional, have joined in creating Boys’ Love art works.

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Introduction

The most active Twitter-like microblogging site in China, *Sina Weibo* (新浪微博) sets up fan-oriented ranking lists of hot topics from different fields such as music, games, athletics and so on; and the ranking will be affected by the number of Weibo users who follow this topic, and posters of each topic. There is only one on-screen male-female CP (couple) in the top 10 CPs' ranking list, and the rest are all male-male CPs selected from celebrities, and characters from movies, TV series, anime or novels. The most topical CP, *Double Clouds* (双云, a CP name) is about two professional musical actors who had participated in a singing contest TV show held by Hunan Satellite TV, *Super Vocal*, from November 2nd 2018 to January 18th 2019. Fans are addicted to discuss every detail about them on and off stage due to their well-matched handsome appearances, outstanding talent, gracious demeanor, and a friendship that has lasted for a decade. Recent data shows that there are 1.69 billion sharing quantity, 109000 posts, and 144000 fans in the hot topic of Double Clouds in Sina Weibo. For maintaining the high topicality of this CP during the broadcasting time of this competition show, the program group arranged several duet performances and more video segments for them. It is obvious that the CP of Double Clouds becomes a propaganda technique for this TV show.

In numerous contemporary Chinese TV and web dramas, a plot of male-male close relationships has been considered as a common element in normal male-female romance to capture audiences' attention and gain more topicality. This phenomenon has reflected a tendency in which producers try to create a shortcut to making a

popularly successful film by inserting aspects of homosexuality into the plot; however, general audiences will usually accept contents involving only a few ambiguities between two young men. TV dramas or movies focused chiefly on homosocial, and other explicit homosexuality are still restricted, and censored from circulating in the mass media. Moreover, many homosexual roles are wealthy, and played by handsome, tall, and young actors, which has implied a stereotype of gay people to public: that only a man who has an eye-catching appearance and fortune can become a gay, or every gay person has a perfect physical condition. The reason why this contradictory phenomenon has existed and is tacitly approved by many people is related to an undercurrent of a new subculture, “Rotten Culture” (腐文化), evolved from a Japanese word *Fujōshi*, 腐女子, which has been used to describe girls who are addicted to watching and reading male homosexuality manga and anime. It is obvious that “Rotten Culture” is a wave that originally comes from, and develops in Japan, and then shifts to many regions globally. The circumstances of “Rotten Culture” are still a new phenomenon which awaits identification and discovery. The information shown above reflects the fact that “Rotten Culture” has penetrated deeply into almost every realm of literature and art, and even shows some influences in people’s daily conversations. For example, a Chinese cyber word, *Ji you* (基友, usually translated in English as bromance) was commonly used to describe an intimate male friendship in an entertaining way; and, *Ji* (基) has been selected from a word, *Ji Lao* (基佬), a negative appellation for male homosexuals in Chinese.

The fluidity of “Rotten Culture” is its most predominant feature, and it is this

fluidity that has allowed people to identify and discover it from every different perspective and aspect. The “Rotten Culture” creations are not restricted to a specific sort of artistic form, they can exist in movies, fictions, manga or anime; and sometimes, these creations which are somehow “Rotten” are not from professional artists but the most important participant, fans. Many studies related to “Rotten Culture” come from different academic sectors, such as Mass Communications, Research on Contemporary Literature, or Manga and Anime research. Moreover, there is a blurred line between “Rotten Culture” and homosexual literature, which has also kept a delicate balance. Some Boys’ Love web fictions, especially in the early stage of the development of “Rotten Culture” (the late 1990s and early 2000s) had shown strong social concerns which were not only about the fantasy of love between men. For example, *Ten Years* (十年, Shi Nian) written by An Ye Liu Guang (暗夜流光) in 2005, exhibits a story between two men, and their choices of love, friendship, family, and even their future in a special time of Chinese economic reform and opening. The dramatic development of China’s economy has gradually changed people’s thoughts and thus these two main characters finally realized that there is no need to hide, and they are no different than others. This book reflected the struggle and hesitation of ordinary homosexual people in real life. In the sense of social concerns, *Ten Years*, is really similar to a famous work of Chinese homosexual literature, *Crystal Boys*, written by Pai Hsien-yung (白先勇), who is an author and a Kunqu opera producer, which has mirrored the marginalization of homosexual people by family, school, and society in the 1960s in Taiwan.

“Rotten Culture” has brought many issues into social debate. Therefore, at the very beginning, there are two main goals of this project: 1. To present a clear narrative of the process that illustrates the migration of Boys’ Love manga and web fiction from Japan to China (including an introduction of the background of shōnen’ ai, yaoi/boys’ love in Japan; and an analysis of shōnen’ ai, yaoi/boys’ love in China); 2. study of the importance of Boys’ Love fan culture, which can be a part of the motivations for creating Boys’ Love art works, and promoting the development of “Rotten Culture” in China. This last part will be analyzed by using fan culture theory from *Textual Poachers*, written by Henry Jenkins, and introducing two case studies of recent popular Chinese web fiction and manga which have been adapted into anime versions, *The King’s Avatar*¹ and *The Outcast*².

Tracing “Rotten Culture” to the time of its birth and early years, it is clear that it had already existed in the early shōjo 少女 manga in the form of shōnen’ ai 少年愛 in the 1970s, an innovation which had been made by the *Fabulous Forty-Niners* (花の24年組, a female manga artists’ group, the members of which were born in Shōwa 24)³. These often highly literary manga narratives – printed in mainstream shōjo manga magazines in wide circulation – featured male protagonists in same-sex romantic and sometimes overtly sexual relationships⁴, for example, Hagio Moto’s *The Heart of Thomas* (Toma no Shinzo, 1974), depicted a close relationship between

¹ *The King’s Avatar* (全职高手, Quan Zhi Gao Shou), a serial web fiction from 2/28/2011 to 4/28/2014 (published from 4/1/2012, twenty-four books plus one side story in total); manga adaption has been serialized from 9/10/2015; the first season of anime adaption was serialized from 4/7/2017 to 6/16/2017.

² *The Outcast* (一人之下, Yi Ren Zhi Xia, Hitorinoshita), a serial web manga from 2/26/2015 – now; anime adaption was serialized from 7/8/2016. <https://ac.qq.com/Comic/ComicInfo/id/531490>

³ M. Mclelland, K. Nagaike, K Suganuma & J. Welfer, *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, 2015, P. 44.

⁴ Ibid.

beautiful adolescent European schoolboys.

The second step is yaoi in the early 1980s -- a truly global label for male homoerotic manga and anime – which designates the rise and growth in the amateur comics sphere of amateur homoerotic works⁵. This step had indicated that more people came to join in the creation of male homosexuality-related art works, such as manga, anime, illustrations, and fictions through comic cons and Doujinshi (amateur or fan magazines).

The last step has more frequently been described as “Rotten Culture”, representing the phase in which the Boys’ Love elements are not only restricted to the forms of manga and anime, and spread within the comic cons, but also infiltrated into other areas, such as TV dramas, movies, commercials, or idol groups.

As this brief history of “Rotten Culture” demonstrates, it is clear that manga is the most predominant technique for the development and circulation of “Rotten Culture”, and many Japanese Boys’ Love researches have focused on the narratives and aesthetics of manga as well. Nevertheless, many investigations in China have neglected the importance of manga in “Rotten Culture” and concentrated on discussing male homosexual elements existing in TV dramas and movies. For instance, *The “Rotten Culture” in Film and Television Works* by Liu Binbin and Yan Chenlu, pursues this approach, which results in an underestimation of “Rotten Culture”⁶. The paucity of Boys’ Love manga researches means there is a neglect of

⁵ Ibid., P. 57.

⁶ Liu Binbin & Yan Chenlu, The “Rotten Culture” in Film and Television Works (当前影视剧创作中的“腐女文化”辨析), *Movie Review* (电影评介), vol 07, 2014, P. 80-82.

early “Rotten Culture” development. Additionally, on the aspect of motivations of people doing Boys’ Love creations, scholars tend to find the answers from the participants, but do not examine original texts. Some Chinese studies argue that the influence of the development of the Internet has accelerated the evolution of fan creations⁷, but such studies neglect the influence of fan culture, which is the focus of Henry Jenkins’ *Textual Poachers*, a book which has gained widespread acceptance from the participants of Boys’ Love fan creations in China. The Chinese version of this book was published in 2016, and translated by Zheng Xiqing 郑熙青. She is a young scholar of Cultural studies and New Media, who has also been reading, watching, writing, and translating Boys’ Love fan creations for more than ten years, and chose to study the interaction and symbiosis between Chinese online fan subculture and mainstream literature and culture in her thesis. Therefore, my methodology will be historical research into the ways in which BL manga began to take root and change in China, combined with textual analysis using Fan culture from Henry Jenkins, and manga theories (visual language) from Scott McCloud and Neil Cohn to examine this issue.

To sum up, this research will focus on contemporary Chinese BL manga and web fiction to achieve two main goals: a clear timeline of the migration of Boys’ Love from Japan to China, and the main motivations for why a huge number of people have started to create Boys’ Love art works. According to those studies which have been done until now, the conclusion will be that Boys’ Love migrated from Japan to China

⁷ Li Yu Chen, *The Studies of the Influence of the Internet of Fan Creations* (互联网对同人创作的影响研究), 2015.

with a wave of the migration of ACG (anime, comics, and games) starting from the late 1980s. Except for gender problems, Henry Jenkins's fan culture can be used to explain some of the motivations behind Boys' Love creations. To be more specific, in the late 1980s, in a special time when only a few ACG products could be spread in an official way because of economic, political, and technical issues, the participation and efforts from ACG fans had promoted the circulation of Japanese ACG. Fans' behaviors of translation, writing, recording and sharing of ACG products occurred in the early BBS (Bulletin Board System). Because of that Fans were doing their recreations through the processes when they are translating, writing, and sharing. Fan creations appeared at the very beginning and accompanied the migration of ACG. Thus, Boys' Love fan creations emerged with this tendency. Furthermore, these creations can be analyzed as Fan creations related to ideas of Fan Culture from Henry Jenkins. Normally, people have argued that what motivates some females to become so enthusiastic about creating Boys' Love art works are mainly resistance to patriarchy, desire for the same rights as males, or a fantasy of the ideal partner. However, Henry Jenkins emphasizes that the attraction of the original works, and the interests to discover more information in the universe created by books, movies, or TV series, will motivate fans, both male and female to do fan creations. Moreover, when fans have gotten together and reach an agreement, they will have a certain decision-making power to intervene in the serialized original works. There are some interactions between fans and producers; when producers have accepted fans' suggestions during their creations, producers may do a fan creation as well.

Literature Review

The literature reviewed below can be categorized as follows: 1. Studies of the history of Japanese and Chinese manga; 2. development and migration of ACG; 3. studies of fan cultures; 4. Boys' Love fan manga and web fictions, including case studies *The King's Avatar* and *The Outcast*. There are relatively systematic studies of early Japanese Boys' Love manga from some manga scholars such as Mark McLelland and James Welker. As the brief history of Boys' Love which has been mentioned in the introduction indicated, manga scholars have reached a consensus on the development of Boys' Love in Japan between the 1960s and 1990s, which are Shonen'ai and yaoi phases. However, the studies of recent Boys' Love works are deficient. Boys' Love manga have always been analyzed as a part of shōjo 少女 manga due to the fact that these works were originally created in shōjo manga for young girls aged 9-14. In fact, however, it has extended to other realms of the arts, and possesses its own identity. Compared to Japanese Boys' Love manga studies, there is hardly any specific research on Chinese Boys' Love manga. There are two potential reasons, the first one is that the migration of Boys' Love from Japan to China occurred in the early 1990s at the very beginning of the development of the Internet in most parts of Asia, following the trend of the circulation of ACG. Because Internet spreads rapidly and is relatively low-budget, it has gradually displaced some traditional transmission methods such as TV, radio, or letters; now the web manga has become popular. Another reason is that anime has always been considered as the pillar element in the whole ACG industry; on the contrary, manga has a low sense of

presence in terms of commercial value. Moreover, the concept of manga in China overlaps with *Lianhuanhua* (连环画), cartoon, and illustrated magazines or newspapers. Because of these similarities, some research on Chinese manga has confused them.

Some comics scholars, such as Shamoon⁸ and Fujimoto Yukari⁹ have begun their studies since the early 1990s in an era when the Japanese manga and anime had risen sharply and become one of the dominant industries in Japan. Japan even has been considered as another center of globalization outside Europe and North America after the expansion of Western imperialism.¹⁰ These scholars have worked chiefly on the field of Japanese manga and anime. For example, Johnson-Woods has listed the majority of Japanese manga genres in detail; they are shōnen (boy's manga)¹¹, shōjo (girls' manga)¹², hentai 変態/へんたい (sexual perversion)¹³, kodomo (children)¹⁴, shōnen-ai (boys' love)¹⁵, yaoi¹⁶, yuri shōjo-ai (girls' love)¹⁷ and so on.¹⁸ Nevertheless, since many studies have focused on the early period, the development and improvement of Japanese manga and anime in the recent decades have been neglected. Recent Japanese manga and anime have reflected increasingly blurred

⁸ Shamoon, *Passionate friendship: The aesthetics of girls' culture in Japan*. 2012.

⁹ Fujimoto Yukari, *The Evolution of BL as "Playing with Gender" : Viewing the Genesis and development of BL from a Contemporary perspective*, in a collection of *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, edited by M. McLelland, K. Nagaike, K. Suganuma & J. Welker, 2015.

¹⁰ Wendy Siuyi Wong, *Globalizing Manga: From Japan to Hong Kong and Beyond*. 2006. P. 24.

¹¹ Holmberg, Ryan, *Manga Shōnen: Katō ken' ichi and the manga boys*. 2013.

¹² Yukari Fujimoto & Matt Thorn, & Takahashi Macoto, *The origin of shōjo manga style*, 2012.

¹³ Walker Andrea, & David A. Makin, & Amber L. Morczek. *Finding Lolita: A comparative analysis of interest in youth-oriented pornography*. 2016.

¹⁴ Ito, Kinko. *A history of manga in the context of Japanese culture and society*. 2005.

¹⁵ McLelland, Mark J, *Boys love manga and beyond: History, culture, and community in Japan*. 2015.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Johnson-Woods, T. *Manga: An anthology of global and cultural perspectives*, 2010.

boundaries between genres. Some elements which are considered as girls' comics characteristics have been introduced in shōnen manga, and more and more manga and anime are aimed at broader groups of consumers. For instance, *K*, a Japanese anime which was adapted from a light novel and released (season one) in 2012 (season two was released in 2015), has an explicit shōjo drawing style including the exaggerated eyes, slender body, and luxuriant costumes; however, the story contains adventures, superpowers, and romances, which have been part of both shōnen and shōjo narratives. The lack of the studies of the recent Japanese manga and anime will result in a misunderstanding of this aspect.

The same problem also exists in the studies of Japanese Boys' Love manga and anime; the early Boys' Love manga in the 1970s have been repeatedly analyzed, but recent art works have gotten less attention. For instance, the studies from Gravett¹⁹ and Aramata Hiroshi²⁰ are all focused on the beginning (1930) and the flourishing time (1950s – 1980s) of Japanese manga.

Moreover, there are some other problems which I have noted in the study of manga: the lack of the discussion of the creators' motivations and the contradictory explanations and excessive analysis of Fujōshi (腐女子, girls who are crazy for Boys' Love) in Boys' Love studies. Boys' Love manga began as a subgenre of shōjo manga; thus, many studies start from the analysis of the shōjo manga. Deborah Shamoon, in her book, *Passionate Friendship*, which follows a clear order for introducing the

¹⁹ Gravett Paul, *Manga: Sixty years of Japanese comics*, 2004.

²⁰ Aramata Hiroshi, *Nihon manga == 日本まんが: Nihon manga: The untold stories of the manga masters and their creative struggle*. 2015.

aesthetics of girls' culture in Japan from the emergence of the shōjo in the prewar period to the postwar shōjo manga, has classified the shōjo manga into two competing discourses according to the distinct consumers, adult men and girls themselves. She demonstrates the different purposes of girls' culture creations: to portray a sexualized and threatening figure or to create a secret world of girls. While she focused on investigating shōjo manga from the main consumers, the motivations of the main creators have been neglected in her book. Although she repeatedly mentioned that the main creators of the early art works related with girl's culture are men, she still has not explained the reasons. Fujimoto Yukari's article, *The Evolution of BL as "Playing with Gender"*, however, has suggested that there is a "amusementization of gender" which allowed "masculinity" and "femininity" to be free from any sense of oppression. According to this "amusementization of gender", there are various patterns of *seme-uke* (attacker and receiver) coupling and the "prescribed mixture of the characteristics of both sexes". Although Fujimoto has done a reasonable analysis of "playing with gender", his explanation of the category of Boys' Love is contradictory. Fujimoto has argued that shōnen-ai, yaoi, and Boys' Love are three different categories; however, James Welker's article *A Brief History of Shōnen'ai, Yaoi, and Boys' Love*, argues that those three terms are the different steps of the same manga genre, Boys' Love.

Studies of Japanese manga are useful and provide a model for analyzing manga when Chinese manga studies is still an "undeveloped area". Though not as abundant as manga studies are in Japan, there are some manga studies in China as well, such as

The Analysis of the Development of the Industrial Chain of Chinese Anime from Pong Chong²¹, and *The New Way of the Development of Original Chinese Manhua Journal – A Case Study of Zhi Yin Man Ke* from Zhang Min²². However, only a few of these studies are about Boys' Love manga, and most of them are focused on arguing about the prospects for the manga and anime industries in China. For instance, *On the New Trends of the Development of Chinese Anime Industry*, by Wang Yan, argues that a current favorable policy, and a good social environment will provide the basis for the development of Chinese anime industry.²³ Some studies about early Chinese manga in the republican period are more descriptive rather than analytical. For instance, *Lianhuanhua And Manhua Picture Books and Comics in Old Shanghai*, from Kuiyi Shen²⁴, has indicated the history of Chinese manga in the early time by listing some essential figures, such as Feng Zikai (1897-1975), who has been considered one of the founders of Chinese comics, and Zhang Leping (1910-1992), who created San Mao (三毛).²⁵ Moreover, some studies of the development of Chinese manga are invariably related with politics. For example, the 1920s and 1930s are characterized as the “golden age of comics” in China due to the fact that the new international relations and social transition after May Fourth, 1919, are the main motivations for the publication of the first successful newspaper comic strips, and many dedicated

²¹ Pang Chong, *The Analysis of the Development of the Industrial Chain of Chinese Anime* (中国动漫产业链发展问题研究), UIBE, 2016

²² Zhang Min, *The New Way of the Development of Original Chinese Manhua Journal – A Case Study of Zhi Yin Man Ke* (中国原创漫画期刊的发展新路 – 以《知音漫客》为例的分析), Publishing Research, 2013

²³ Wang Yan, *On the New Trends of the Development of Chinese Anime Industry* (论中国漫画产业化发展新动向), Journal of Zhejiang University of Media & Communications, 2013(06).

²⁴ Lent, John A. 2001. *Illustrating Asia: Comics, humor magazines, and picture books*. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2001.

²⁵ Ibid.

cartoonists had showed their attitudes in humor and cartoons.²⁶ During the war years of the 1930s and 1940s, cartoons were a weapon against the invader, and represented the support of people of different political parties²⁷.

In the Chinese Boys' Love field, the studies of Fujōshi, the main consumers of Boys' Love have already started. For instance, a group of psychology students from Beijing Normal University have been conducting research since 2015 by distributing questionnaires and collecting information online. What is more, researchers have also noticed the Boys' Love fandom in China; for instance, Jing Jamie Zhao, Ling Yang, and Maud Lavin have investigated three key aspects of Chinese Boys' Love fandom: grassroots distribution networks, major fan "circles" or communities, and the rise of a women-dominated online public sphere.²⁸ They have also compared this fandom in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan under the influence of both Japanese and Western queer cultures.

To sum up, both Chinese and Japanese manga scholars have done ground-breaking studies on the historical development of Boys' Love; however, the studies of recent Boys' Love texts and motivations of people who participate in Rotten Culture are still relatively scarce. This thesis will analyze the development of Boys' Love Manhua and web-fiction, and the motivations for why people participate in creating Boys' Love works in China by researching recent Boys' Love works in two chapters. In the first chapter, there will be 1. a background introduction of Boys' Love in Japan

²⁶ Lent, John A, & Xu Ying, *Comics Art in China*, 2017.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Maud Lavin, Ling Yang, & Jing Jamie Zhao, *Boys' Love, Cosplay, and Androgynous Idols: Queer Fan Cultures in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan*, 2017.

(shōnen'ai, yaoi/boys' love: history and development of themes and styles; motivations such as gender problems and fan culture); 2. the process of migration of Boys' Love from Japan to China (Boys' Love elements migrated from Japan to China with ACG in a way of fan participation and efforts in 1990s); and 3. the history and development of Boys' Love in China and motivations. The second chapter will start from 1. the analysis of the importance of Fan culture in Boys' Love and the related abundant fan creations that have helped ACG migrate from Japan to China; 2. the reasons why some novels or web-fictions, movies, TV series, and ACG have become popular Boys' Love fan creations topics; and 3. case studies of *The King's Avatar* (全职高手, Quan Zhi Gao Shou), a Chinese web fiction, and *The Outcast*, a Chinese web manga, both of which have anime adaptations, and numerous Boys' Love fan creations.

Chapter I: The Development of Boys' Love in Japan; and the Migration of Boys' Love from Japan to China

Boys' Love originally comes from shōjo, including drawing style, themes, and plots in shōjo of different eras. Briefly, shōjo was formed in the pre-war Japanese shōjo magazines, which had created a secret space for Japanese school girls. Stories serialized in these magazines were about the girls' school life, and close friendship between school sisters. Illustrators and commercial artists, such as Kashō, who worked for these magazines in that era, had combined two dominant modes of early-twentieth-century fine art: yōga 洋画, or Western-style oil painting, and nihonga 日本画, or Japanese-style painting²⁹. This drawing style has influenced later shōjo manga, which focus on depicting slender body, and exaggerated huge and bright eyes, in order to reflect the virtuous heart, and innocent spiritual love of characters. This chapter will present a clear narrative of how Boys' Love developed from shōjo manga through various stages, then give an account of the process that illustrates the migration of Boys' Love manga and web fiction from Japan to China.

1.1 Boys' Love in Japan

As one of the dominant cultural industries, Japanese manga has shown its influence on the rest of the world since the 1950s when Astro Boy was created by Osamu Tezuka, who has been called “the god of manga”. Under the influence of globalization, analysis of which has been centered on the Western world, the Japanese

²⁹ D. Shamooin, *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girls' Culture in Japan*, P. 59.

manga industry has helped Japan to play an important role in recent years. Its role has been used to counter the “European and American oriented globalization” by the process of “Japan’s globalization” which is reflected in the fact that Japan has gradually become the center of cultural influence in Asia³⁰. After decades of Japanese manga development, there are numerous and specific genres that have emerged and been classified according to the age and gender of the target readers, as well as personal preferences and tastes³¹. For instance, shōnen 少年 manga are marketed to teenage boys; shōjo 少女, teenage girls; josei 女性 (or redikomi, and rediisu), women; yōnen 幼年, children; and so on³². It is obvious to see that there are different genres of manga corresponding to the readers from different social status and age groups. Among these abundant genres of manga, shōjo and shōnen share the most extensive popularity. In Japanese society, shōjo and shōnen are not only meant for girls and boys in the age group from 13 to 18, but especially refer to school girls and boys. Due to this peculiarity, the school setting normally existed in Japanese shōjo manga. Boys’ Love, starting out as one of the subgenres of shōjo manga, has inherited some features from shōjo, but also developed its own styles. Manga scholars Mark McLelland and James Welker have introduced Boys’ Love as:

³⁰ W. S. Wong has used the concept of cultural globalization concept from Harumi Benu to discuss the influence of Japanese manga in her article “Globalizing Manga: From Japan to Hong Kong and Beyond,” 2006. Harumi Benu, *Globalization Theory from the Bottom Up Japan’s Contribution*, 2003, argues that cultural globalization proceeds along two routes. In the first, sojourners – emigrants, students, businessmen, and others who leave Japan and settle around the world – create a patchwork of global Japanese ethnoscape, as individuals necessarily take their culture with them…… the non-sojourner route, through which cultural products spread abroad without native carriers. P. 4.

³¹ W. S. Wong, “Globalizing Manga: From Japan to Hong Kong and Beyond” , *Mechademia*, P. 28.

³² Ibid.

“Pronounced “bōizu rabu” and usually written in the katakana script, this term first appeared in the commercial BL sphere at the beginning of the 1990s. It is most frequently used as a label for commercially published manga and light novels, but it can also be used as a label for non-commercial works. It is often abbreviated “BL”.”³³

This indicates that Boys’ Love or BL is a general designation of all kinds of commercial or non-commercial works which contain unique male-male relationships. Moreover, there are three steps that Boys’ Love has experienced in the decades since the 1970s. They are shōnen’ ai, yaoi, and Boys’ Love. Each step has reflected different levels of commercialization and fan engagement.

To be more specific, the term “shōnen’ ai” has been most widely used in reference to shōnen’ ai narratives that existed in commercially published shōjo manga in the 1970s and 1980s³⁴. As mentioned before, the early shōnen’ ai was built on developments in- and outside shōjo manga³⁵. Shōnen’ ai, which had often been labeled as narratives about male protagonists in same-sex romance, existed in mainstream shōjo manga.³⁶ During the time between 1960s and 1970s, shōjo manga artists were searching for more mature themes such as sexuality, race, or violence; shōnen’ ai narratives were the way in which these themes could be found in manga targeted at older female readers with some sexual knowledge.³⁷ The emergence of shōnen’ ai manga as a new manga genre which was apart from shōjo manga was marked by the

³³ M. McLelland, K. Nagaike, K. Suganuma & J. Welker, *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, 2015, P. 5.

³⁴ Ibid., P. 44.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ M. McLelland, K. Nagaike, K. Suganuma & J. Welker, *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, 2015, P. 45.

publication of a short narrative of “Snow and Stars and Angels and...” (*Yuki to hoshi to tenshi to*), latter reissued as “In the Sunroom” (*Sanrūmu nite*) from Takemiya Keiko in the December 1970 issue of *Bessatsu shōjo komikku* (Girls’ comic extra), and Hagio Moto’s “November Gymnasium” (*Jūichigatsu no gimunajiumu*) in the same magazine³⁸. After that, many art works had been made in this new genre of shōnen’ai manga, and there was a boom of shōnen’ai manga in the 1970s and beyond³⁹. The successful and large circulation of shōnen’ai manga among female manga readers brought the emergence of amateur works at the end of 1970s⁴⁰, which meant that it had moved to the next step, yaoi, a combination of commercial and non-commercial shōnen’ai manga⁴¹. Many shōnen’ai manga readers and fans have participated in creating and sharing amateur works, normally through buying and selling of *dōjinshi* (coterie magazines, fan creations). Moreover, the “Comic Market,” since December 1975, has provided a space for fans and professional artists to share their ideas and creations outside the restrictions of the commercial publishing world⁴². By the early 1980s, yaoi was beginning to be used in the amateur comic sphere to name these amateur homoerotic works⁴³, and the term yaoi can be explained as:

..... an acronym for “yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi,” or, roughly, “no climax, no point, no meaning,” an apt description of the relatively plotless original narratives and parodies replete with implied or roughly depicted male-on-male

³⁸ Ibid., P. 47.

³⁹ Ibid., P. 44.

⁴⁰ Ibid., P. 47.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., P. 54.

⁴³ Ibid., P. 55.

In the yaoi era, there were several significant magazines collectively known as *JUNE* and many other similar magazines, which published shōnen'ai manga, amateur works, and pornographic fiction and illustrations. *JUNE*, called *Comic Jun*⁴⁵, produced by Sagawa Toshihiko (1954-), was mainly carrying manga and fiction about the romance of beautiful young boys and men for the target readership of adolescent girls and young women. Some professional manga artists had contributed to this magazine, such as Keiko Takemiya and Nakajima Azusa, and the magazine also published prose fiction and critical essays⁴⁶; many readers contributed to it as well by sharing their stories and manga drawings⁴⁷. Another magazine, *Allan*, founded by Nanbara Shirō, provided more space for readers to create similar content with *JUNE*⁴⁸. Moreover, both *JUNE* and *Allan* included the introduction and discussion of literature and films aimed at homosexuals or gays; alongside the portrayal of innocent-looking teen boys and young men, these magazines also published erotic illustrations⁴⁹. The emergence of *JUNE* style magazines has enriched the aesthetics

⁴⁴ M. Mclelland, K. Nagaike, K. Suganuma & J. Welker, *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, 2015, P. 55.

⁴⁵ Ibid., P. 59: "The commercially published anthologies in the 1980s were not, however, the first effort by publishing to commercialize these amateur works. Already in 1978, riding on the early wave of enthusiasm for beautiful young men at the Comic Market and for shōnen'ai manga, Sagawa Toshihiko (1954-), then working part time at San shuppan, a publisher of magazines with erotic themes aimed at adults, including the homo-erotic magazine Sabu (1974-2002), convinced the company to produce a "mildly pornographic magazine aimed at females". At least at the time this is how he framed the project that became *JUNE* (pronounced "ju-nay"; 1978-1979, 1981-1996), the first commercial magazine for adolescent girls and young women featuring beautiful boys and young men in romantic and sexual relationships with one another."

⁴⁶ Ishida, *Hisoyaka na kyōiku*, 204.

⁴⁷ M. Mclelland, K. Nagaike, K. Suganuma & J. Welker, *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, 2015, P. 60.

⁴⁸ Ibid., P. 62.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

and narratives of shōnen'ai manga, and built the connection between shōnen'ai readers and real homosexual communities.

The boom of Boys' Love started in the 1990s and continues to show its influence to the present. In the first half of the 1990s, there were at least thirty new magazines focused on BL⁵⁰ in Japan. In addition to the plentiful paperbacks of BL manga, there were many other BL media, such as drama CDs, anime, and light novels (ライトノベル, raito noberu) released in this decade. The proportion and quantity of fans' participations and dōjinshi were greater than original shōnen'ai manga in the yaoi era. However, in the stage of BL, abundant classical long-running BL manga had been created and released. For instance, *Zetsuai-1989-* (絶愛-1989-, *Everlasting Love - 1989-*) by Minami Ozaki (尾崎南) BL was serialized from 1989 to 1991 in *Margaret* (マーガレット) magazine; and a sequel, *BRONZE* was serialized from 1992 until now. Another example would be *Haru wo Idaiteita* (春を抱いていた) by Nitta Yuuka (新田祐克) was serialized from 1999 to 2009 on *Magazine BE x BOY*. Many professional manga artists as Minami Ozaki and Nitta Yuuka have focused on creating original BL manga rather than dōjinshi. BL had gradually replaced yaoi and shōnen'ai commercialized and non-commercialized Boys' Love creations.

This development has reflected a tendency of involvement of more people, from the very beginning in the shōnen'ai era when only professional writers and manga artists had been involved in creating Boys' Love works, to the time when there was no limitation, which had allowed more and more fans to participate in creating these

⁵⁰ Ibid., P. 64.

works. It also indicates that *dōjinshi*⁵¹, which can be termed as fan creations, is the most essential element of Boys' Love. After the first "comic market" was held at a public hall in Toranomom in Tokyo's Minato Ward in December 1975⁵², a Boys' Love sphere has emerged, which has provided a free atmosphere for fans to create and share with others. Recently, Boys' Love has expanded from manga to other areas, and almost all contain the historical and contemporary intimate male-male relationship or friendship elements that now exist in all kinds of art works, such as movies, TV dramas, or fictions. In the realm of manga, Boys' Love manga has shown the potential, as a sub-genre, to exceed other *shōjo* manga sales.

In August 2014, I made a special trip with three other manga fans to Japan to attend C86, the largest comic market in the world, and experienced the original manga culture in Japan. The gathering place of manga, anime, and games was located around the Akihabara station in Tokyo. There were hundreds of stores selling manga and other derivative products, and Boys' Love elements could be seen everywhere. In the largest and oldest chain manga and anime store in Japan, *Animated*, Boys' Love products had been sold on one floor, and separated from other genres, even *shōjo*. On the first floor, there were boards of greeting messages written by famous manga artists in Japan, such as Masashi Kishimoto (岸本齊史), who wrote and illustrated *Naruto*, and Eiichiro Oda (尾田栄一郎), the author of *One Piece*. Surprisingly, some Boys'

⁵¹ Ibid., P. 65: "the parodying of existing manga and anime in *dōjinshi* – often broadly referred to as "aniparo" —circulating at the Comic Market took off in the 1980s. While an abbreviation of "anime parody" (anime parodi), the "aniparo" can be used in reference to any *dōjinshi* parodies, regardless of what or who is being parodied."

⁵² M. Mclelland, K. Nagaike, K Suganuma & J. Welker, *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, 2015, P. 43,54

Love manga artists had been involved in this; for instance, Ayano Yamane(山根綾乃), who had serialized a Boys' Love manga, *Faindā Shirīzu* (Finder Series) since 2002. This detail reflected the fact that some Boys' Love manga had influence as wide as other popular Japanese manga. In the three-days' comic market, C86, Boys' Love doujinshi were sold in an individual stadium which had been also grouped together with shōjo; countless young female consumers came and bought such merchandise. This "pilgrimage" to manga in Japan had surprised me by the rapid development of Boys' Love, and I assumed that Boys' Love manga would exceed shōjo and become an independent genre rather than a subgenre of shōjo. Moreover, there was one "accident" that might be worth sharing, which made me unable to help thinking about the scope of Boys' Love. In the Boys' Love products sale floor in *Animated* store, I found a book which I had read before, *Heart* (心) from one of the most predominant writers in early twentieth century Japan, Soseki Natsume (夏目漱石). From my memory, this book was about a story of two men who fell in love with one girl, and there was no ambiguity between these two men. However, this book had been sold in the Boys' Love area with many copies. This small "accident" made me suspect that Boys' Love or "Rotten Culture" had grown to encompass every art work which involve two, or more than two, male characters.

1.2 The Themes, Aesthetics and Plot of Japanese Boys' Love

As mentioned in the introduction, no matter whether the stories are in early shōjo magazines, or late shōjo manga in Japan, romance is always the most popular theme

for depicting the ideal love between boys and girls. The distinct shōjo drawing style concentrates on depiction of the beauty of each character through exaggerated eyes and long arms and legs. In Japan, the majority of BL manga are drawn by females for female audiences; thus, most BL manga are following a shōjo manga drawing style which includes a more tabular, less linear page layout, a lot of Chibi チビ (superdeformed) character images, word balloon panels, comedy with emotional states and so on. As a subgenre of shōjo manga, Boys' Love manga shared the same themes with shōjo at the beginning in the shōnen'ai era. European boys' school settings were common in these shōnen'ai narratives. An early Shōnen'ai narrative created in this era, *The Heart of Thomas* (Tōma no shinzō, 1974), written and illustrated by Hagio Moto, involved a setting of a German boys' school, and the story revolved around a group of school boys. This tendency has influenced both Boys' Love manga and shōjo for a long time. Recent Boys' Love manga have reflected this tendency as well. An example is *Kaasuto Hevn* (カーストヘヴン, Caste Heaven) from Ogawa Chise, serialized from 2015. In this work the author has set a story about school violence which is reflected in a class game called "King and target" (all classmates will draw a playing card, and each card represents the student's status in the game. For example, a student who gets the card of king will be the leader of this class). Though there are many other elements in *Kaasuto Hevn*, the core of this manga is still a story about school boys.

Moreover, in shōjo, there is another indication that authors get inspired from celebrities. For instance, *Itazura na Kiss* (Mischievous Kiss), a successful manga at

the end of the 20th century, and influential in the East Asian area, is a good example. It had an adapted anime in 2008, and three adapted TV series, which are Japanese, Chinese, and Korean versions. This manga was created by Kaoru Tada (多田薫), and first serialized and published in 1990 through a shōjo magazine, *Margaret*. It is the story of a romance between a normal high school girl, Kotoko Aihara (相原琴子), and the smartest and most handsome senior, Naoki Irie (入江直樹), in her school. The appearance of the character, Naoki Irie was created based on a famous Japanese movie star, and singer, Masaharu Fukuyama (福山雅治), who started his career in 1988. Similarly, Boys' Love artists took inspiration from some characters in European movies, such as a "beautiful boy", Tazio, in an Italian movie *Death in Venice* (*Morte a Venezia*, 1971), and even glam and hard rock musicians associated with beauty and, in some cases, homosexuality, particularly those from the UK, such as David Bowie.

In the development of Boys' Love, *JUNE* is unique because it is the general designation of commercialized amateur Boys' Love media, and overlapped with yaoi more or less. The most important magazines in this era, *JUNE* and *Allan*, functioned as a bridge in the 1980s between commercial and non-commercial worlds of shōnen'ai manga.⁵³ It is true that *JUNE* improved the diversity of the narratives of Boys' Love, because the range of its published works was not only focused on beautiful teen boys, but also homosexuals or gays depicted in foreign and domestic

⁵³ Akiko Mizoguchi, *Male-male Romance by and for Women in Japan: A History and the Subgenres of "Yaoi" Fictions*, 2017, P. 62, ".....*June*'s semi-amateurish quality can be understood negatively on the one hand, while on the other hand it provides space for more experimental works to be commercially published."

literature and films, and other “experimental works”⁵⁴.

Many studies of Boys’ Love manga have focused on the art work before the 2000s; thus, there are not enough resources to demonstrate the development and change of the themes of Boys’ Love manga in the recent years. However, after a reading of more than 50 recent Boys’ Love manga, I can conclude that because of the particularity of the main characters (male and male), it is convenient and easy to combine some themes from shōnen with themes from shōjo in Boys’ Love manga. In other words, there are a wider variety of themes in Boys’ Love manga compared with shōjo. For example, adventure, magic, myth, religions and romance existed simultaneously in *Kulimuzon Superu* (クリムゾンスペル, Crimson Spell) from Yamane Ayano; a story telling of an adventure in which a prince and a wizard work to remove the curse put upon the prince. They finally fall in love after being together morning and night. Another example, *10 Count* (テンカウント) from Rihito Takarai (宝井理人), is a story about a man who has mysophobia and his psychologist. In the first five episodes, there is no progress in their relationship; however, there is an explicit depiction of the background, such as the reason why the man has mysophobia, his family, and his daily life. While recent popular shōjo are still focused on the romance between school girls and boys, such as two animated manga, *Hirunaka no Ryuusei* (ひるなかの流星, Daytime Shooting Star, 2011.3 – 2014. 11)

⁵⁴ Ibid. “..... (1) works that are less explicitly “heterosexualized,” with versatile characters who do not assume the fixed positions of “*seme*” (the aggressive partner) and “*uke*” (the passive partner), (2) works that do not have any sex scenes (which are obligatory in other commercial “boys’ love” magazines, with the infrequent exceptions of stories with teenaged protagonists who only kiss), (3) works with strong female characters, or (4) works focusing on subsidiary characters.

by Mika Yamamori (山森三香), and *Ao Haru Ride* (アオハライド, Blue Spring Ride, 2011.2 – 2015.3) by Io Sakisaka(咲坂伊緒), Boys' Love has already involved other more diverse themes.

There is no significant difference in the drawing style between Boys' Love manga and shōjo in shōnen'ai, *JUNE*, and yaoi eras. To compare two shōnen'ai works, *The Heart of Thomas* (Tōma no shinzō, トーマの心臓, 1974), from Hagio Moto, and *Song of the Wind and the Trees* (Kaze to kinouta, 風と木の詩, 1976 - 1988) from Takemiya Keiko (竹宮恵子), it is obvious that both of them had inherited shōjo's drawing style. There are some symbols used in these manga. For instance,



Figure 1.1, *Kaze to kinouta*(風と木の詩) from Takemiya Keiko (竹宮恵子), Volume 1, Chapter 1

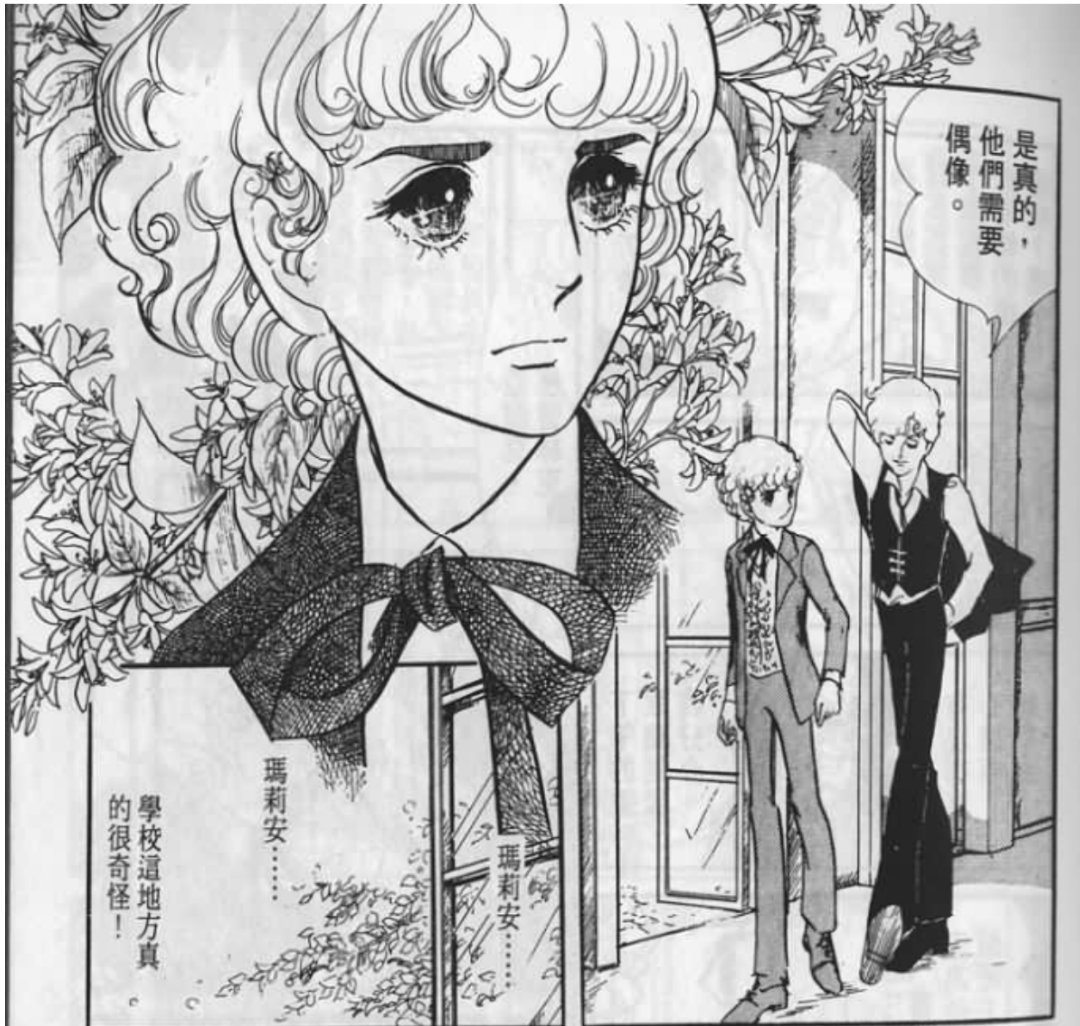


Figure 1.2, *The Heart of Thomas* (Tōma no shinzō, 1974), from Hagio Moto, Volume 1, Chapter 1

flowers around the portrayal of characters and detailed depiction of eyes, to present their beauty. In addition, as shown in Figure 1. 1 and 1. 2, interior monologues appear outside word balloons, and images of characters are layered through the irregular frames⁵⁵. However, more recently, Boys' Love has gradually broken away from shōjo. The serialized Boys' Love manga, *Junjou Romantica* (純情ロマンチカ), from Nakamura Shungiku (中村春菊) will show this transformation. This manga has been serialized from 2002 with sixteen volumes already. In its early volumes, there was a

⁵⁵ D, Shamoan, *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girls' Culture in Japan*, P. 59.

more explicit shōjo drawing style. Figure 1.3 shows the features of this style: simplified drawing of the background; portrayals of full body with exaggerated long arms and legs; close view of the characters' expression; words without word balloons. However, in the recent volumes as shown in figure 1.4, there are huge differences, such as, an explicit drawing of the background, and clear word balloons. Although there are still exaggerated big eyes of characters, close views, and less action transitions to show movements, the whole style has been gradually separated from shōjo. Recently, not only Nakamura Shungiku (中村春菊) has improved her own drawing style, but other Boys' Love manga artists have developed their own particular drawing style as well. For example, some of them may combine shōnen manga style,



Figure 1.3, *Junjou Romantica* (純情 ロマンチカ) from Nakamura Shungiku (中村春菊), Chapter 1.

which involves a linear layout, a lot of action-to-action and moment-to-moment transitions, motion lines and so on. Most Japanese Boys' Love manga follow a "beautiful" drawing style due to the fact that most figures are

adolescent school boys. Moreover, the drawing style may be different and changeable due to the differences of plot, audiences, and creators. For instance, most romantic BL manga have a “beautiful” drawing style, and serious literary stories display a realistic drawing style. *Twittering Birds Never Fly* (囀る鳥は羽ばたかない, 鳴鳥不飛), from Kou Yoneda (ヨネダコ, 攻鉄) included a realistic drawing style and stories of the relation between adult males as figure 1.6 shows. This manga has raised several social problems such as Yakuza (Japanese organized crime), domestic violence, and crime. It is true that some famous manga artists have their own distinct drawing style. For example, manga artist Sakyō Aya (左京亞也), who has drawn one of the three most famous BL manga series, *Kuroneko Kareshi no Amaekata* (クロネコ彼氏の甘



え方), is expert in drawing a style which may be a combination of “beautiful” and realistic as Figure 1.5 shows. The male characters have beautiful faces and bodies but not as exaggerated as a

Figure 1.4 *Junjou Romantica* (純情ロマンチカ) from Nakamura Shungiku (中村春菊), Chapter 42.



Figure 1.5, *Kuroneko Kareshi no Amaekata* (クロネコ彼氏の甘え方), Sakyō Aya (左京亞也), Volume 1, Chapter 5

pointed chin or huge
bright twinkling eyes, and
a realistic drawing of
body and movement
without hyperbolic body
proportion, and less use
of motion lines. Another
example, *Doukyusei* (同
級生) from Nakamuta
Asumiko (中村明日美
子), shows a style which
has simplified shōjo
drawing style as Figure

1.7 and 1.8. This includes less use of lines to depict characters' face, hair, and body combined with much use of rich and varied movements and expressions in stick figure, to present characters' emotions.

Most shōnen manga have involved an adventure plot in which the main character (boy) may have suffered a lot in his childhood, but has never given up being brave, strong, powerful, responsible; and there will be a lot of struggles on his growth path. He eventually passes these as tasks that help him grow. He may also meet someone who will be the most loyal companion and in the end, he will get all he wanted when he was young. Many famous shōnen manga such as *Naruto* are following this type of



Figure 1.6, 囀る鳥は羽ばたかない(鳴鳥不飛, Twittering Birds Never Fly), from Kou Yoneda (ヨネダ コウ, 攻鉄), Chapter 1.

plot.

In contrast, most BL anime have included a romantic story between two males. As mentioned before, during the shōnen'ai era, narratives were placed in romanticized European settings and populated with beautiful adolescent European boys, and the plot may have been about their school life. Recent

BL works take more influence from contemporary social problems, famous people, films, or TV dramas. Furthermore, current trends suggest that a single drawing style may be not right for the recent manga market due to an expansion of manga readers' age groups, an overlap of subjects such as BL elements in sports manga like *Kuroko no Basuke* (黒子のバスケ), and a boom of doujinshi in which some fan works have exceeded the original story. Many sports manga may be considered as shōnen manga for male readers, however, when female readers have become an essential consumer group for manga in huge numbers, publishers may have to figure out a way to include

BL elements to attract more female consumers. Manga artists and publishers call those BL aspects as “a special friendship between boys”, which is a euphemistic explanation. In the West, there is a similar situation in the comics market as in Japan. For instance, a lot of fans have hoped to see Spiderman and Deadpool appear together in the same Marvel movie due to the fact that Spiderman has played a role in saving Deadpool in the comic in a way which implies a unique friendship.



Figure 1.7 & 1.8 *Doukyusei* 同級生, from *Nakamura Asumiko* 中村明日美子, Volume 1, Chapter 1

1.3 The Motivations of Boys' Love Creations

Some studies of Boys' Love manga have concluded that there are three main motivations of their creators, which are: a defiance of patriarchal society, sexual desire, and spiritual love. Shamoon has demonstrated that the intimate relationship

between school girls, which can be called an *S relationship*⁵⁶, was the main theme in the pre-war shōjo magazines⁵⁷. Homosocial contents in these pre-war magazines have provided a secret world for their main consumers, school girls;⁵⁸ in other words, a temporary escape from the pressures of heterosexual courtship and marriage, which awaited girls upon graduation⁵⁹. The homosocial world of girls was premised on an idealized concept of spiritual love⁶⁰; and spiritual love of a homosocial variety has been considered and depicted as more innocent than heterosexuality. In the postwar period, in shōjo manga from the 1970s and beyond, depictions of homosocial relationships shifted from friendship between two girls to the love between two boys⁶¹. Because of this transformation, love between two boys has inherited the aspect of innocent love, which has encouraged people to create Boys' Love narratives. In Fujimoto Yukari's studies of yaoi, he has suggested that there is a "amusementization of gender" (jendaa no gorakuka) from Nagakubo, which allowed readers of yaoi/boys' love to enjoy "masculinity" and "femininity" to be free from any sense of oppression⁶². This "playing of genders" has motivated female manga artists

⁵⁶ D, Shamoan, discussed in *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girls Culture in Japan*, P. 33-38, "The term that girls used themselves and that is still redolent of prewar girls' culture is S relationship (esu kankei), or sometimes Class S (kurasu esu). The term "S" first appeared in girls' magazines around 1910..... English-language scholarship on S relationships is beginning to take this more Foucauldian approach. For instance, in his essay, "'S' is for Sister," Gregory Pflugfelder finds that even in the discourse of sexologists and journalists in the 1910s and 1920s, relationships between girls were treated as a common experience of adolescence. In spite of the influence of late-nineteenth-century Western medical discourse about homosexual pathology, some Japanese sexologists argued that S relationships were healthy and normal as long as these relationships did not go "too far" (meaning sexual intimacy or refusal to give up the relationship after graduation) S relationship were not necessarily pathologized, nor were they subversive, but rather mimicked heterosexual courtship in a safe, socially acceptable way."

⁵⁷ D, Shamoan, *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girls' Culture in Japan*, P. 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., P. 12.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., P. 13.

⁶² Fujimoto Yukari, "The Evolution of BL as "Playing with Gender" : Viewing the Genesis and

to draw hermaphrodite figures with a mixture of the characteristics of both sexes. To combine Fujimoto's and Mark McLelland's ideas, the social status and sexual desires of women will be motivations as well, and the reasons that many erotic scenes emerged in Boys' Love manga. There is an imbalance between women and men in Japanese society, and perhaps other places as well. The role of women in society is constant, they need to become a good wife and wise mother in order to reproduce society. Women have to face the risk of pregnancy, and pressure of bearing and raising a child; however, in Boys' Love manga, these are not problems anymore, the flexible relationship patterns of Boys' Love couples, which will be explained in the second chapter, allowed women to imagine different roles in their relationships.

From the late 1990s to now, the rapid development of the Internet has enriched people's independent activity, which can all be completed online. The Internet has provided much information for people to discover their interests. As one of those people who are interested in Boys' Love, I was born in the 1990s, a generation that was born and grew up with the Internet in China. I read the first Boys' Love manga and web fiction online and wrote my first Boys' Love piece and shared it online with other people as well. During the years-long experience of creating and sharing Boys' Love, my interests have moved from Japanese shōnen and shōjo manga, doujinshi of

development of BL" from a Contemporary perspective, in a collection of *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, edited by M. McLelland, K. Nagaike, K. Suganuma & J. Welker, 2015, P. 84. "Nagakubo found that the *seme* and *uke* sexual roles in a same-sex couple are determined by the very contrast between them. That is, the same person can be either a "prince" or a "princess" depending on who their partner is. This, she claims, is why coupling is so important in yaoi fiction. In other words, no matter how much a *seme-uke* couple may appear to imitate traditional masculine-feminine gender roles, the differences between them are no more than idiosyncrasies brought about by grouping the two together. The couple is, therefore, free from the oppression of sexual difference."

Japanese shōnen manga, original Japanese Boys' Love manga, to Korean male idol groups and the popular Western series movies, and doujinshi of these films and television shows. The reason for these changes of focus is simply, I just found something new which I am more interested in when the Internet has provided me a lot of choices. This may be the most important motivation for the hundreds and thousands of non-professional Boys' Love participants.

For those professional Boys' Love manga artists and writers, the top motivation will be the economic element. Some obscure shōjo manga artists have started their career by drawing manga with a lot of erotic scenes in order to accumulate enough popularity initially, and then publish normal shōjo manga to ensure a respectable sales volume. For instance, the early shōjo manga from Minami Kanan (水波風南), *Love X Love Honey Life* (蜜×蜜ドロップス, 2004 - 2006) and *Renai Shijo Shugi* (恋愛至上主義, 2002 - 2004), include more intimate physical contact than other shōjo manga. However, Minami then serialized a relatively standard shōjo manga, *Kyō, Koi o Hajimemase* (今日、恋をはじめます) when she became famous, a story between high school students with less erotic scenes focused on the depicting school life and discussions of the confusion of young people in choosing their future. Similarly, some manga artists have gained more attention by drawing doujinshi of popular Boys' Love couples from best-selling manga. For instance, Kou Yoneda (ヨネダ コ, 攻鉄) has drawn several doujinshi works of Yamamoto Takeshi (山本武) and Habari Kyoya (雲雀きょうや) from a shōnen manga, *Hitman Reborn* (ヒットマン REBORN!, 2004 – 2012) while publishing her original Boys' Love manga. There is the same tendency in

China as well. Some manga artists and illustrators will recreate Boys' Love related portrayals of popular manga and anime characters, and share them online to gain enough popularity. Pixiv is the largest Japanese website for professional and non-professional manga artists and illustrators to share their art works, including web users not only from Japan, but also mainland China, Taiwan, Korea, and even the West. By looking through this website, it is obvious to see that the doujinshi of popular manga, movies, or TV dramas are still in the majority. Moreover, Akiko Mizoguchi has mentioned copyright problems and a free creative environment are the other important reasons that many professional writers and artists continue to participate in the Boys' Love fanzine world. As she explains:

One obvious reason is that many professionals produce ani-paro fanzines in which they publish work that cannot be released professionally due to copyright problems. But they also use fanzines as venues in which to express their fantasies directly in originally composed comics and novels, despite the fact that such work can be published commercially with no copyright problems. Professionals turn to fanzines for publication of their own original work precisely because their professional work is inherently collaborative with editors, in that a writer or comic artist is assigned a piece - often with specific instructions on theme and setting as well as length – and must communicate with the editor during the creative process to ensure that the end product meets editorial expectations. In fanzines, in contrast, professional writers and artists can work as “amateurs” and create whatever they like of their own accord, often in a looser manner both technically and structurally⁶³

⁶³ Akiko Mizoguchi, *Male-male Romance by and for Women in Japan: A History and the Subgenres of “Yaoi” Fictions*, no 25, 2003, P. 60,

For those unprofessional participants, Boys' Love fan creation is a low entry barrier, low-budget, and low risk space for them to show their interests in their favorite art works. I will return to discuss this reason in more detail in the second chapter by using Henry Jenkins' ideas of Fan culture.

1.4 The Migration of Boys' Love from Japan to China

The term "Japanization", which has been mentioned before, has shown the influence of Japan in the world in recent decades, and it has gradually become the center for popular culture in East Asia. Harumi Befu noted that cultural similarity or proximity — similarity of the cultural assumptions and background between Japan and neighboring Asian cultures is probably the answer to the question of why creolized versions of Japanese-style manga, anime, television dramas, variety programs and talent shows are so popular in East Asia⁶⁴. Moreover, the expansion of Japanese popular culture has also been promoted by the Japanese government as part of its so called "cultural diplomacy". Under the shadow of World War II, and facing economic problems, the Japanese government was urged to take action to soften the anti-Japan mood and emphasized the significance of promoting the international understanding of Japan through cultural exchange in the 1970s⁶⁵. Koichi Iwabuchi summarized the process of how Japan moved from a concentration on traditional culture and educational exchange to media culture:

⁶⁴ Harumi Befu, *Globalization Theory from the Bottom Up Japan's Contribution*, 2003, P. 7.

⁶⁵ Koichi Iwabuchi, *Pop-culture diplomacy in Japan: soft power, nation branding and the question of "international cultural exchange"*, 2015, P. 420.

“While traditional cultural forms such as the tea ceremony and Kabuki as well as language education and human exchange programs such as The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET), which started in 1987, were the main staple of cultural exchange, the potential of media culture for cultural diplomacy began to draw attention in the late 1980s. The growing popularity of Japanese TV programs in Asian countries demonstrated that Japan’s colonial past did not prevent Japanese TV programs and pop idols from being accepted in East and Southeast Asia. Accordingly, a strong interest emerged in the capability of Japanese media culture to improve Japan’s reputation. In 1988, the Takeshita government for the first time established a discussion panel on international cultural exchange with a focus on the promotion of exporting TV programs to Asian countries. In 1991, the then MOFA and the then Ministry of Post and Telecommunications jointly established the Japan Media Communication center (JAMCO) to provide subsidies to developing countries to import Japanese TV programs.”⁶⁶

Since the mid-1990s, Japan noticed the significance of soft power to build a national brand as other countries, much as America had done. Japan’s pop-culture diplomacy was firmly institutionalized with the “Cool Japan” policy discourse, which sought to capitalize on the popularity of Japanese media culture in global markets around the beginning of the present century.⁶⁷ The 1990s was also the rapid development period of the Internet, which had provided a broader space for expanding media culture. With support from the Japanese government, Boys’ Love

⁶⁶ Koichi Iwabuchi, Pop-culture diplomacy in Japan: soft power, nation branding and the question of “international cultural exchange” , *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 2015, P. 421.

⁶⁷ Ibid., P. 422.

manga and fiction have been circulated to other regions with other media cultures in a particular time of gradually spreading use of Internet.

Boys' Love, as a part of Japanese manga and anime, shifted from Japan to China with a trend of cultural exchange. A video, *the Differences between Chinese and Japanese "Otaku Culture"*, on the largest Chinese anime website, Bilibili, made by an anime fan, Guo Jiang Zhi Ji (过江之鲫) who has seventeen thousand followers, has introduced the history of the migration of Japanese manga, anime, and games from Japan to China, based on the information the creator has collected online. This video maker mentioned that he was born in the 1980s, which places him in the first generation that encountered Japanese manga and anime in China; thus, some details in this video come from his memory and his personal experience. This video may not be academic enough; however, it is worth analyzing due to the fact that it has been approved by many manga and anime fans as reflected by their comments. By comparing this video with other studies, an idea of the process of the migration can be formed.

First, there is a term that needs to be clarified: ACG, the acronym of Animation, Comic, and Game, has been used as the general designation of Japanese anime culture in China.⁶⁸ The migration of ACG started from the late 1980s, when pirated copies of some popular Japanese manga such as *Dragon Ball* were circulated in China, and some Japanese anime such as *Astro Boy* were played on official TV channels⁶⁹. In

⁶⁸ X, Y, Gao, *Research on the Communication of ACG Subculture in China* (ACG 亚文化在中国的传播研究), P. 7.

⁶⁹ Ibid., P. 14.

1993, the first Chinese manga magazine, *Hua Shu Da Wang* (画书大王, the King of Comics) was distributed, which extended the influence of manga. Moreover, it not only published famous Japanese manga, and art works from domestic manga artists, but also included an encyclopedia of the manga market and associated knowledge. Unfortunately, this magazine stopped publication in 1994. The 1990s is the era when the Internet arose in China. ACG emerged as a term in 1995, which was also the time when *EVA* (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*, 新世纪エヴァンゲリオン), one of the most predominant Japanese anime, involving contents about psychology, religion, and philosophy, had been released and influenced Chinese ACG (from 1997 to 2000, and even after). Between 1994 and 1995, BBS (Bulletin Board System), the early virtual community, was popularized in Taiwan, which provided the gathering place for ACG fans. From 1996, the discussion area of manga and anime emerged on the BBS of high educational institutions in mainland China. For instance, in September 1996, the cartoon page of Tsinghua University' BBS opened. In 2000, software of file sharing, *winmx*, came out, which provided a more efficient way for fans to share ACG works; and then, in 2001, FTTP (fiber to the premises) was provided. In June 2001, the first digital video record (DVR) in Japan, SONY SVR-715, went on sale, which has improved the quality of recording anime. When DVR was popularized in Japan, anime released on Japanese channels could be recorded and circulated to other countries through broadband. In August 2002, a Chinese online chat program, QQ, supported “group chatting”, which replaced the early BBS to become the most important gathering place for ACG fans. Then in 2007, the first Chinese anime

website, AC Fun, was built; in February 2010, Bilibili, another anime website was established. Up to the present, some Chinese anime companies, such as Tencent anime, have entered the ACG area, and solved copyright issues. This whole process has reflected the change of “sharing of ACG and discussing between ACG fans” under the rapid development of the Internet. Therefore, a large number of fan creations including Boys’ Love emerged and have been shared online rapidly. Boys’ Love, as a part of ACG, has migrated from Japan to China this way.

Moreover, Wong has mentioned that Japanese manga and anime have extended to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea earlier than mainland China due to politics⁷⁰. The process of the migration of ACG has also reflected political issues. In 1978, the *China-Japan Peace and Friendship Treaty*, was signed⁷¹. Therefore, in the 1980s, ACG from Japan has largely shifted to China as well.

To sum up, from the development of Boys’ Love in Japan, and the process of migration of Boys’ Love from Japan to China, the efforts of doujinshi, or fan creations should not be neglected. Therefore, the next chapter will focus on analyzing Boys’ Love fan creations in China by using Fan culture from Henry Jenkins, and case studies of popular Chinese web fiction and web manga which have been adapted into anime version with thousands of fan creations.

There was a discussion about how “Rotten Culture” emerged initially from manga and influenced other realms of art in China. Moreover, the literature review showed how scholars analyze the motivations of tons of Boys’ Love fan art, and they

⁷⁰ W. S. Wong, *Globalizing Manga: From Japan to Hong Kong and Beyond*, P. 26.

⁷¹ X. Y. Gao, *Research on the Communication of ACG Subculture in China*, P. 14.

usually agree about some answers, such as gender equity, opposition to patriarchal society, and the fantasy of the role of a female's ideal lover. The discussion of the motivations is one of the most important parts of this thesis, and it will be analyzed from a new perspective, the influence of a new relationship between readers and writers caused by increasingly efficient sharing and communicating activities via the Internet. Chapter one contains two main parts, and they are: a brief introduction of history and development of shonen'ai, yaoi/Boys' Love in Japan; and the migration of Boys' Love from Japan to China. In the section on the migration of Boys' Love, the acronym of ACG (anime, comics, and games) was introduced, and it showed that Boys' Love is not the only thing spreading from Japan to China, but follows a trend of dissemination of ACG with energetic fan participation and efforts.

Chapter II: The Diversity of Fan Creations and the Attractions of male characters from Original Art Works

The contents above have mentioned the importance of fan participation and efforts and led to a key point which will be the main argument in this chapter, that is: an analysis of the motivations of Boys' Love fan creations caused by the original art works, and the importance of Boys' Love couples. For analyzing it, an introduction of the current concept of fan arts and fandom/fans' circle, and a presentation of the thesis of Fan Culture from Henry Jenkins will be included, with case studies as the proof. Because the literature review in the introduction has criticized that some resources are out-of-date, all gathered information except *Textual Poachers* written by Henry Jenkins (published in 1992, Chinese translation version published in 2016) will be new, especially in the case studies section. Examples are chosen from no earlier than at most five years ago. Most data are mainly collected from three websites: 1. LOFTERS: a blog for sharing fan or original drawing and writing; 2. SUI YUAN JU: a BBS for sharing fan writing of Western art works, and some translations of Western fan writing; 3. Sina Weibo: Chinese Twitter, the latest information of fan creations and comments. Moreover, for enriching the types of fan creations, a Chinese video website, Bilibili, will also be considered.

2.1 Abundant Fan Arts

Fan arts are usually explained as an activity of fans in which fans create derivative work based on original works. The Chinese term for Fan arts can be

translated as 同人 (Tong Ren), the same Chinese characters from 同人志 (Tong Ren Zhi), the Chinese term for Doujinshi (the compilation of fan arts which are sold in the comic market in Japan), which reflects the fact that the concept of fan arts in China has been strongly influenced by Japan. Chapter I mentioned that fan participation was the main method to help ACG migrate from Japan to China in the 1990s, a politically sensitive period when only a few official copies could be circulated. Because of the lag in network technique in the 90s, most fan arts were confined to translations, web fictions, and paintings.

Fans' writing and drawing are definitely the most common and "time-honored" fan arts; however, after decades of development of the Internet, fan activities have become abundant, and the scope of fan arts has extended to other realms of art. Fans energetically show their affections for the original works in many different ways. For example, MAD (マツドー), which is not an acronym of "Music, Anime, Drama", but the name of a fan created multimedia works of video games and anime. MAD is close to fan video-making, a video clip edited by fans by using scenes and frames selected from their favorite anime, movies, and games with dubbed in background music. Some MADs place emphasis on saluting original works; thus, these kinds of MADs will retain the original story line. Sometimes, fans will show some of their understandings reflected by the editing pace and rhythm and background music selection. Another type of MAD may emphasize showing characters' unique charm. These MADs are usually edited to have a new story, and present the re-creators' understanding and editing capabilities, which can be seen as a video version of fan

fictions, or dynamic fan drawing and painting. Bilibili held a MAD competition in 2016, where creators uploaded their MAD works, which were then graded by judges and web users. A MAD work named *Natsume Yuujin Cyou – A Story about Ginn*⁷²



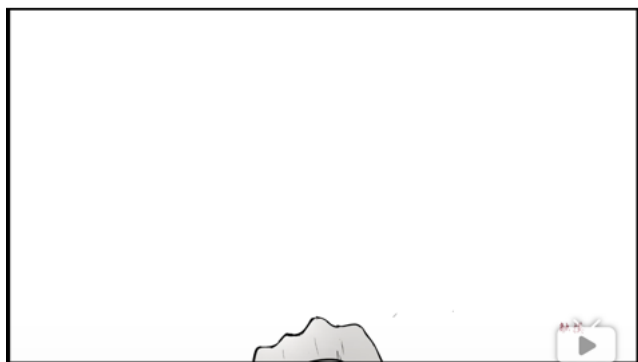
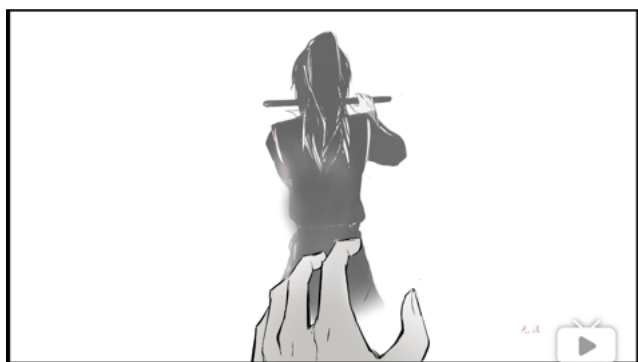
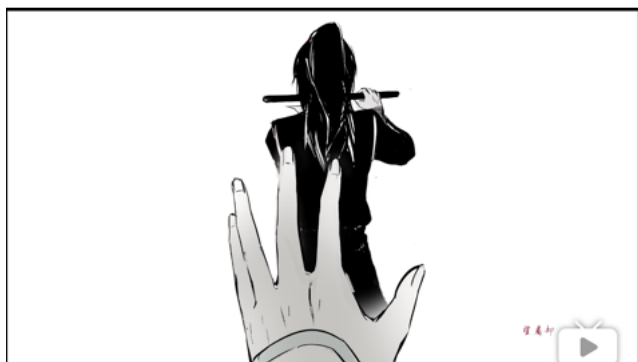
Image 2.1, 夏目友人帳 – 关于银的故事 (*Natsume Yuujin Cyou – A Story about Ginn*⁷³), from 桥西 (Qiao Xi), 2016. The first image is a re-created scene by using photoshop, and the second image is the original scene from *Hotarubi no Mori*.

⁷² <https://www.bilibili.com/video/av5696590/?from=search&seid=16177001444240409235>

⁷³ Ibid.

(Chinese title: 夏目友人帳 — 关于银的故事), which took second place, had been discussed and circulated for a long time. The creator, Qiao Xi (桥西, the West Side of Bridge), has made this MAD by editing two Japanese anime: *Natsume Yuujin Cyou* (夏目友人帳, *Natsume's Book of Friends*) and *Hotarubi no Mori* (萤火の森, *The Light of the Fireflies Forest*). Qiao Xi has recreated a story about two main characters, Natsume and Ginn from two different anime respectively. However, the original manga of these two anime are from the same person, Midorikawa Yuki (緑川ゆき), a female Japanese manga artist, who is skillful in drawing manga about spirits' and ghosts' stories inspired by Japanese Shinto. Because these two anime share the same background and drawing style, the new storyline and scene seem reasonable, coherent, and harmonious as the comparison shown by Image 2.1. A lot of Photoshop skills have been used for setting two characters from different anime in the same scene.

In addition to MAD, there are other categories of fan arts, such as 手书 (Shou Shu, Hand drawing music video), 广播剧 (Guang Bo Ju, radio drama), and 同人歌 (Tong Ren Ge, characters' derivative song). Technically, Shou Shu is similar to MAD since both of these two categories involve matched video editing and background music elements; however, the contents of the scenes are totally different. The images in MAD are all edited from existing movies, TV series, games, anime and so on; on the contrary, Shou Shu is all drawn by the editor, even if the characters already existed. Image 2.2 is a screenshot of a popular Shou Shu, a fan creation of a Boys' Love web fiction, with over a million visits, and twenty-four thousand comments on



Bilibili which generally reflected that Shou Shu is close to a stop-motion animation. In this five-minute long Shou Shu, the creator has drawn ninety-four different images including portraits, backgrounds, close-ups of some objects which have symbolic meaning in the original web fiction to represent the experiences and emotions of these two main characters. Basically, the background music of Shou Shu plays a role as a narrator; the lyrics and images are matched. For example, the close shot of the hand in Image 2.2 expresses a scene of a condition that is

Image 2.2, 可念不可说-忘羡手书 (*A memory could not be talked – Shou Shu for Wang-Xian couple from BL web fiction 魔道祖师, Mo Dao Zu Shi*), drawing and edited by 蓝诺 (Lan Nuo), 2016.
<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av5092967/?from=search&seid=2459901110220542442>

beyond retrieval which reflects a plot of one character who has lost his true love in the original web fiction. The corresponding lyrics shown at the lower

right corner are “could not tell” which means he wants him to stay but he cannot speak it out loud; and the name of the song has always been used as the name of the Shou Shu with a subheading to explain the themes.

Radio drama is a vocal version of some novels and web fictions with some adaptations for the convenience of audiences. Radio dramas have also been remade as video version with some background images, and uploaded on video sites. It is usually produced by a group of fans, some of them maybe engaged in broadcasting and dubbing works. At the beginning of the development of radio drama, it was supplements of the original fictions; however, a growing number of professional broadcasters and voice actors joined and thereby assured the high-quality of this kind of fan creation. The standard radio drama will contain several excellent voice actors including voice-over, a rational adapted script, professional post-production, suitable background music and theme song. Some outstanding radio dramas have exceeded the original fictions. One example is a radio drama, 一醉经年 (Yi Zui Jing Nian, *Drink till all's Blue*) -- produced by 翼之声中文配音社团 (YZS Chinese dubbing club) adapted from a Boys' Love novel of the same name written by 水千丞 (Shui Qian Cheng). This five-hour long radio drama has deleted some long and tedious parts in the original novel, and the faithful voice acting and original songs have fully shown different layers of characters' emotions. Some comments online agree that “if you have listened to the radio drama, you do not need to read the book”. While Japanese radio drama has already been an essential component of the mature manga and anime market, it is still a hobby or pastime in China. As a result, non-profitable

and high-quality standard Chinese radio drama is confronted with a long production cycle issue; a complete radio drama is usually produced over a period of years. For instance, 四月一日 (April 1st), a dubbing club, shared the first episode of a radio drama, 职业替身 (Zhi Ye Ti Shen, *Professional Substitute*) on 2014-10-29 online; the second episode on 2015-05-04; third one on 2017-09-30; and the rest are still in production.

Tong Ren Ge is a song that fans write for their favorite characters or couples. The lyrics are normally inspired from the experiences of characters or some classical lines. Some fans prefer to write original music, and some will copy other beats. Fans are accustomed to share Tong Ren Ge as background music or theme song in a MAD, Shou Shu, and radio drama. If they tend to circulate a song alone, they will also find some illustrations to make it as a video. To sum up, abundant fan arts have provided a relatively free circumstance which allow fans to perform their roles as in a “free employment market”; for example, they can only be a “vagrant” (reader) at the very first, and then they can start their own career (creating an account and sharing works in the social network) as an illustrator, a writer, a cosplayer, or a voice-actor. Fans who have drawing skills can produce derivative manga or illustrations; fans who know music can write a song; fans who excel at writing can create slash fiction. Moreover, there is no existing strict standard to circulate these works, and it is effortless to find a fan club or an online community to share and discuss with others.

The creation of Chinese fan arts has been inspired by arts both from the Western countries (especially the USA) and Japan which can be proven by the number of

different themed fan arts. For instance, in LOFTERS, the hot tag of *the Avengers*, a popular Marvel movie, shows that 16626 works of fan arts including fictions, pictures, cosplays and analyses of the original version have already been posted online. Another hot tag, 锤基 (the Chinese translation of the couple name of Thor and Loki, “Thorki” in English), devoted to two main characters from the Marvel universe, shows that 26705 pieces of fan arts linked and posted under that hot tag. Moreover, searching a hot tag of *Naruto*, a famous Japanese manga which also has an anime version and several theatrical releases as well, and 鸣佐 (the Chinese translation of the couple names of Naruto and Sasuke), 36751 and 21731 are the numbers of fan participants for each. These numbers only show a slight difference which reflects the similar popularity of American movies, and Japanese manga and anime in the Chinese fan creation world.

2.2 The Concept of Fandom/Fans’ Circle, and *uke-seme* Couples (CPs)

The variety of fan arts has been caused by increasingly developed and strengthened fan groups. People who are interested in the same movies, TV series, idol groups, anime and manga and so on will gradually form several different and independent fandoms or fans’ circles. Most fandoms are disparate and can be thought of as “independent kingdoms”; however, there may still be some arguments between groups if their interest subjects are similar which can be imaged as “border wars”. For example, a video game *League of Legends* has nearly the same world outlook, such as the same division of living beings, human beings, elves, Orcs, wizards and so on, as

with the novel series of *Lord of the Rings*. Sometimes, book fans will debate plagiarism problems with game fans. Moreover, arguments between fans of Korean and Japanese idol groups revealed the different aesthetic standards of two things with the same model. Korean idol groups pay more attention to appearance, and every member has a clear character setting; for instance, in a 6-member Korean idol group, there will be two lead dancers, two lead vocal people, one who has the most handsome or beautiful face, and one leader. However, Japanese idols are more focused on all-sided development; the five members from Japanese national icons, SMAP (dissolved in Dec 31st, 2016), are active in music, movies, TV series, and TV shows. Another obvious difference is that Korea idol groups are devoted to extending overseas markets, whereas Japanese idol groups are content with their domestic market; thus, the conflicts between these fans can be heightened in the discussion of Korean and Japanese pop cultures.

The emergence of “Rotten Culture” has made some overlapping spaces between each fandom and fan circle. Fans can find the subject of intimate male relationships in every art work, and then give a couple name to their favorite characters. The couple name usually shows the roles which these two characters play in this special relationship. An example, Thorki (Thor and Loki), which was mentioned before, has represented that Thor plays the *seme* role (literally “attacker”), and Loki is the *uke* role (literally “receiver”). Some fans of the couple of Thorki are from a Marvel fan circle, which also belongs to the Western culture fan circles; however, some Asian culture fans will also be interested due to the fact that Thorki reflected a *seme-uke*

couple pattern of a muscular and straightforward *seme* and a tsundere cunning *uke*.

In “Rotten Culture”, fandom and fans’ circle are not categorized by the original art works but based on the couple patterns combined by characters. They may have frequently discussed which male couple is the most perfect match. Fans in “Rotten Culture” are not attracted by one character, but mostly a personality trait. For instance, fans who are interested in the character setting of a brave man, may be fascinated by *Harry Potter* and *Naruto* simultaneously. Similarly, fans choose their favorite male couples depending on the different relationship patterns of *seme-uke* couples which Fujimoto Yukari has discussed:

“A wealth of yaoi terms have come into being to describe various relationship patterns, such as “sasoi *uke*” (an individual who is mentally *seme* but physically *uke*), “hetare *seme*” (a loser *seme*), “jōuke” (a proud *uke* queen), “keigo *seme*” (a *seme* who talks to his partner using honorific language), “yancha *uke*” (a naughty *uke*), or “gekokujō” (when an *uke* overcomes a *seme*). All of these terms are inherently contradictory, highlighting two different personality traits held by the *same* character.”⁷⁴

“Rotten Culture” has obscured the distinction between each fandom and fans’ circle; male-male romance is the common subject for every “Rotten” fan. A common phenomenon is that a “Rotten” fan is normally reading Japanese manga, listening to K-pop music, watching Western movies, and sharing fan creations. The interests are

⁷⁴ Fujimoto Yukari, *The Evolution of BL as “Playing with Gender” : Viewing the Genesis and development of BL from a Contemporary perspective*, in a collection of *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, edited by M. McLelland, K. Nagaike, K. Suganuma & J. Welker, 2015. P. 85.

not following the art works themselves, but the setting of the distinct relationship patterns of male-male couples. The image of “Rotten Culture” fandom and fans’ circles can be imagined as a stereo-picture which will cover all kinds of popular culture, and a large sphere which contains many tiny spheres of different fandom and fans’ circle, and the size of each sphere depends on the number of fans and fan art; each sphere’s size is constantly changing due to the strong flow-ability of fans. “Rotten Culture” seems an instrument which can be used to unify all disparate “fan kingdoms”.

2.3 Fan’s Participations from Henry Jenkins:

Henry Jenkins’s *Textual Poachers* is a classic treatise about fan culture. Jenkins has used a concept of “poaching”⁷⁵, from a French scholar Michel de Certeau, and then extended this notion to analyze the meaning of cultural consumption and production from fans, emphasizing the initiative of fans doing derivative works and parodies. *Textual Poachers* was published about twenty-five years ago. The group of fans which Henry Jenkins observed were mainly American TV series’ fans in the 1980s, such as fans of *Star Trek*, who have also been called “Trekkies”. Because this book is an early research of fans’ culture, some fans’ actions which this book mentions might seem outdated: for example, sound recorder, videotape, or mimeographed fan arts and fictions. The communications of each fandom and fans’

⁷⁵ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, P. 24: “...an impertinent raid on the literary preserve that takes away only those things that are useful or pleasurable to the reader...De Certeau’s “poaching” analogy characterized the relationship between reader and writers as an ongoing struggle for possession of the text and for control over its meanings.”

circle were maintained and operated by postal system; however, these fan-participants and their efforts have been transferred to online activities in recent years. Henry Jenkins has created a new concept of participatory culture from “Poachers” to explain fan culture. He noted that

the fans’ response typically involves not simple fascination or adoration but also frustration and antagonism, and it is the combination of the two responses which motivated their active engagement with the media. Because popular narratives often fail to satisfy, fans must struggle with them, to try to articulate to themselves and others unrealized possibilities, fans cannot dismiss them from their attention but rather must try to find ways to salvage them for their interests. Far from synecdochic, fans actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced texts which provide the raw materials for their own cultural productions and the basis for their social interactions. In the process, fans cease to be simply an audience for popular texts; instead, they become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings.⁷⁶

Moreover, Henry Jenkins mentioned that fans recognize that their relationship to the text remains a tentative one, that their pleasures often exist on the margins of the original text and in the face of the producer’s own efforts to regulate its meanings.⁷⁷ Fans are actively participating to recreate while they deeply know that those fictions and characters do not belong to them. The motivation of fan art is caused by fans’ interests but also discontents; active participation is the direct way to express their understandings and sentiments.

⁷⁶ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, P. 24.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

2.4 Motivations Caused by the Original Art Works:

People normally analyze the motivations of fan arts through the perspectives of fans themselves, but neglect and underestimate the influence and attraction of original art works. Excellent books, movies, TV series, or manga and anime have fascinated fans to discover the details and recreate them as new stories. After sorting out some popular original works, such as *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Avengers*, or Japanese manga and anime, *Naruto*, *One Piece*, and *Gintama* (銀魂) which have a huge number of works of Boys' Love fan art, people may find out that they all contain the same features: 1. the popularity of art works are widespread; 2. the proportion of male characters in each art work is greater than female characters; 3. the figures of male characters are more outstanding than female characters; 4. a weak portrayal of love between male and female characters. To be specific, in the trilogy of *Lord of the Rings*, the main story line is about the fellowship of the ring, and those nine members are all male. There are not many prominent female characters who have left a profound impression on audiences and readers. A male supporting character, an Elf, Glorfindel, who has even not appeared in the adapted films has a high popularity in the fandom of *Lord of the Rings*. Searching his name on SUI YUAN JU, there will be many fan fictions and art works about him and couples involving him. Moreover, there are some similarities between every male character; thus, it is easy to pair them as couples, and then start to recreate stories for fans. For instance, in *Naruto*, at the very beginning of the story, the same suffering in Naruto and Sasuke's childhood has been emphasized, and repeatedly mentioned in the manga. On the contrary, the

depiction of ties between male and female characters, such as Sasuke and Sakura, Naruto and Hinata are flimsy and unmoving. These original art works are rarely romantic, the authors never pay much attention to representing the love between male and female characters. Therefore, the mutual trust, mutual support, mutual encouragement, and similar life experience between men will motivate fans' passion to re-create. Chinese Boys' Love fandom has the same situation as well. Many Chinese indigenous popular BL couples have been presented in web fictions, films, comics, or anime over the years. There will be two case studies involved to demonstrate the motivations of fan creations caused by the original art works and patterns of *uke-seme* couples in China.

2.5 Case Study of *The King's Avatar* (全职高手, Quan Zhi Gao Shou):

In 2013, 腾讯动漫 (*Tencent Anime*), a branch of an Internet corporation 腾讯 (*Tencent*), produced the first anime, 尸兄 (*Shi Xiong, Brothers in Dead Body*, homophone of 师兄, senior fellow apprentice), adapted from a manga of the same name, to formally enter into the Chinese anime market⁷⁸. Due to the advantage of abundant funding and a strong technical background, Tencent Anime has become the bellwether of the Chinese anime industry in a few years⁷⁹. Data shows that there were seven Chinese anime that had over a hundred million network plays from 2016-3-10 to 2016-10-11, and Tencent Anime owned three among them⁸⁰. Tencent Anime places

⁷⁸ Luo Yan, *To Analyze the New Trend of Chinese Anime Industry from the Practice of Tencent Anime* (从腾讯动漫的动画实践看国产动画产业发展新趋势), P11.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

emphasis on developing the diversity of themes of Chinese anime in order to reduce the impact of a lowering trend age stereotype. Until 2016, Tencent Anime had released sixteen network animations, and their themes included thrillers, adventure, teenage-boy oriented, mysteries, athletic competitions, and also romance. All of these anime were adapted from manga which were distributed on a fifty thousand creators' network platform founded by Tencent⁸¹. Following Tencent Anime's step, other animation companies started to concentrate on adapting online works. Under this trend, many outstanding anime have been made, and the most conspicuous one is *The King's Avatar*.

The King's Avatar is a web fiction written by Hu Die Lan (蝴蝶蓝, the Blue of Butterflies), which had been serialized in a male-oriented online reading website, *Qi Dian* (起点, *The Beginning*) between 2011/2/28 to 2014/4/28, and was published in 2012/4/1 as twenty-four books plus one side story in total. Because of its rapidly increasing popularity, there is a manga adaptation of this web fiction beginning from 2015/9/10. It's anime adaption has been released recently, and the first season was serialized between 2017/4/7 and 2017/6/16. The setting of this story is almost twenty years in the future, when electronic sports have become a national sport with a mature commercially operated system in China. The main character, Ye Xiu (叶修, and his former name is Ye Qiu 叶秋), is a genius of a popular PC game called Glory, an imaginary game created by the author in this book; the whole development of this story is around Ye Xiu's growth and frustration about the way to be the champion. As

⁸¹ Ibid.

a long-form book, hundreds of characters have come on stage; while no more than ten female characters are memorable for readers. In this story, because of the exuberant development of this game, many clubs have been founded, and their competitions are organized by the Glory alliance, the official developer and operator of this game. Their competitions can be distributed into two steps, point race and playoffs. In the first step, there will be twenty clubs competing one by one; after two rounds, the top eight on the scoreboard will have the right to get into the playoffs. In this step, eight clubs will be randomly divided into four groups, and the winners can move to the semifinals and finals. The regular number of members in each club is usually twelve people, the total number of characters will be over a hundred; however, only nine female characters have been carefully depicted by the author. This whole serial book can be summarized as three steps: 1. when Ye Xiu leaves his club and starts to play a new game account; 2. when Ye Xiu tries to establish a new club, find new game players, and train them to be professional; 3. when Ye Xiu comes back to the Glory alliance competition with his new club. Different clubs and characters have emerged in these three steps. For the characters' modeling, the author is frequently depicting characters' psychology and behavior, more than their appearance to reveal their personalities. Because the game is the most important element in this web fiction, the depiction of the performance of characters during their competitions is an important way to build their personalities as well. Each male character is distinct and unique, but in contrast, female characters are weak and insubstantial. Related to the "motivations caused by the original art works" as analyzed above, *The King's Avatar*

obviously contains all the features that a work which has plenty of fans' creation has. What is more, the author, Hu Die Lan, has admitted on his social network, Sina Weibo, that he does not specialize in writing romantic male-female stories; thus, the growing experience and competition relationship between males is the main content, which motivates readers to re-create.

Glory is a computer game imagined by the author Hu Die Lan in *The King's Avatar*; but the occupational and skill's classifications of different characters are based on a real 2D game, DNF (Dungeon & Fighter, released by Samsung Electronics, Korea on August 2005, agented by Tencent Games in China on June 19th, 2008.) DNF is a game which is focused on character development; game players can upgrade their characters' level through game instance zones (dungeons), PVP (player vs player), and PVE (player vs environment).⁸² Similar with other computer games, DNF provides a promotable game equipment system with over five hundred game props which match the skill level changes of characters.⁸³ DNF has nineteen occupations, such as ghost knight, fighter, sharpshooter, clergy, and enchanter, and it has an awakening system, which means characters will own more skills when they reach a particular level.⁸⁴ Glory has been derived from DNF and extended to a board game setting. Glory possesses six occupational types and twenty-four positions; for example, the mage series includes four professions which are battle mage,

⁸² Barryli editor, *DNF Starts the Brand New 2D Era* (地下城与勇士开创 2D 横版全新纪元), Tencent Game, 2008.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

elementalist, magic scholar, and summoner.⁸⁵ The author introduces the first perspective playing method into the game of Glory; and also, a face remodeling and costume matching of characters. Moreover, a large amount of rare materials in the game can be used to produce the most unique and highest weapons, props and costumes, which have been named as “silver weapons” in the book.⁸⁶ These settings of appearance may help readers to imagine the outlook of each game character and enhance the connection between characters and their own game characters. The author has also mentioned that those game accounts which belong to professional clubs own a set of “silver weapons” which are designed by a technical game programmer.⁸⁷ The adapted manga and anime invariably depict a character and his or her game character sharing the same face. On the one hand, characters and their corresponding game characters who have the same face may help readers and audiences distinguish stories about different characters that happened in either the real world or game world in the book. On the other hand, “the same face” hints at the dual identities of each character, and the game world becomes a parallel world of the real world; some fan fictions are written based on a setting of two simultaneous worlds. The author has also emphasized the inheritance of game accounts and bound characters; game accounts of those professional game players belong to their pro clubs, in other words, game characters are permanent whereas game players are replaceable. For instance, the main character, Ye Xiu, was forced to give up his game account, Yi Yie Zhi Qiu (一叶

⁸⁵ Hu Die Lan, *The King's Avatar 1-19*, 2018.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

之秋), a battle mage, when he left his pro game club; and this game account was given to an initiate professional player.⁸⁸ Because of the permanency of game accounts, game characters have been depicted as real people independent from game players in some fan creations which focused on the game world. Therefore, the complicated relationships between game players, game players and pro clubs, game players and their game characters in *The King's Avatar* supply an immense space for readers to do abundant fan creations.

Five CPs from *The King's Avatar* were on a list of the top twenty LOFTER Chinese CP fan creations in January 2018; and they are Ye&Huang (Ye Xiu and Huang Shao Tian, 叶修 and 黄少天) in 16, Ye&Lan (Ye Xiu and Lan He, 叶修 and 蓝河) in 15, Zhou&Ye (Zhou Ze Kai and Ye Xiu, 周泽楷 and 叶修) in 13, Yu&Huang (Yu Wen Zhou and Huang Shao Tian, 喻文州 and 黄少天) in 7, and all&Ye (all characters in *The King's Avatar* and Ye Xiu, all 叶) in 4.⁸⁹ By combining the latest data collected from three websites, Sina Weibo, Bilibili, and LOFTER which are the main platforms of fan creations, three most representative CPs from those five CPs of *The King's Avatar* will be analyzed to prove motivations caused by the original art works. First, data of the CP of Yu&Huang: 97524 fan fictions, illustrations, and manga in LOFTER; 2.1-hundred million sharing quantity, 3774 posts, and 18000 fans in the hot topic of Yu&Huang in Sina Weibo; 672 fan created videos, such as Shoushu, MAD, and radio drama in Bilibili. Second, data of the CP of

⁸⁸ Hu Die Lan, *The King's Avatar 1-19*, 2018.

⁸⁹ Yun Meng Jiang Wan Yin, *LOFTER Chinese CP Fan Creations TOP20 (Jan 2018)*, 2018.
<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av19006716?from=search&seid=16070752150719718903>

Ye&Lan: 50060 fan creations in LOFTER; sixty-four million and eight hundred thousand sharing quantity, 1219 posts, and 5152 fans in the hot topic of Ye&Lan; 391 fan created videos in Bilibili. Third, data of the CP of Zhou&Ye: 56211 fan creations in LOFTER; sixty-nine million and five hundred thousand sharing quantity, 2345 posts, and 5488 fans in this hot topic; 213 fan created videos in Bilibili. This data shows that fans are creating and sharing positively in fandoms of these three CPs. Another reason for choosing these three CPs is that they show three distinct relationship patterns of *seme-uke* couples which will be discussed in detail below.

1. Yu&Huang (喻黄)

Characters' introduction⁹⁰: Yu Wen Zhou and Huang Shao Tian are members of a traditional strong pro game club, Lan Yu (蓝雨, Blue Rain), the grand champion of the sixth Glory professional league. Yu Wen Zhou is the leader of Lan Yu and his game character is a warlock named Sorcerer (索克萨尔) inherited from the first leader. Because his APM (actions per minute) is just over 200 which means his game action ability is near the bottom of professional game play level (professional game players' average APM is 300), he has to focus on studying tactical strategy. In Lan Yu, his position is chief commander, and selected as one of the four great master tacticians by the Glory alliance. Huang Shao Tian is the vice-captain of Lan Yu with his game character, Ye Yu Sheng Fan (夜雨声烦), the best swordsman, who has also been called "blade master". He is the "trump card" and tactical core in Lan Yu, and he is the most remarkable opportunist in the Glory alliance with a high game operation

⁹⁰ Hu Die Lan, *The King's Avatar 1-19*, 2018.

technique and striking judgment. The setting of these two characters are complementary; they are best friends and teammates. Contents from the original novel indicated that they have met each other and gradually become the most trusted partners since they were young trainees in Lan Yu:

“Fang Shi Jing looks back and sees Yu Wen Zhou and Huang Shao Tian in the group of young trainees at the end of the hallway. (方世镜回头，看着走廊尽头，一群少年中的两位。)

Wei Chen places great expectations on these two boys. They are the future and center of Lan Yu club. (那是魏琛对他的托付，是蓝雨的未来，是属于蓝雨的双核。) They are sword and curse. (剑，与诅咒。)”⁹¹

“Sword and curse” is also another couple name of Yu&Huang, and their couple fans are proud that it is an officially certified couple name because it is from the original texts. Their intimate relationship is reflected by their interaction in everyday life:

“Did you meet with Ye Qiu?” Yu Wen Zhou asks. (“是不是去见过叶秋了?” 喻文州问) Huang Shao Tian says nothing. (黄少天没吱声。)

“The time when you went out corresponds to the time of the record of that game instance, you are that swordsman, Liu Mu, aren’t you?” Yu Wen Zhou says. (“时间和那个副本记录时间很吻合，那队里那个剑客流木，就是你吧?” 喻文州说。)

“Liu Mu? Eh, this name sounds a little bit familiar. How can it be? It is so odd.” Huang Shao Tian says. (“流木吗? 嗯，这个名字似乎是由那么一点点耳熟。怎么会呢? 好奇怪的哈。” 黄少天说。)

“He-he……” Yu Wen Zhou laughs. (“呵呵……” 喻文州笑了笑。)⁹²

⁹¹ Hu Die Lan, *The King’s Avatar: The Peak of Glory*, Chapter 4, 2018.

⁹² Hu Die Lan, *The King’s Avatar I-19*, Chapter 184, 2018.

Yu Wen Zhou fully understands Huang Shao Tian; he can read Huang Shao Tian's mind from his every facial expression, tone of voice, and physical movements. Huang Shao Tian has even exclaimed that he does not have any secrets in front of Yu Wen Zhou in the original novel. Moreover, their close relationship is also reflected by their effective and smooth cooperation during the competition with other prop clubs:

“Cover!” Yu Wen Zhou shouts, Huang Shao Tian's Ye Yu Sheng Fan moves to Sorcerer's side immediately and protects him. (“掩护!” 喻文州喊了一声，黄少天的夜雨声烦立即撤剑归位，护在了索克萨尔左右。)

.....

Sorcerer starts to sing an incantation. It seems that he is desperate to finish this spell, Huang Shao Tian's game character has even become the shield to protect Sorcerer. (索克萨尔开始吟唱，看起来要不顾一切地完成这次法术，黄少天的夜雨声烦都被拿来当盾牌用了。)

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Therefore, Yie Yu Sheng Fan stands before Sorcerer with a strong hand as a knight. The bullet which he can obstruct by the sword, he stops it; the bullet which he cannot obstruct by the sword, he uses his body to bear injury. (于是，夜雨声烦以极强硬的姿态，骑士般地护卫在了索克萨尔身前。能解决的子弹，就解决，不能解决的，就用身体去挡。)⁹³

Some details of this CP coincide with several popular CP's relationship patterns, which are childhood sweetheart *seme-uke*, gentle *seme* with active *uke*, teammates *seme-uke*, or share happiness and hardships together *seme-uke*. Yu&Huang have known each other since they were in the youth training camp of Lan Yu when they

⁹³ Hu Die Lan, *The King's Avatar* 1-19, Chapter 1263, 2018.

were both around 14 or 15. They are the best cooperators when they are on Glory competition terrain; and they are best friends during their daily and training life. Moreover, there is one interesting feature of Yu Wen Zhou which is that his APM is inferior to other professional game players. There is also one more feature of Huang Shao Tian which is that he is a chatterbox; he always keeps talking when he plays the game. Because his non-stop chatter will disturb other game competitors, Glory Alliance abolishes the audio system in the league; players of all teams can only communicate by typewriting. These two features of this CP are two extremes; characters who are unique will be memorable for readers. From the excerpts of the original novel, it is obvious to see that the author does not portray an excessively intimate male-male relationship intentionally. However, this does not restrict fans from doing derivative works. Every detail of Yu&Huang CP in the original novel reflects that they know and understand each other very well and guides fans to discover more stories. Because most of the relationship patterns of Yu&Huang CP reflect a transformation of their relationship from friendship to love, many fan creations tend to depict immature and innocent boys' love which is also a specialty of this CP.

2. Yie&Lan (叶蓝)

Character introduction⁹⁴: Ye Xiu is the main character of *The King's Avatar*, he is a talented Glory game player with two game accounts, Yi Yie Zhi Qiu (一叶之秋), a battle mage (which was forced to be transferred to another game player in Season

⁹⁴ Hu Die Lan, *The King's Avatar 1-19*, 2018.

eight of Glory League when he left his pro club, Jia Shi (嘉世), and Jun Mo Xiao (君莫笑), an unoccupied game character (a game character which can use all low level skills of all game occupations) came on stage in Season nine of the Glory League when he founded a new pro club, Xing Xin (兴欣). Ye Xiu has been awarded the honorable titles of a textbook Glory player, god of battle mages, one of four master tacticians, and god of Glory. He is the pioneer of Glory and has won four championships of the Glory League in total. The author, Hu Die Lan, endows Ye Xiu with the best character properties as a main character. On the contrary, another character of the Ye&Lan CP, Lan He, is an ordinary Glory game player, who is not even a professional game player. His real name is Xu Bo Yuan (许博远), and he works for Lan Yu pro clubs to manage the subordinate games guild of Glory. Because of his job specification, he owns many game accounts, such as Lan He (蓝河), Lan Qiao Chun Xue (蓝桥春雪), and Jue Se (绝色), and they are all swordsmen. Furthermore, because the communication of these two characters is restricted only to the game and online, and the game character of Lan He has the most interaction with Ye Xiu, fans normally use Ye&Lan as the name of this CP, but not Ye&Xu (叶许) which is selected from both of their real names. The first meeting of Ye&Lan CP is in the game; Lan He was trying hard to add Ye Xiu as his game friend when Ye Xiu was playing in a game instance zone (dungeons):

“The hidden boss does not appear when Ye Xiu finishes this mission twice. Ye Xiu notices suddenly that there is a pending system message when he tries to get into the mission the third time; he clicks on the message and sees that system prompts

that game player Lan He sends a friend request, Yes or No. (一次没有，两次没有。叶修第三次回来准备拼人品时，突然发现有一条待处理的系统信息，点开一看，系统提示玩家蓝河申请加您为好友，是否同意。)

.....

Ye Xiu clicks on ignore all messages and he finds that the person of Lan He had persistently sent 18 friend requests in the past ten minutes. (一气点下去，这十分钟里，这个叫蓝河的人竟然锲而不舍向君莫笑发了 18 条申请。) Ignoring is not refusing; the message which is ignored can be re-operated. Ye Xiu is shocked by the perseverance of this person, so he selects one friend request and clicks on Yes. (忽视不是拒绝，被忽视的消息是可以重新提出来操作的。叶修感慨此人毅力，于是翻出了一条信息，点击了同意。)”⁹⁵

“Eighteen friend requests” has become a classic incident of this CP. The fact that Lan He is the one who is sending these friend requests. This implies that Lan He is the pursuer in a relationship with Ye Xiu. Therefore, many BL fan creations contain a similar main plot – the *uke* role, Lan He pursues love persistently, and gradually is recognized by Ye Xiu, the *seme* role.

“Does Lan He come here?” Ye Xiu asks suddenly. (“蓝河没有来?” 叶修却突然问了这么一个莫名其妙的问题。)

“No.” Chun Yi Lao answers. (“没有。” 春易老说。)

“You should let Lan He join this team.” Ye Xiu says, “This new team member may be better than Lan He in PVP, but Lan He is better in PVE because he is steadier to maintain a good record.” (“你们应该叫蓝河的。” 叶修说，“这个人嘛，如果是 pk (player killing) 的话，应该会赢蓝河多一点；但要刷副本，蓝河比较稳重，

⁹⁵ Hu Die Lan, *The King's Avatar* 1-19, Chapter 30, 2018.

打配合刷记录会比他出色的。”⁹⁶

This part is important because it has indicated that the strength of Lan He to lead a team and guild in a game has been approved by Ye Xiu, the best Glory game player. This fact provides more possibilities for fans to create more plots based on the main plot of “*uke chasing seme*”. For instance, Ye Xiu notices that he likes Lan He as well, but he decides not to speak out about it until the right time; and he wants to accompany and help Lan He to achieve goals in the game world.

“Are you still online?” Ye Xiu urged Lan He to reply. (“人呢人呢?” 叶修这边还催上了。)

“Are you asking me to manage your game guild?” Lan He responds by asking. (“我帮你经营公会?” 蓝河反问。)

“Absolutely!” (“对啊!”)

“Why is it me you ask?” Lan He is really curious on this point. (“为什么啊?” 蓝河极度好奇这个问题。)

.....

“I am an undercover agent from Lan Yu game guild, and you know that!” Lan He emphasizes his identity. Lan He thinks he is the most failed undercover agent in history in this situation. (“我是卧底!” 蓝河强调。这句台词结合到当下场景, 蓝河觉得自己恐怕会是史上最莫名其妙的卧底。)

“Yes, but you are an undercover agent whom I know through and through.” Ye Xiu says. (“嗯, 但你至少是一个被知根知底的卧底。” 叶修说。)

Lan He is shocked, he thinks he may understand what Ye Xiu means somehow.

(蓝河一怔。至此, 他忽然多少有点明白这位大神的意思。)⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Hu Die Lan, *The King's Avatar 1-19*, Chapter 173, 2018.

⁹⁷ Hu Die Lan, *The King's Avatar 1-19*, Chapter 358, 2018.

Even though Ye Xiu and Lan He are attached to two different and opposite pro game clubs, Ye Xiu still offers Lan He a position to help him to manage his game guild. Ye Xiu trusts Lan He excessively because he accepts Lan He's moral quality, passion for Glory, and operating capability of a game guild. The composition of Ye&Lan CP has broken the constant model of CP patterns in *The King's Avatar* which is that a CP is a combination of two professional game players. Ye&Lan CP is one of a few CPs which are not composed by two professional Glory players. Ye Xiu is the best game player, and every Glory player knows and admires him; but Lan He is responsible for a game guild management as one of the support crews of the Lan Yu pro club. Most parts of Ye&Lan's interactions happened in the game Glory, so game operation level is the main measuring standard of their identities. The non-equivalence of identities of these two people has determined the relationship pattern of this CP, which is strong *seme* and weak *uke*. This relationship pattern of a CP usually reflects that two people from different backgrounds and experiences try to find a balance between each other, and they finally accept an intimate relationship after this process. Moreover, Lan He appears mostly in the first part of *The King's Avatar*, which is when Ye Xiu leaves his club and starts to play a new game account of Jun Mo Xiao; thus, all of their communications are online through the game information system and other communication softwares. This has caused the relationship pattern of this CP to conform to a bilateral unrequited love *seme-uke*. Ye Xiu does not go public about his real identity when he plays the new account of Jun Mo Xiao at the beginning; Ye&Lan are getting along as normal net friends. Lan He

works for an official game guild of Lan Yu pro club, so he needs to find a high-skill game player as Ye Xiu to help the development of his guild. In the initial period of their interaction, Lan He asks Ye Xiu to help his guild to set new records of several game instance zones (dungeons) repeatedly by exchanging rare material of game props; and Ye Xiu can always obtain some useful information of other game guilds from Lan He. Their relationship moves to the second step when Ye Xiu opens the real identity of his game character of Jun Mo Xiao and sets up his own game guild at the service of his new pro club, Xing Xin. At this time, Lan He no longer asks for help from Ye Xiu when he realizes that it is impossible to draw Ye Xiu over to Lan Yu's side; and Ye Xiu is busy with establishing a new professional team. However, the author designs some causal meetings of these two characters. The last step is a process of mutual understanding of this CP; they recognize their devotion to Glory is the same. As a professional game player, Ye Xiu shows his enthusiasm for Glory by winning the championship with his new team members; as an ordinary game player, Lan He works conscientiously for the Lan Yu game guild and helps Ye Xiu to manage his guild sometimes to show his love. They finally find the balance between each other which is that they are no different because both of them ardently love Glory.

3. Zhou&Ye (周叶)

Character Introduction⁹⁸: In Zhou&Ye CP, the character of Ye is the same one from Ye&Lan CP. The order of CP name reflects distinct identities of CP which has

⁹⁸ Hu Die Lan, *The King's Avatar* 1-19, 2018.

been mentioned above; thus, Ye Xiu plays the *uke* role in Zhou&Ye CP even though he is *seme* in Ye&Lan CP. Ye Xiu has been fully introduced at the part of CP Ye&Lan, so this part will only focus on introducing Zhou Ze Kai. He is one of the professional Glory players, and he is in service of an emerging pro club, Lun Hui (轮回, Samsara in English). In this team, he is the leader and also the center of tactics system with his game character, Yi Qiang Chuan Yun (一枪穿云), a sharpshooter. Because of his prominent individual ability, he led his team to win the championship of the eighth and ninth Glory league. Zhou Ke Kai is the second one who has been called “the first person of Glory” after Ye Xiu by Glory fans and gaming medias. Moreover, the author underlines that Zhou Ze Kai is the most handsome man as an idol in the Glory alliance. In contrast to the tag of “talkaholic” given to Huang Shao Tian, Zhou Ze Kai is uncommunicative, he usually talks as little as he can.

The interactions of Zhou&Ye are only a few in the original novels, but there are still some details that can show their special relationship:

“A game operation skill of Dragon Heads-raising? Who is on that competition platform?” the sound of Han Wen Qing, the leader of Ba Tu game club. (“龙抬头? 是谁在比赛台上?” 霸图战队队长韩文清的声音。)

“Dragon Heads-raising? Is it?” people start to speak in low murmurs. (“龙抬头? 这就是龙抬头?” 议论声迅速在蔓延着。)

“Is it really Dragon Heads-raising? Are you seeing correctly? Why is there no playback? Why?” Huang Shao Tian keeps gabbling with other Lan Yu members. (“真的是龙抬头吧? 没看错吧? 怎么还不放回放, 怎么还不放回放?” 蓝雨战队这边, 黄少天正在不住地啰嗦着。)

“I see……” Zhou Ze Kai says less as he always at the side of Lun Hui club.

(“原来如此……” 轮回战队这边，周泽楷还是一如既往地简单说了一句。)⁹⁹

“Dragon Heads-raising” is the symbol of Ye Xiu which requires an extremely accurate game operation. Ye Xiu invents this skill and he is also the only one who can complete it. However, he merely uses this skill. Not everyone, especially for those who are not familiar with him can recognize it. The excerpt mentions that Han Wen Qing, Huang Shao Tian and Zhou Ze Kai have noticed this gaming skill. It is reasonable to highlight the reaction of the former two people because both of them are close to Ye Xiu, a fact which has been described repeatedly in the original novel (Han Wen Qing, ten-year opponent of Ye Xiu; and Huang Shao Tian, best friend of Ye Xiu); the emergence of Zhou Ze Kai in this part is odd due to the fact that there is not any foreshadowing of a close relationship between he and Ye Xiu. Fans explain that there must be many interactions between Zhou&Ye in *The King's Avatar* universe even if the author does not write them down; and they can create plenty of works by following the gossamer threads of a spider and the trail of a horse.

“Good job! (好家伙！)”

Zhou Ze Kai knows the situation on the battlefield clearly in one moment.

Not like the others have assumed that the high popularity of Zhou Ze Kai is only caused by his good-looking face; his game operation technique, consciousness, and attitude are actually outstanding among all professional game players, and Ye Xiu knows this exactly. (只这么一瞬间，周泽楷就已经洞悉了状况。荣耀第一人之称，并不如很多人臆想的那样是靠外型加分，周泽楷的技术，意识，态度，确实放在职业圈中都是翘楚，叶修很清楚这一点。)

Because Ye Xiu is familiar with Zhou Ze Kai. Except for competition season nine,

⁹⁹ Hu Die Lan, *The King's Avatar 1-19*, Chapter 329, 2018.

Ye Xiu has confronted Zhou Ze Kai several times on competition terrain since the fifth season. Ye Xiu totally understands the strength of Zhou Ze Kai and knows that he is a difficult opponent. (因为对他来说周泽楷并不算什么陌生人，第五赛季至今，除了叶修完全空白的第九赛季，双方在场上打过的交道不是一次两次。他完全了解周泽楷的能量，完全了解这个对手有多难对付。)¹⁰⁰

Zhou&Ye are well-matched in strength; even though they are not training and practicing in the same pro club, they still can show a tacit cooperation in some particular occasions. For instance, they had been assigned to the same team to play an exhibition match once; both of them fully understood every move and gaming strategy with each other. The CP of Zhou&Ye is unique because of its high popularity and the small quantity of interaction between these two characters in the original novel series. The attraction of the first two CPs, Yu&Huang and Ye&Lan, are mostly from their episodes of original text; so, how did Zhou&Ye become one of the most popular CP among all CPs from *The King's Avatar*? To combine with the notions above, there are four main reasons. (1) The attraction of the relationship patterns of Zhou&Ye CP: this CP is a typical CP pattern of strong *seme* and strong *uke*; because these two people are the only two who have been called “the first person of Glory”. As a quotation from Zhou&Ye fan circle asserts, Zhou Ze Kai is the only one who has sufficient strength to stand beside Ye Xiu. This CP shows a sympathetic emotion between two powerful men. Furthermore, Zhou&Ye are from different pro clubs; so, this CP also reflects a relationship pattern of “opponents to lovers” *seme-uke*. (2) The

¹⁰⁰ Hu Die Lan, *The King's Avatar I-19*, Chapter 1697, 2018.

pretty appearance: the original texts clearly depict that Zhou Ze Kai is the most handsome man among all professional Glory players. It is true that there is no specific description of appearance of the main character, Ye Xiu; however, the official adapted manga and anime give Ye Xiu a good-looking design. A CP of two handsome men is always popular. (3) The abundant excellent fan creations: some fan circles have gradually disappeared due to the fact that there are no more splendid fan creations emerging and being shared. A mature and successful CP fan circle is similar with a “vegetable field” which needs people’s irrigation and fertilization accumulating day by day and month by month. The population of fans is mobile, but plentiful outstanding fan creations will slow down their mobility. Zhou&Ye CP fan circle have this feature which maintains its high popularity. (4) The last reason is that the few interactions between Zhou&Ye CP in the original concept actually leave a tremendous imaginary space without any constraints for fans to create. For instance, there is a detail from the original concept which is that Ye Xiu particularly focuses on a sharpshooter game player because he used to have a best friend who played sharpshooter as well but who died in a car accident in his adolescence. Some fans assume that Ye Xiu’s incipient concern about Zhou Ze Kai is caused by his cherishing the memory of his best friend; he finally falls in love when he gradually knows about Zhou Ze Kai. This detail provides a process of transference reaction, and transformation of emotion from friendship to love.

These analyses of three most representative CPs and original contents from *The King’s Avatar* have reflected the reasons and process of Boys’ Love fan creations. The

original web fiction contains all four features of an art work which owns tons of Boys' Love fan creations. Boys' Love fans takes away only those things that are useful or pleasurable to them as a poacher¹⁰¹; and then recreate some new works based on their interesting parts and understanding. Except those four features which were discussed above, *The King's Avatar* possesses another specialty which is that all characters, no matter positive or negative, are chasing for the same goal, the championship of the Glory league. In other words, the eagerness for victory and enthusiasm for Glory are the similarities of every character, which give flexibility to the Boys' Love fan creations of each CP. Moreover, *The King's Avatar* left an open-ending: a meeting between twelve top players (including Ye Xiu, Zhou Ze Kai, Huang Shao Tian and so on) who had been selected from different professional clubs by the Glory alliance to compete in the first International Glory league. The story about international matches becomes a popular theme in Boys' Love fan creations due to the fact that these game players can finally train and compete together as one team. Fans can imagine every detail without any limitations from original art works. Some fans are inspired by the operational model of existing electronic sports, such as League of Legends (LOL), to create a reasonable story.

2.6 Narratives and Drawing Style of Fan Creation of *The King's Avatar*:

In the fan creations, the narratives of those works can be divided into two categories, AU and PARO. 1. AU is an acronym of alternative universe, it can contain

¹⁰¹ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, P. 24

all fan creations which have a different setting than the original works. 2. PARO is a word from parody, but it is closer to aniparo (parody of anime) and gameparo (parody of game) nowadays; PARO usually contains some fan creations which have been created by borrowing a setting from a work. For instance, in every fandom, there will be fan fictions writing in a “*Harry Potter*” setting. There is a simple story which can be an example in this genre: Legolas (character in *Lord of the Rings*) is a new student in Hogwarts, and he has been assigned to Slytherin because of his high lineage (corresponding to his identity as an Elf prince in *TLOR*); however, he becomes a companion to Aragorn, a muggle (corresponding to his half Elf and half human bloodline in *LOTR*), who is in Gryffindor; Legolas’s father, Thranduil, disagrees with their friendship, and sends an Orc (who plays a role of house-elf) to obstruct; after a long journey and help from their friends, Legolas and Aragorn have noticed the love which is deep in their hearts.

With the enormous quantity of the production of fan arts every year, there is one point that needs to be highlighted, which is the connotation of the name of CP. As mentioned above, the name of CP is usually chosen from two characters who are in one CP; and the sequence of the CP’s name implies an *uke-seme* relationship pattern. In recent fan arts, a CP name even plays a role as an abstract. For instance, there is an unwritten rule of fan fiction that the CP name must be emphasized at the very beginning of every story. A standard format of a fan fiction will be:

(CP name) (Title)

(AU or PARO)

(Warning of new creations)

(A really brief introduction, normally in one sentence)

.....contents.....

Both AU and PARO have some inheritances from original art works. Even though PARO has a great degree-of-freedom of creation, the character personality has to follow the original setting more or less. If fans tend to build up a new identity based on their own understanding, they need to give notice to readers of an OOC (out of character) at the “Warning” part.

Henry Jenkins has mentioned that slash¹⁰² stories often incorporate other generic traditions such as historical romance, horror, action-adventure, undercover missions, landing parties, crossovers, etc¹⁰³, and he has constructed a formulaic structure of slash¹⁰⁴. The narrative formula of slash involves a series of movements from an initial partnership, through a crisis in communication that threatens to disrupt that union, toward its reconfirmation through sexual intimacy¹⁰⁵ which can be explained as four steps: 1. the initial relationship; 2. masculine dystopia; 3. confession; 4. masculine utopia. Henry Jenkins has analyzed that the first step frequently describes and re-establishes the pair’s basic relationship as it has been previously represented within the original series.¹⁰⁶ The first step will then emphasize the transition of the pair’s relationship, how they notice and gradually accept it. The second step shows the

¹⁰² L. Neville, ‘*The Ten’s Big Enough for Everyone*’: online slash fiction as a site for activism and change, 2018: “Slash has previously been described as ‘queer female space’, and there is widespread agreement that slash can be categorized as ‘queer’, inasmuch as it is ‘a practice that problematizes clear straight/gay dichotomies’. It has also been argued that slash is ‘political’ inasmuch as it is inherently transgressive, and provides a space for going against current restrictive social norms.” P. 386.

¹⁰³ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, P. 196.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., P. 211.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., P. 212.

struggle between pairs, often that “the male protagonist dares not act on his erotic fantasies, convinced that the other partner could not possibly share such feelings and that voicing them could damage the men’s working relationship”¹⁰⁷. “When the tension between the two men becomes almost unbearable, just when communication seems on the verge of breaking down completely and their partnership appears to be forever doomed”¹⁰⁸, they come to the third step, and they express the “unspeakable” desires to each other. At the last step, “the confession paves the way for physical release as bodies long kept apart are finally brought together in moments of sexual intimacy.”¹⁰⁹ The pairs can fully understand each other on the same level and accept each other both physically and psychologically. Because Chinese “Rotten Culture” has been influenced dramatically from the West, many Boys’ Love fan fictions have reflected the four steps that Henry Jenkins described.

A statistic¹¹⁰ from fans in 2016-6-16 showed the popularity of the top 70 hot tag of couples or pairs (involving male-male and female-female) in LOFTER. The lowest one had 789 pieces of fan arts, and the top one had 46752 works. The example which will be analyzed is from the top ten hot tag, 周叶 (Zhou-Ye, couple name of Zhou Ze Kai and Ye Xiu) and latest data shows that there are 50644 works of fan arts linked under it. 蚁穴 (Yi Xue, *Ant Colony*) is an AU (alternative universe) of Zhou-Ye couple from *The King’s Avatar*, written by a fan, 郁洲 (Yu Zhou). This fan fiction had been serialized on LOFTER from 2013-10-08 to 2014-5-29 with sixty-four

¹⁰⁷ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, P. 215.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., P. 220.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., P. 221.

¹¹⁰ <https://www.bilibili.com/video/av4994093/?from=search&seid=13667923992485086142>

chapters and three additional stories. The average reading quantity of each chapter is a thousand, and the average comment quantity is fifty. As a finished fan fiction, it had been printed in book form by the author individually, and sold to readers who had reserved it previously. This fan fiction reflects the four steps of slash stories clearly.

(1). *The Initial Relationship*: following the setting in the original web fiction, both of those two main characters, Zhou and Ye are professional game players. The author writes a blind date with a lady for Zhou (who plays the “top” role in this pair) to represent his heterosexual orientation. And then the author has arranged the first transition, an old laptop which is a time machine allows Zhou to play the game, *Glory*, with people who are living ten years ago. The second transition is that Zhou has met Ye in this game (who plays the “bottom” or “receiver” role in this pair). He knows Ye but is not close to him in real life. Two timelines have been set up, and two emotion lines will cross the whole story. The third transition is that Zhou cannot distinguish between the emotion of the younger Ye in the game and the real Ye; when he gets close to the younger Ye, he intends to know the real Ye. When Zhou notices that his behaviors have affected the real Ye, he decides to destroy the old laptop. In the end of the first step, Zhou and Ye maintain a close and ambiguous relationship.

(2). *Masculine Dystopia*: Zhou is hesitating to get closer to Ye due to two reasons: a transition of sexual orientation from heterosexuality to homosexuality, and the secret of the old laptop. Quite the opposite, Ye does not have these confusions, and starts to guide Zhou to face his real emotion. At this step, there is a transition of the roles of Zhou and Ye as they nearly stand at the same level. (3). *Confession*: Zhou tells Ye the

secret of the old laptop and his radio game time travel experience which effects the real Ye's memory; and Ye chooses to forgive and accept him. (4). *Masculine Utopia*: They fully accept each other and face the struggles that will come from the society together.

It is true that the depiction of characters' appearance is not enough for fans to draw those characters who fit the fantasy of all fans. However, there is a fan canon, which Henry Jenkins's book also mentions, that may standardize fan arts. In fandom, canon does not only mean the collection of classic and significant works, but also means legitimacy and authority. For instance, when the anime adaption of *The King's Avatar* began to be serialized, most fan art was drawn by following the same portrayal shown in the official anime as Figure 2.4 shows. However, when a fandom lacks official character settings, fans will find and discover some details from the original



Figure 2.4, the first image is a screenshot of Ye Xiu from the official adapted anime, and the second image is a fan illustration of Ye Xiu from 又双叒叕 (You Shuang Ruo Zhuo, a network name), which shows the same hair style, the same color of eyes.

text by themselves and create one. For example, the name of character may provide some information for many fans to draw a character: Lan He (蓝河, Blue river), from *The King's Avatar* as a young man who has blue hair because his name contains blue. These kinds of fan arts can be categorized as “fanon”, the abbreviation of fan and canon, means the widely circulated recreation of fans, and other fans can choose to follow this style or not.

2.7 Case Study of *The Outcast* (一人之下, Yi Ren Zhi Xia):

As with the first case study of *The King's Avatar*, *The Outcast* is also a popular IP (Intellectual Property) of Chinese anime, which inspires abundant fan creations as well. The difference is that the original work of *The King's Avatar* is a web fiction, while *The Outcast* was a web manga originally. *The Outcast* has been serialized from Feb 26, 2015 to now on the Tencent comic official website by the author of Mi'er (米二); and it has 357 episodes currently¹¹¹, and released offprints by Zhejiang People's Fine Arts Publishing House (浙江人民美术出版社) since August 2016. The total twelve episodes of first season of anime adaption of this web manga are produced by a Japanese animation company, Pandanium. The Chinese language web edition had been released on video websites which owned the copyrights, such as IQIY (爱奇艺), Tencent, and Mango TV from Jul 8, 2016 to Sep 25, 2016; and the Japanese language TV version had been renewed on TOKYO MX every Saturday since Jul 9, 2016. The producer of the total 24 episodes of second season was changed to a Chinese animation company, Animation Company Huimeng (上海绘界文化传播有限公司), which owns several outstanding anime such as *Fox Spirit Matchmaker* (狐妖小红娘), *Spirit Blade Mountain by Mars Gravity* (从前有座灵剑山), and *Die Now* (端脑). Although the producer was changed, the second season still maintained Chinese and Japanese language dual versions; and the Chinese one had been updated on the same video websites as season one from Oct 27, 2017 to May 18, 2018. The Japanese version has been serialized since Jan 17, 2018 until now on TOKYO MX as well.

¹¹¹ <http://ac.qq.com/Comic/comicInfo/id/531490>

The setting of *The Outcast* is in contemporary Chinese society, however, there are a group of people who have been called “*unusual people* (异人, Yi Ren)” from some particular families that have inherited distinct mysterious ancient powers. The features of each power are inspired from old Chinese Kungfu, tales, myths and legends, classics, traditions, conventions and knowledge of geomancy (风水, Feng Shui). For instance, *The Outcast* indicates that the reason why “unusual people” have special power is the existence of *Qi* (气), a natural gaseous energy which circulates within people’s bodies and can be used to regulate bodily functions. *Qi* has emphasized that people are interdependent with nature; and this notion is similar with *Tai Ji* (太极, Taiqi or Tai chi), which generates two complementary forces.¹¹² The whole story of *The Outcast* starts around two main characters, Zhang Chu Nan (张楚岚), a young male university student, and Feng Bao Bao (冯宝宝), a mysterious female who looks like a teenage girl but whose real name and age are unknown. Zhang Chu Nan’s grandfather had guarded the secrets of “unusual people” until he died; his last words were that he hopes his own grandson will never use his inherited power and live as an ordinary person because this is the only way to protect himself. However, Zhang Chu Nan was attacked by zombies which were manipulated by someone in a graveyard one day; at a crucial moment, Feng Bao Bao appeared and helped him. Since this day, Zhang Chu Nan has started to know the world of “unusual

¹¹² Brief explanation of Tai Ji: Two complementary forces are then developed into four aggregates, and the four aggregates give rise to eight trigrams (易有太极，是生两仪，两仪生四象，四象生八卦).” from Yi Jing (易经, *the Book of Changes*), in ancient Chinese philosophical books and records. The two complementary forces are the two opposing principles in nature, *yin* (阴, feminine and negative) and *yang* (阳, masculine and positive), and the eight trigrams cover everything in this world. *Yin* and *yang* exist in nature and human’s body simultaneously, and reflects the interactions among living things.

people”, meeting the others and their organizations. The two main storylines emerge clearly. One is that Zhuang Chu Nan and his friends try to find the truth of the secret which his grandfather was defending; and another is finding out the truth about Feng Bao Bao; who her family is, recovering her lost memories, and discovering her real identity and power.

With the development of the story, more characters come on the stage. Some of them have high popularity in Boys’ Love fan circles; for instance, Wang Ye (王也) and Zhu Ge Qing (诸葛青) of a CP of Ye&Qing (也青) which has 10987 related fan creations at LOFTER; fourteen million sharing quantity, 1091 posts, and 5687 fans in the hot tag of Ye&Qing in Weibo; 158 fan created videos in Bilibili. My analysis will start from characters’ introduction as usual. Wang Ye, who practiced in the *Wudang Sect* (武当派) before, is also known as Wang Taoist priest; he possesses powers of Taiji boxing and *Feng Hou Qi Men* (风后奇门, a power of Daoist divination). Although he is one of the most talented young “unusual people”; he is not famous because of his low-key disposition. Zhu Ge Qing is the opposite side of Wang Ye, yet even their powers are similar. He is the inheritor of *Wu Hou Qi Men* (武侯奇门, a branch of Daoist divination); and he has a gregarious personality and a sense of humor, so he has high popularity with “unusual people”.

There are some interactions of Ye&Qing in the original serialized web manga:



Figure 2.5, *The Outcast*, Episode 131, from Mi'er.

The translation from left to right, from up to bottom will be:

(Zhu Ge Qing eavesdrops the contents of what Wang Ye says when he had a phone call with his master before.)

“You gave a chance to Zhang Chu Nan, and he made his own choice……” from Zhu Ge Qing.

“Oh My! How could I forget you…… you heard by using magic of the wind……” from Wang Ye.

“And coming to mount Longhu to join the competition was your own choice, right?”

“You made your choice, so it is no use to regret now, do not wear a sad face……”

“I don’t!”

“I don’t like to be entangled with trouble actually. It may be too exaggerated to say that I will shed my blood with you. But I will help you within the scope of my capacity if you have trouble.”

“Just Go! I should not make friends with you! You know everything! Please keep a sense

of my mystery, ok?”

“Haha! I really want be your friend!”

“Pooh!!” from Zhu Ge Bai (the younger brother of Zhu Ge Qing).

“Maybe I will get bored at my home, and then I will go to mount Wu Dang to bother you without telling you.”

“.....”

“What man.....”



Figure 2.6, *The Outcast*, Episode 181, from Mi'er.

The translation from left to right, from up to bottom will be:

“Bro Du! Please take these three people back to the hotel, I will go with Qing.....”

“No problem!”

“Although I knew these three people will not get you into trouble, I was still worried About it, so I came over to see.....”

“Haha, no worries.....”

“What?”

“Eh?”

“You are different now, you were relaxed as mud when you were at mount Wu Dang.....”

“I thought you were nervous today.....”

“.....”

“Give me your hand.”

“Really?”

“Let me see.....” (Zhu Ge Qing starts to do palm reading for Wang Ye.)

“.....”

“Wang Taoist priest, you have a bad fortune because there is a darkness of your ophryon!”

“I will lead you to a right way!”

“Ophryon? Aren’t you touching my hand bone?”

“Eh, I really got lost when I fought with you at mount Longhu. I have finally realized when I came here.”

“Everyone is talking about your power recently, someone says you can control six elements, some are saying eight. It is a masterstroke as Qi Ti Yuan Liu (炁体源流).”

“The others who do not understand Daoist divination may think there are Meanings in our fight at mount Longhu.”

“However, only the master of Daoist divination can know how fantastic you are. Haha, you can control four aggregates freely.”

These two people of Ye&Qing CP have similar power, which is Daoist divination, a power to divine what will happen next and then determine the next action in advance. Figure 2.4 shows a conversation after their fight in mount Longhu which is also their first meeting. Zhu Ge Qing was confident to win the competition

with Wang Ye because he practiced hard and mastered all the powers inherited from his family, however, he failed completely and felt confused. Therefore, Zhu Ge Qing went to Beijing to find Wang Ye when he heard that Wang Ye had left from mount Wu Dang. Meanwhile, Wang Ye got into trouble because he exposed his power, as one of the “unusual people,” in public; he was trying to find a way to protect his family. At this crucial moment, Zhu Ge Qing found him and offered help. Figure 2.5 shows the dialogue at that moment. Ye&Qing CP is a typical relationship pattern of CP of strong *seme* and strong *uke* just as the setting of Zhou&Ye CP from The King’s Avatar; both of them are outstanding young “unusual people” with strong power. Moreover, they have a lot of interactions in the original web manga which give Boys’ love fans more “raw material” to create.

The target audience of *The Outcast* is not just only female readers, but also male readers; therefore, there is no obvious depiction of close male-male relationship. The author portrays Ye&Qing as best friends in the original manga. However, the CP fans interpret “close friendship of two young handsome men” comprehensively and deeply. As other popular CPs, these two characters from Ye&Qing CP contain a certain degree of similarity of characterization in the original art work. For instance, both of them have defining feature: Wang Ye always behaves as if he is not interested in anything, which is depicted as a poker-face and glassy eyes in web manga. Zhu Ge Qing barely opens his eyes (smiling foxy-eyes in manga) only in significant moment; he opened his eyes when he promised to Wang Ye that he will offer him help when he needs it in Figure 2.5. Moreover, Ye&Qing have been evaluated as the most

outstanding young “unusual people” with great power by senior “unusual people”. Their power comes from the same source, Daoist divination, which gives them more opportunities to understand each other. In the original manga, almost every important male character has an official female partner to make a pair with plentiful interactions; Ye&Qing are the two exceptions. CP fans explain this situation as that they deserve each other.

These two figures have also represented the painting style of this web manga. Each episode has no more than twenty pages, and all the images are colorized, while the development of plot is mostly promoted by plenty of dialogue. The painting of background and the portrayal of characters are abstract and simplified because there are no rich juxtapositions of patterns and intricate line works which are similar with the style of some Korean web manga. Every panel is arranged in an orderly way, which makes it easy to follow the transitions. Some word bubbles break panel, and even cover “the gutter”; the change of the form of each word bubble is used to reflect the emotional changes of the speaker. For instance, the irregular rectangle shape of word bubbles of the panel at the top right corner in Figure 2.5 correspond to a roaring action of the character, Wang Ye.

This web manga contains five panel-to-panel transitions, and they are moment-to-moment, action-to-action, scene-to-scene, subject-to-subject, and aspect-to-aspect. Because of the existence of plentiful dialogue, subject-to-subject and aspect-to-aspect transitions account for a large proportion of all panel to panel transitions. Action-to-action transitions are mainly used for some fight scenes. This web manga involves

more than one story line; therefore, scene-to-scene transition are used when the story lines change. To portray an action scene, *The Outcast* tends to use conspicuous action lines and “subjective motion”¹¹³. For instance, in figure 2.5, there is one panel which shows a view of Zhu Ge Qing’s back, thus setting readers in the perspective of Wang Ye to see that Zhu Ge Qing is leaving. Some manga prefer to use some lines and colors of the background to present the emotions of characters, however, the dialogue and word bubbles have replaced this function of the background in this web manga. Therefore, there are not many unique designs of the background. Many close views of the characters’ expressions combine with the dialogue to help readers to imagine the tone of characters’ voices and understand the implication of each sentence.

This seemingly scratchy and low-budget drawing style is the most common technique of painting or drawing in web manga. There is no official definition of web manga recently, which can also be understood as digital manga. Some manga researchers analyze web manga by its artistic technique based on digital, network, and mobile communication techniques, which is different from the traditional manga production based on paper and pen; and it is released and circulated through the Internet.¹¹⁴ Under the influence of the Internet, higher speed of propagation and

¹¹³ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, 1994. In regular panels showing movement, the moving object is blurred or appears in multiple poses to indicate their moving. In “Subjective motion,” or perspective as readers is placed with the moving subject so that the surrounding environment is blurred. Japanese artists, starting in the late 60s, began putting their readers “in the driver’s seat” with panels like these. And starting in the mid-eighties, a few American artists began to adopt the effect in their own work, until by the early nineties it has become fairly common. P.114.

¹¹⁴ X H Zheng, M Gao & X Meng, “Postmodern” Writing and the Aesthetics of “Hypnosis” of Web Manga (网络漫画的“后现代”书写与催眠美学), vol. 4, 2016, P14-17, P. 34.



Figure 2.7, The fan manga of Ye&Qing CP from *The Outcast*, drawing by Mu Wei'er (木卫二).

broader scope of promulgation, web manga are pushed to face extensive web users. The diversity of themes and enjoyment of stories will be the main considerations rather than drawing skill for readers.

Henry Jenkins

argues that there is a

fanon (the abbreviation

of fan and canon) in each

fan circle to lead the dominant taste as mentioned before. The original work of *The Outcast* is a web manga, which means the official portrait of every character takes the place of fanon in fan circle. Therefore, many fan illustrations and manga are also following a similar drawing style to that of the original web manga as Figure 2.7 shows. The characterization of Ye&Qing in this fan manga is also inherited from the original work. Wang Ye is a lazy and self-concealing person; on the contrary, Zhu Ge Qing is close to a playboy. This fan manga has exaggerated these two personalities by drawing three panels of how Zhu Ge Qing is paying court to Wang Ye.

These two case studies are the most appropriate examples to examine the Boys' Love fan creations under the influence of "Rotten Culture". Both of *The King's Avatar* and *The Outcast* are not rotten-oriented art works, and their target consumers are mainly young male readers; however, the fascinating storyline, successful depiction of many male characters, and anime adaptations have attracted many fans to create fan arts. There are mature fandoms of these two art works, which have been operated by thousands of fans. Several years ago, the majority of Boys' Love fan creations were based on popular manga and anime from Japan, Books and movies from the West, and idol groups from South Korea. The proportion of the translation of art works from other countries were greater than domestic productions in Chinese Boys' Love fan creations sphere before. In 2011, the great vogue of a male-male CP, Ping&Xie (a couple name, 瓶邪), two characters from a web fiction, *The Grave Robber's Journal* (盗墓笔记) by Nan Pai San Shu (a pen name, 南派三叔) indicated the rise of domestic Boys' Love fandom in China. The CP of Ping&Xie had held the top spot of CP list for several years; many fans entered this Boys' Love fandom because of it. Although it has been replaced by other popular CPs, Ping&Xie is the turning point of Chinese Boys' Love fandom.

Conclusion

Boys' Love artworks originally appeared in shōjo manga in Japan, and experienced three stages which were shōnen'ai, yaoi, and then Boys' Love between the 1960s and 1990s. During these several decades, it became obvious that fan creation was the most essential means to promote the development of Boys' Love, and the migration of it with ACG from Japan to China. Because of the popularization of the Internet, the way fans participate in creating Boy's Love art works are various in forms, such as MAD, Shoushu, video drama, and Tong Ren Ge. This thesis contains an analysis of the influence of Japanese manga and anime demonstrating Harumi Befu's idea of the "Japanization" of much East Asian popular culture and a clear timeline for Boys' Love's migration from Japan to China with ACG. Moreover, the attraction from original art works and the *uke-seme* relationship pattern of CPs are the main motivations for fans to recreate. The idea of Fan culture from Henry Jenkins emphasizes the initiative of readers, which is that fans will only take away what they are interested in. Different from other researches on Boys' Love, this thesis has focused on the Boys' Love fan creations in China, and involves two significant case studies to display the ways in which Boys' Love fandom works.

"Rotten Culture" is still a growing subculture. The contents above have only analyzed a small part of it. When Boys' Love migrated from Japan to China with ACG by the Internet in 1990s, "Rotten Culture" started to emerge and shows its influence in China. In this two-decade development, there are more issues related with "Rotten culture" which may be in my further studies. For example, slash fiction

from the West has influenced “Rotten Culture” as well as Boys’ Love manga and anime from Japan. In the early Western cultural fan circle in China, many Boys’ Love web fictions were translated from slash fiction. An account, *Everygreen*, has translated parodies of the couple of Aragon and Legolas from *Lord of the Rings* for a decade and inspired people who are interested in this couple. Even now, there are many translated works in *SUI YUAN JU* (随缘居), a BBS for sharing fan writing of Western art works. Moreover, two brand new patterns of universes have been recreated by Western slash fiction fans: ABO (Alpha, Beta, Omega), based on the setting of the social status in wolves’ tribes (Alpha is at the top, and then Beta, and then the last, Omega) in the American TV series, *Supernatural* (in this universe, ABO presents three genders of people multiplied by the original two genders of male and female, so that there will be six different genders in human society. And there are strong individual differences between each gender; for instance, Alphas are the inborn leader and ruler due to their masculine body and high intelligence. Usually, Alpha plays the *seme* role in fan creations). Another example is Sentinel and Guide, also from an American TV series *The Sentinel*. This setting emphasizes spiritual power (Sentinel are inherent soldiers with sharp senses and robust bodies; Guides are the people who have strong psychic force which can pacify the Sentinels when they carry out a mission). These two new settings have enriched the creations in “Rotten Culture” in China. They have also shifted to Japan: some serial Boys’ Love manga have set their story in an ABO world (examples). People also analyze “Rotten Culture” with some social issues, such as LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,

Transgender). Some people argue that the transmission of “Rotten Culture” may help society to accept homosexuals; however, there are some opposite comments from fujōshi girls such as that they read and watch Boys’ Love fictions, manga, and anime, but they cannot endure having people who are close to them be homosexual. Moreover, the excessive “Rotten” parts and expression in mass media have repelled many people; for instance, the outrageous antics between male celebrities (example). In this information era, no one can predict the future of “Rotten Culture”, as one of the participants, I hope every fan will maintain their passion, and enjoy their creations without prejudice.

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