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GLOBALIZED FANDOM: THE OU MEI TONG REN CULTURE IN CHINA

by

Yijie Wu

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Tim Havens
Thesis Mentor

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Andrea C. Krekel
Communication Studies Honors Advisor

The University of Iowa

Globalized Fandom: the *Ou Mei Tong Ren* Culture in China

Yijie Wu

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Tim Havens

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Introduction

It was in 2006 that Dong first learned about Boys' Love (BL) fiction when other fifth graders like her were barely reading heterosexual romance novels. It was a fanfiction from online forum of a popular Japanese anime, and she followed the serial for a few months. The fiction, portraying the love between beautiful boys, did not seem "normal" to her at first. But the depiction on romantic relationship between two men was just the same as in heterosexual romance novels ---- the only difference was just the gender, and it seemed acceptable.

Dong never identifies herself as *fu nv* (腐女), the female consumers of BL contents. She thinks that she is more of a "fan" than a "BL fan": she falls in love with a work first, and then follows its derivative works created by other fans. These fans form a *tong ren* (同人) circle in China.

The release of the first *The Avengers* in 2012 marked Dong's "official entrance" into *tong ren* circle. Fascinated by the appearances of the super heroes, Dong found a community of female fans just like her, who create and consume derivative works based on Marvel universe. A number of these derivative works contain BL contents, depicting the romantic love between two Marvel heroes. "I accepted them naturally," says Dong, "maybe because I more or less learned about BL when I grew up. Although I'm not a *fu nv*, I don't consider BL weird. After all, I love the heroes' faces and bodies. It is enjoyable for me to look at two beautiful humans falling in love with each other. And I don't think it is different from a heterosexual romantic relationship."

Dong's story represents a possible way of becoming a *tong ren* fan of Western pop culture products. This paper studies these fans like Dong. They were largely influenced by Japanese *dōjin* and boys' love culture, and with the Western cultural products seizing the market of China in recent years, they started to learn about Western popular culture and became the *tong ren* fans of Western cultural products, in a method of boys' love culture. They are called *ou mei tong ren* (欧美同人) fans. While *ou mei* (欧美) literally means Europe and United States, *tong ren* (同人) both means a group of people sharing the same goal, and, in a fandom context, using the same

character from an original text to develop new stories. To explore *ou mei tong ren* fans, I raise some questions for future discussion: which influence more on the *ou mei tong ren* fans in China? Japanese *dōjin* and boys' love culture or Western "slash" culture? What makes *ou mei tong ren* fans special in a broader fandom context? Does the emergence of *ou mei tong ren* fans reflect the changing discourse of gender and sexuality in China? To answer these questions, I will first look at the history of boys' love and *dōjin*, their origin in Japan and the development in China. In the following section, I will examine the Western fandom and "slash" culture. In the third section, I will be looking at the development of Chinese fandom culture, and then briefly review the history of *ou mei tong ren* fandom's development, and how Chinese *tong ren* fans adopt "slash" contents. In the fourth paragraph, I will focus on the government and the public's attitude on this emerging community. Last but not least, given the gender studies in China, I am intrigued of the relation between *ou mei tong ren* fans with the mainstream LGBT culture and Chinese feminism.

Boys' Love, *Dōjin*, and Chinese *Tong Ren* Culture

Boys' love culture first emerged in Japan in the early 1970s (Wei Wei, 2008, 1). Boys' love contents, featuring the romance between two males became popular in Japan and soon radiated out into the entire East Asian markets. BL contents take the forms of manga, novels, animation, and video games. They are highly female-oriented, mostly created and consumed by females (Wei Wei, 2008, 1). The content creators and readers of BL are called *fujoshi* (腐女子), literally translated as "rotten girls" (Chunyu Zhang, 2016, 249). BL contents are distinguished into two genres, *sounen-ai* (少年愛) and *yaoi* (やおい). The former can be literally translated as "teenage boys' love," and stands for the pure, immature love between two boys, often with struggles and uncertainty. *Yaoi* is sexier and more about pornography (Cathy Camper, 2006, 24).

Due to the historical and cultural connections with Japan, Taiwan was one of the first Chinese speaking regions that was imported with BL in late 1970s. And then BL contents entered the

market of Hong Kong in the late 1990s (Chunyu Zhang, 2016, 250). The emergence of BL in Mainland China was relatively late. While there were lack of constant importation of Japanese anime and manga in Mainland China, the BL culture in China was developed with the progress of the internet. At first, it was the serial fanfictions on online forums like *Baidu Tieba*, and then there were massive original BL fictions published on cyberliterature websites like *Jinjiang*. Because of the impact from *yaoi*, many of these contents are with explicit sexual descriptions.

Because of its unique background, BL culture in China has some distinctive features. While the earliest BL contents in China are the fanfictions on online forums, although most BL readers also identify themselves as *fujoshi*, or *fu nv* (腐女) in Chinese, they also think of themselves as *tong ren nv* (同人女). The term was adopted from Japanese *dōjin* (同人) and *dōjinshi* (同人誌). *Dōjin* can be translated as “same person,” and *dōjinshi* are the “self-published writings and drawings that feature the same characters from an original work (Chunyu Zhang, 2016, 249). In Japan, the *dōjinshi* culture was not merely associated with BL contents, it can be derivative works based on any content. Nonetheless, while the commercial culture in China was missing due to the historical factors, with the BL contents and *dōjinshi* culture imported into China, the earliest fandom and fan-created derivative works in China emerged.

The development of BL culture also breeds some descendant concepts. An example is the “CP” culture, or “coupling” culture (カップリング), which originally stands for matching the two or more characters from a *Nijigen* (2次元, “two-dimensional space”) work with a romantic relationship (Put Club, 2014). The term CP was first used by Japanese BL *dōjinshi* creators. With the development of *tong ren* culture in China, the term CP is used beyond the *nijigen* context, and profoundly influences Chinese fandom culture, which I will be focusing in the next section. In addition, the term *dan mei* (耽美) is also an instance of BL’s derivative development in China. It comes from Japanese *tanbi*, meaning “obsessed with beauty,” and in a more specific BL context, meaning “the beautiful romantic relationship between two beautiful boys” (Chunyu

Zhang, 2016, 250). The idea conforms with Dong's mentality at the beginning of the paper, that she thinks she simply enjoys seeing two beautiful men falling in love with each other.

Fandom Culture, Slash, and Shipping

Western fandom culture is an outcome of Western commercial culture and media entertainment. Fan communities are usually formed based on their shared passion towards a media franchise, and an early example is Star Trek. Media franchise and transmedia storytelling (Henry Jenkins, 2010) provides multiple perspectives of telling a story on different media platforms, which enables fans to recreate derivative works. Fandom culture also have a countereffect on promoting a media franchise. Fan-creative derivative works add more dimensions onto the existing stories. Elana Shefrin argues that "a growing number of 'active' or 'participatory' fans are exhibiting a sense of ownership that includes an investment in the creative development of these universe." (2004, 262). The franchising nature and the production method of Western media products gives their fans initiative in the creating process. For instance, most of the U.S. television series are produced in seasons, and they depend large on the audience feedback in deciding whether the series runs another season. Meanwhile, the production group relies on the transmedia storytelling method in inviting interaction with fans, and furthermore consolidates the fan community.

There is also homosexual aspect exists in Western fandom culture that is similar to Japanese BL culture, an instance is Kirk/Spock from television series Star Trek, which marks the emergence of "slash" culture in the U.S. The term "slash" was used by Western fandom communities to represent the homosexual relationship between two male characters. "Slash" stands for the "/" between two characters' names, of whom they imagine to be romantic. The first fanfiction of Kirk/Spock emerged during the zine publishing period, as the fans started to make the relationship between Captain Kirk and First Officer Spock sexual (Anne Kustritz, 2004, 371-

371). Similar to BL contents, “slash” is also female oriented, and the contents could sometimes be erotic as well (Slash and yaoi, 2010).

The concept of “coupling” also exists in Western fandom culture. The fans use the term “shipping” that means entirely the same as “coupling.” “Shipping” comes from the vocabulary “relationship.” Building on this concept, a “shipper” is the fan who pairing the characters, and a “shipping war” or “ship war” happens when two pairings are contradicted (Fanlore, 2018). Unlike the BL background of “Coupling,” “Shipping” can be used in any circumstances, including heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

Although both “slash” culture and Japanese BL culture are about female-oriented fictional homosexual contents, there are some major differences between Western fandom culture and Japanese boys’ love culture that need to be identified. Firstly, “slash” culture is significantly associated with fandom culture, while BL contents are not necessarily about *dōjin*. Although there are some original “slash” contents on the website, “slash” culture is originated from fandom culture, and it is “slash” culture’s essence to pair characters into romantic relationships. Unlike “slash” culture, BL culture emerged as original *tanbi* works facing to female readers, and *dōjin* is just one aspect of BL culture. Secondly, “slash” culture is always recognized as a subculture. It emerged during the period when fans shared their interests through unpublished, handmade zines. At the meantime, BL is an official genre of *shōjo* manga, the manga targeted at teenage female readers, and can be published and promoted on manga journals. Thirdly, the relationship between the original content creator and the fans is different. “Slash” culture is derived from fandom towards media franchise produced by media conglomerate. Jenkins suggests that the fan-created contents represent their self-awareness under the pop culture background, and showcases their oppositional contereffect on the media industry. On the other hand, many manga creators, especially BL manga creators in Japan are individuals or small groups. Although the animations are produced by larger companies, the animations are either

based on a manga, or there is an individual creator to represent the entire production team. Therefore, the fan-creator relationship in BL culture is not oppositional but is on an individual-to-individual based communication.

Fandom Culture in China

Given the background of Japanese BL culture and Western “slash” culture, the *ou mei tong ren* fans of China are grouped under the impact of both. It is worth noting that as I mentioned previously, *Ou Mei Tong Ren* are actually consisted by two terms, *ou mei* (“European and American”) and *tong ren* (“same people”). *Ou mei tong ren* fandom is a combination of the localized Western pop culture and Japanese *tong ren* culture, so the two terms reflect different cultural background of this fandom culture. I also want to point out that *ou mei tong ren* fans are a subset of either *ou mei* fans and *tong ren* fans ---- the two terms themselves represent two larger fandom cultures. Thus, we need to interpret the two terms separately. We will look at the *ou mei* aspect first, and examine how Western pop culture enters Chinese market. And it is impossible to talk about *ou mei* fandom without looking at Chinese mainstream fandom culture. In this section, I would split Chinese mainstream fandom culture into pre-internet era (before late 2000s) and post-internet era (late 2000s to present).

The fans market was dominated by record industry from Hong Kong and Taiwan. The entertaining industry of Hong Kong had a golden age from the 80s to around 1995 thanks to its incomparable economic strength in Chinese speaking area. However, because of the disadvantage in language (Hong Kong uses Cantonese while Mandarin is more commonly used in other areas) and the growth of Taiwanese entertainment industry, Taiwanese record companies start taking the fans market of Mainland China. Taiwanese record companies take advantage of the emergence of youth culture and consumerism in Mainland China (Anthony Y.H. Fung, 2009), and promoted singers like Jay Chou, Jolin Tsai, and girl groups like S.H.E, who sell

millions of records annually. The success of these singers formed the first fandom culture in China.

In the late 2000s, with the economic growth of Mainland China and the impact from the internet, the power balance of entertainment industry shifted from Taiwan to Mainland China. The unexpected popularity of actress Yang Mi in 2011 symbolized the birth of Chinese fan economy. The fan economy reached the peak in 2015 after the former four Chinese members of EXO, a popular South Korean boy band, saw the potential of Chinese market and decided to terminate the agreement with SM Entertainment, a leading talent agency of South Korea. The four members are called “Four Sons Returning Home” on the internet (The History of the “Four Sons Returning Home,” 2017). What they brought back was not merely the fame they collected during their terms in EXO, but also the South Korean fandom pattern. Fans spend an abundance of money on buying excessive music records to make their idols rank on the top of Billboard, keep their idols exposed on social media platforms by liking and commenting their posts, or even argue with a television production team to position their idols at a better spot on the poster. A new phrase, “Traffic Star,” was introduced to describe these idols who enjoy the resource brought by the fans without doing anything, while “traffic” stands for “the activity of data and messages passing through an online communication system or the number of visits to a particular website” (Cambridge Dictionary). The popularity of “traffic star” reflects the barbaric growth of fandom culture in China.

At the meantime, another term corresponding to this phenomenon became popular: *fan quan* (饭圈), which can be translated as “fan circles.” *Fan quan* is a broad term to describe the overall fandom culture, and each *quan* (“circle”) stands for different groups with different interest. *Fan quan* is dynamic: you can be one’s fan today and the other day another’s. And *fan quan* can be included or intersectional (“The Jargon of fan quan of 2017,” 2017). For instance, if you are a fan of Benedict Cumberbatch, your circle might be included in a greater *fan quan* of *ou mei*

circle, the group of people who like Western culture, and be intersected with the *fan quan* of *Sherlock*.

There are currently four dominant popular fandom cultures in China. Korean popular culture (“Hanryu”) first took over the youth market in China in about 2005 and introduced the particular concept of “fandom,” that requires a constant supporting to the idols. Japanese fandom culture entered Chinese market at around the same time, along with the increasing influence of Japanese *nijigen* culture. With the emergence of “traffic stars,” starting 2010, the idols from Mainland China retook the market and became a young influx of the fandom industry. And a forth power is the fans of North American and European popular culture, which form an *ou mei* circle.

Therefore, the *ou mei tong ren* fandom this paper focuses on is considered a subset of *ou mei* circle. *Ou mei* circle is consisted of all the circles that are interested in different Western cultures, including films and television (e.g. the fans of *The Avengers*), music (e.g. the fans of Taylor Swift), sports (e.g. the fans of Mesut Özil), models (e.g. the fans of Freja Beha Erichsen), and even musicals (e.g. the fans of *Mozart, l'opéra rock*). Western popular culture was introduced by the MTV Mandarin that was launched in Canton, Mainland China in 2003, which also led to the popularity of Western musicians like Avril Lavigne and Backstreet Boys. (MTV: China, 2018) *Ou Mei* fans often give nicknames or abbreviations to the celebrities or things that they follow to develop a high-context communication and form an exclusive community. For instance, *South China Morning Post* published an essay on March 17, 2018 titled “Oscar nominee Timothee Chalamet gets a ‘Sweet’ Chinese nickname” reports that Chalamet is named “Sweet Tea” by his Chinese fans and gives some more examples. For instance, “british actor Tom Hardy is known as ‘Tang Lao Shi’. ‘Lao Shi’ means ‘always wet’, apparently because of his typically slicked-back hair” (South China Morning Post, 2018).

So, what makes *ou mei* circle in China different from other Chinese fandoms? *Ou mei* fans are always ranked on the top of “chain of contempt” among all the circles because they are usually

associated with educated, advanced, and rational (Sohu Entertainment, 2017). It seems like a must to know some extend of English to be an *ou mei* fan, and being passionate towards Western culture somehow means you accept the progressive ideologies in Western society. Joining which fandom circle might be a personal choice, but according to my interview, people have certain impression or image for each fandom circle, and *ou mei* fans are mostly associated with “female college students.” Another vital difference is the idea that *ou mei* fans are rational. Due to the geographic distance, while fans of the “traffic stars” are having argument online with a movie production team, *ou mei* fans can hardly do anything other than downloading another episode of their favorite television series. It is almost impossible for *ou mei* fans to spend irrational money as well. Unlike the fans of the “traffic stars” buying excessive records to boost their idol’s ranking on Billboard, the best way of *ou mei* fans supporting their idols is just to watch the premiere of his/her movie. *Ou mei* fans seem to be irrelevant with the irrational consumerist culture or fans economy.

Ou Mei Tong Ren Fandom

Although *ou mei* fandom is distinct from Korean or Japanese fandom, *ou mei tong ren* fandom is bred by the Asian *tong ren* culture, other than its Western counterpart “slash” culture. To distinguish that we need to look back to the history of Chinese *ou mei tong ren* fandom.

Unlike Japanese *dōjinsh* or Western “slash” culture, Chinese *Tong Ren* culture is vastly rooted in the internet culture. The early *Tong Ren* fictions appeared on online forums like *Baidu Tieba* (百度贴吧), the most influential forum of Mainland China, or *Yuanyuan*, a Taiwanese cyberliterature/politics forum. After the online forum era, the founder of *Yuanyuan* forum established the cyberliterature website *Xian Wang* (鲜网) on June 1st, 2000 (“Disclose: from the shutdown of *Xian Wang*...,” 2018). The internet-based format and Taiwanese background of *Xian Wang* endowed the writers more freedom in creating, and made *Xian Wang* a biggest

platform for erotic literature, which was a taboo in Mainland China due to the ruling party's policy. *Xian Wang* also attracted many BL and *Tong Ren* writers. On one hand, Taiwan was the first Chinese speaking region that BL culture was imported, and over thirty years of development, a mature BL community was formed in Taiwan. On the other hand, the erotic nature of *yaoi* (BL) needed an emancipating place. *Xian Wang* was once renowned for erotic literatures, including either original or *Tong Ren*, homosexual or heterosexual contents. And BL contents were extremely popular on *Xian Wang* that it was even considered a major category. In fact, a *Dou Ban* (Chinese hipster social platform) user "a cup of fruit tea" reveals that "the earliest writers on *Xian Wang* were mostly BL writers, and heterosexual romance, thriller, and light novel writers joined the website gradually." "A cup of fruit tea" also points out that the website shut down in 2014 because "the new administrator ignored the BL writers and thought that they were an alternative culture." ("Disclose: from the shutdown of *Xian Wang*...", 2018) Nonetheless, the fourteen years of *Xian Wang*'s success also represents the growth of the inchoate *Tong Ren* culture in China.

Along with the increasing *tong ren* contents, *ou mei tong ren* fanfiction emerged on *Xian Wang* as a subset. It is hard to trace back to the first Chinese *ou mei tong ren* fanfiction, but as an *ou mei tong ren* fan, Cox, recalls, the fanfictions of *Harry Potter* were one of earliest. Because *Xian Wang* was closed down, an evidence of early *ou mei tong ren* fanfiction can be found on *Xian Wang*'s equivalent, the 2003-launched female cyberliterature website, *Jinjiang*. "Chinese Dream" is an unfinished *Harry Potter tong ren* fanfiction written by "diaoling." It was serialized on September 24, 2004, a year after the *Jinjiang* website established, and the writer only persisted for two days ("Chinese Dream," 2004). Although the setting of the story is still confused in two chapters, the author indicates on the front page that the fanfiction is a *Tong Ren* work of *Harry Potter*, and it is a Boys' Love story featuring Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy. Most of other *Tong Ren* fanfictions on *Jinjiang* are similar. Because the derivative works target niche markets, the authors usually mark "a *tong ren* fanfiction of ..." on the title, and indicate the

“coupling,” usually putting the “top,” the masculine character in the front and the “bottom” follows. Furthermore, the authors use only the initial of the character’s given name. For example, the “coupling” of Harry Potter (as the top) and Draco Malfoy (as the bottom) is called “HD.” This language between *Tong Ren* fans is highly contextual, and apparently contradicts the habits in English-speaking countries. In fact, it is entirely different from the “slash” fandom culture, as the sexual relationship in “slash” culture is indicated by the sign “top/bottom.” (Anne Kustritz, 2004, 371) Therefore, the development of early Chinese *ou mei tong ren* fandom was mostly independent from the Western “slash” fandom culture.

The linguistic style “diaoling” adopts in “Chinese Dream” also demonstrates Japanese BL and *dōjin* cultures’ impact on early *ou mei tong ren* fanfiction. Early *ou mei tong ren* writers in China had the experience of either creating or reading Japanese anime *tong ren* fanfictions. The language used in “Chinese Dream” is highly cartoony, with multiple exclamation marks and tildes by the end of the sentences to express the emotionality of the characters, and the descriptions on actions and the heavy employment of dialogues to create animated scenes. For instance, in the narrative,

with the boom from the sky (get away!!!! Kind of sound), an outgoing, cute, pretty, ... kind, hardworking, smart, brave girl ~~~~ arrives. She somersaults and stands steadily on the head of Malfoy’s father (and his father passes away immediately), with a perfect pose. “Who is this idiot?”
“Ron!!!!!! You are gonna be dead on my hand!!!!!!!” (“Chinese Dream,” 2004)

The author creates a new character that does not exist in the original text, and supposedly this character is a substitute of the author in the story, as she is perfect and omnipotent in this virtual world (“I am here to fulfill your wishes”). This paragraph reflects the desire of a *tong ren* writer of having agency in the existing stories.

Another evidence of the Japanese BL and *dōjin* cultures’ impact on early *ou mei tong ren* culture is the online platforms that collect these *ou mei tong ren* creators. As the early fanfictions gained popularity and formed an *ou mei tong ren* community, the fans brought in various formats of

derivative works including fan drawings, photo remix, and video reedit. It is also hard to trace back to neither the first fan cartoon or the earliest video, but despite that these creators use Weibo as their primary social media platform for promotion, Pixiv and Bilibili are the two major art- and video-oriented platforms that gather the *tong ren* creators. And both of these platforms have Japanese BL and *dōjin* cultural background. Pixiv is a Tokyo-based online platform for artists, especially cartoonists, illustrators, drawers and painters (Pixiv Inc, 2010). Established in 2007, Pixiv quickly became the first and biggest online platform for BL and *dōjin/tong ren* artists. Attracted by its global impact, Chinese artists were once a major force on Pixiv that was impossible to ignore (“Pixiv is aiming...,” 2011). Pixiv as a platform that allows intercultural communication among artists also consolidates the impact of BL and *dōjin* on Chinese *Ou Mei Tong Ren* community. Similarly, although the founder of Bilibili, Xu Yi, is Chinese, Xu’s original attempt was to create an “ACG (animation, comic, game) video sharing platform,” and his inspiration came from the Japanese video platform Niconico (Lou X, 2012).

Nevertheless, the “slash” culture is gradually influencing the *ou mei tong ren* community in the past few years. It began when a small group of *tong ren* readers started going to Western fanfiction platform Fanfiction and Archive of Our Own (AO3) and shared their experience on using the websites. While the time the first *Tong Ren* reader discovered Fanfiction remains unknown, the *Baidu Tieba*’s (online forum) “Fanfiction” topic was established in 2012. But it was not until 2016 the majority of *ou mei tong ren* community got to know about these websites. In the blog post “Tutorial of English Tong Ren fanfiction website Archive of Our Own,” published on February 19, 2016, Weibo user “onepiece369” gives a detailed instruction on the functions and the translation of the website for “fellows who are not so familiar with but eager to know about AO3.” Introducing the features of AO3, “onepiece369” also points out that “AO3 has few limitations on sexual and violent contents, so many Western writers who previously wrote on Fanfiction website now move to AO3” (2016).

Starting from 2015, some *ou mei tong ren* fans shared fanfictions from Fanfiction and AO3 through downloading and translating. These translators usually post a combination of their translated works and the original version on AO3 and share the link on a Chinese social media platform. An example is a translated X-Men fanfiction named “Paper Monsters.” The original work was published in October 2011, and the AO3 user “navi” translated it into Chinese and posted in July 2015. The translated work was later discovered by a Lofter (Chinese social media platform) user “shimianxiang,” and the link was shared on the blog with comments “fast-paced, mind-blowing. Very literature-oriented...” (“A Note about...,” 2013)

Chinese *tong ren* writers also started to adopt the writing style of Western “slash” creators. The distinguishing sign is the adoption of the three fanfiction settings from “slash” community: ABO, Sentinel and Guide, and BDSM. For instance, “Sentinel and Guide” is a setting that particularly from “slash” culture that is derived from a late 90s U.S. television series *The Sentinel*. According to the setting, “the sentinels” are with excessive sensibility and “the guides” are responsible to tolerate and help “the sentinels” with their powerful mental strength (Sentinel and Guide). It is interesting that a setting from fandom community can be also employed by original BL creators. A BL cyber fiction called “Deeply in Love (钟情),” written by “jingshuibian” and first published on *Jinjiang* in 2014 was one of the earliest BL contents using the setting of “Sentinel and Guide.” The fiction illustrates a science fantasy world and the two male characters are a sentinel and a guide in the human army (“Deeply in Love,” 2014).

The increasing influence from “slash” culture also represents the rising impact of Western entertainment industry, especially Hollywood, in China. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the World Trade Organization in 2009 accused China of violating international trade rules for importing only 20 foreign movies annually. To resolve this impeachment, on February 18, 2012, an agreement was made between China and the U.S., that “would make it easier and more profitable for Hollywood studios to show their films in China.” Conforming to this agreement,

China increased the access of U.S. films in Chinese market from 20 to 34 (Bob Davis, 2012). The performance of U.S. movies in Chinese market is phenomenal. Data shows that five Hollywood movies, including *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *Fast & Furious 7*, were listed in the top ten grossing movies of 2006 to 2016 (Yichenxiaoshi, 2017). Another report on the 2017 movies performance reflects Chinese audience's preference on Hollywood franchise, for that eleven of the top twenty grossing imported movies are movie franchises (TMT Post, 2018). The achievement of Hollywood movies in China directly led to the rapid growth of *ou mei tong ren* community from 2012. Cox an *ou mei tong ren* fan who enters the circle in 2012 claims that, "the major reason of us becoming an *ou mei tong ren* fan was the original works, instead of the fanfictions or other derivative works. At least, people around me are first the fan of a work, and then looking for other fanfictions or fan-created works to satisfy their enthusiasm in the original work."

In conclusion, the *ou mei tong ren* fandom of China is cultivated by the internet culture and is a beneficiary of globalization. *ou mei tong ren* community is significantly influenced by the Japanese BL and *dōjin* cultures at its birth, and develops through adsorbing Western "slash" fandom culture. Xiqing Zheng, the Assistant Researcher of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences writes in her note that:

Because of the gap in the commercial culture of Mainland China, the contemporary fandom culture featuring consumerism and re-creation community and Chinese internet culture almost start simultaneously, entirely lack of the printed and postal communication method. Chinese fandom culture enters a global networking, instant messaging, and deterritorializational process from the very beginning. This is very interesting because the fandom culture in China, therefore, presents an attribute of the intersection and parallel of globalization and localization as it develops. (Xiqing Zheng, 2008)

As a result, although *ou mei tong ren* fandom is entirely an outcome of internet culture, it also adopts the printing fandom traditions as it develops. For instance, the zine culture that was popular in the 70s is a tradition of Western fandom culture. Zine culture emerged because the long-distance communication at the time highly relied on printed media (Xiqing Zheng, 2008).

Similarly, although the *ou mei tong ren* community are able to communicate and share through the internet today, the fan artist community creates a tradition of selling self-published works called “the booklet (本子),” and a self-published “the booklet” represents the maturity of a fan artist.

Policies, Public’s Reactions, and the Government’s Attitude

Formed in around 2004, *ou mei tong ren* community had about ten years of freedom in creating erotic, homosexual contents on cyberliterature websites and online forums before Chinese government took an action. Things changed after the “Investigation Report of the Fifth Group of Cases of the Office of the National Work Group for ‘Combating Pornography and Illegal Publications’ Carrying out the Special Action of Combating Online Obscene Contents (全国“扫黄打非”办公室通报打击网上淫秽色情信息专项行动第五批案件查处情况)” was published in July 2nd, 2014. These cases include *Jinjiang* cyberliterature website and its writers’ “crime of Disseminating Obscene and Pornographic Information” (“Investigation Report of...,” 2014). In the report, according to the investigation of the Office of the National Work Group for “Combating Pornography and Illegal Publications,” *Jinjiang* launched a service of self-publishing and selling fictions for the authors online without formalities. And the suspect, a writer on *Jinjiang* called “timber wolf with wings (长着翅膀的大灰狼),” had her erotic contents being published through *Jinjiang*. “Timber wolf with wings” was once a famous writer who created both heterosexual and homosexual contents.

It is doubtful that the case of “timber wolf with wings” is a mere singularity. *Xian Wang*, the leading cyberliterature website was closed during the “Special Action of Combating Online Obscene Contents.” According to *Dou Ban* user “a cup of fruit tea,” many people think that the sudden shut down of *Xian Wang* was caused by this Special Action, while others argue that *Xian Wang*’s company and its server were located in Taiwan, which should be restricted under the

Taiwanese authority. In the post on *Dou Ban*, “a cup of fruit tea” exposes that *Xian Wang* actually shut down because of the break in its capital chain. The company owed the remuneration to the writers which led to a strike and eventually the collapse of *Xian Wang* (h” Disclose: from the shutdown of *Xian Wang* ...,” 2018).

Chinese government’s attitude on “online obscene contents” is consistent. On October 31, 2018, an original BL fiction writer, Tianyi, was accused of “Producing and Selling Obscene and Pornographic Information for Profit,” and was sentenced to ten-year-and-six-month’s imprisonment. Nonetheless, the case of Tianyi evoked controversies on the internet this time. Weibo (Chinese biggest social media platform) user “sinking raccoon, the deceased among the pets” posted

October 31, BL literature writer Tianyi was accused of Producing and Selling Obscene and Pornographic Information for Profit by Wuhu court in Anhui province, and was sentenced to ten year’s imprisonment with forfeit. This May, I was attacked and sexually assaulted by a stranger in Beijing. On the October 10th’s trial in Chaoyang court, the offender was accused of Public Indecency and was sentenced to eight month’s imprisonment. (sinking raccoon..., 2018)

The post was liked for 83,496 times, commented for 10,403 times and was reposted for 149,994 times in ten days. Meanwhile, Chinese Sexologist scholar Yinhe Li also commented on this news that “readers buy her book of their free will. Ten year’s imprisonment for a crime without a victim? The rationale behind this court decision is doubtful” (“Homosexual Fiction Writer...,” 2018).

Although some netizens doubted that the harsh conviction in Tianyi’s case was resulted by the fact that she was a homosexual romance writer, in fact, Chinese government’s attitude on homosexual contents was ambiguous. Tianyi was only accused according to the existing “crime of Disseminating Obscene and Pornographic Information,” instead of her homosexual contents. On April 13, 2018, Chinese biggest social media platform Weibo’s official account “Weibo Administrator” announced that, according to “China Internet Security Law,” to create a

“harmonious environment,” Weibo would close hundreds of accounts that had posted “comics, games, and videos that contain obscene, homosexual, and violent contents, including BL ‘booklets.’” The announcement points directly towards the *Tong Ren* and BL community, however, it attracted not just these subcultural communities, but also the LGBT groups and beyond. The hashtag “#IAmHomosexual” was read for over 540,000,000 times and was commented for over 530,000 times, and was soon shut down by Weibo (“Paralleling Homosexual with...,” 2018).

While the Chinese government never have a clear attitude, the “China Internet Security Law” does not have any regulation on homosexual contents. Three days after, on the 16th, “Weibo Administrator” published a new announcement saying that the censorship would not be aiming at homosexual contents anymore (Chen Liang, 2018).

Ou Mei Tong Ren Fandom, Gay Community, and Female Masquerade

Weibo’s announcement on April 13 2018 caused possibly the first positive connection between Chinese Gay community and *tong ren* fans. The two groups for the first time condemned Weibo of discrimination towards homosexuality. In the article “What we can see after Weibo banned homosexuality,” published on *Thunder* magazine in May 2018, Xiaohe Luo comments “aiming at BL and pornographic contents was an excuse of Weibo blocking all the homosexual-related contents,” And “BL is also sexual minority-related contents...It is wrong to ascribe Weibo’s banning to BL culture or *fu nv* groups...at least it is not correct...The enemy of homosexuality is not BL culture” (2018).

Before the Weibo event, *tong ren* Fandom was almost entirely irrelevant to Chinese gay community. Mr. X, a college student who identifies himself as homosexual points out that, “we don’t really read or watch BL contents. Maybe during the time of discovering our sexual

orientation, some of us would. But when it becomes solid, you notice that these BL comics are fake. They are the fantasy of women.” BL contents are commonly seen as female-oriented. It is a “close-loop” that is both produced and consumed by females. Mr. X also mentions that, “we have our own comics in gay community. We know that they are drawn by gay and aim at gays. And the content is very down-to-earth. The appearances of the characters aren’t fancy as those in the BL comics.”

But it might be a different situation when it comes to *Tong Ren* culture. Like the instance of Dong, the original motivation of *Tong Ren* fandom is not gender-oriented, but the affection towards a text. Although Mr. X claims that he can merely fantasize those works who directly claims to be homosexual, like *Call Me by Your Name*, the boundary between these “serious homosexual text” and BL content is actually blurry. And who can argue that the Italian boy falling in love with American student in the beautiful summer of Italy sort-of-setting is an authentic depiction of gay community’s real life?

Dr. Xiqing Zheng, assistant researcher of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences writes on her Weibo post that, “both of the LGBT groups and the BL community are almost invisible in Chinese society, which makes it hard to conduct statistical work.” But she also points out that that “although there are cultural differences exist, we can refer to data from AO3 (on which, majority of the users are from English speaking countries)” (Xiqing Zheng, 2018). In her post, Dr. Zheng introduces Abigail De Kosnik’s book *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom*. In the book, Kosnik mentions a survey conducted by AO3 in 2013, which, from the answers of “5,709 slash readers and 2,765 creators (writers, vidders, etc.),” finds that “only 31.7 percent of respondents identified ‘solely as female’ and ‘solely as heterosexual.’” (2016, 147).

In addition, the book *Boys’ Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* discusses boys’ love contents from a Queer perspective. In the book,

Antonia Levi argues in the “Introduction” that a distinction between boys’ love and “slash” culture is that boys’ love contents actually attract gay male fans, because “boys’ love products may suggest different theoretical implications for cultural expressions of sex and gender than those of slash.” Alan Michael Williams, Ph.D. from University of Washington also questions in his article “Raping Apollo: Sexual Difference and the Yaoi Phenomenon” that, “as a 25-year-old gay ... how am I to imagine myself alongside the majority of yaoi fans – straight females – most of whom are Japanese? Is such an imaginary naïve, egocentric, ethnocentric, exist?” (2010)

It is still a controversial connection between boys’ love culture and gay community, but in terms of the major consumer and creator group, the changing discourse from boys’ love content to *ou mei tong ren* fandom definitely represents the changing appeal of heterosexual female group. Females desire in consuming boys’ love contents is based on the theory of female masquerade, the “spectatorial transvestism of the woman viewers” (Anneke Smelik). Whereas female spectators are “more fluid in their capacity to identify with the other gender,” the female consumers of boys’ love are actually seeing, or even imagining themselves being in the relationship of two homosexual males. Female masquerade in *ou mei tong ren* culture can also be found when the fanfiction is half-original, meaning that one of the leading roles is originally created by the fan author. The author usually put part of the self into the character, which satisfies the desire of participating in the story.

Therefore, the changing power balance from boys’ love contents from a-decade ago to the *ou mei tong ren* fandom today reflects an awakening consciousness of Chinese feminism. The early original boys’ love or the anime-based fanfiction usually portray a homosexual relationship that imitates traditional heterosexual relationship, with one feminine role and one masculine role. On the contrary, the *ou mei tong ren* fanfictions are mostly lack of gender roles, and the creators often mark “strong vs. strong” particularly on the front-page introduction or when the fanfiction is referred on social media platform. For instance, a fanfiction coupling Sherlock Holmes and

Professor Moriarty from television series *Sherlock*, “A Hundred Tags about Professor Moriarty,” is tagged as “strong vs. strong” on the cyberliterature website (Yuyuan, 2012). What’s more, in her blog, *ou mei tong ren* fan “shimianxiang” indicates that, “I am not fond of fanfictions that feminize the character, making me feel like I’m reading a heterosexual romance fiction. The reason I like these (*ou mei tong ren*) characters was because they are in love based on the equality within their souls” (“A Note about...,” 2013).

Conclusion

The *ou mei tong ren* culture in China is a result of globalization. It is bred by the boys’ love and *dōjin* culture from Japan, thanks to the developing internet culture and Taiwan as a transfer station. It also represents the rising impact of Western entertainment industry and Western fandom culture in China, and is gradually affected by Western “slash” community. The growing *ou mei tong ren* culture is a resistance against internet censorship, a controversial partner of gay community, and a sign of the awakening female consciousness.

More significantly, the development of *ou mei tong ren* culture in China introduces a new approach of studying homosexual contents, fandom culture and gender studies, as it reveals a fact that, both Japanese boys’ love and Western “slash” cultures are transcending their original meaning, audience, and significance when they are practiced in a different culture. For instance, while most of the early academic articles claimed that boys’ love contents are merely female-oriented and are irrelevant to gay community, they are actually a source of “enlightenment” for some of the LGBTQ groups in China, not to mention that in the U.S. the ambiguous gender implication of boys’ love makes it popular in some gay community in comparison to “slash” culture. Culture is fluid. When we study boys’ love or “slash” culture, it is fragmentary to focus on its “origin,” but we should look at it in a global scale.

Yet, when we focus back to the developing society of China, if we argue that the early emergence of boys' love and fandom cultures indicate the increasing consumption level and the growing voice of Chinese women, the formation of *ou mei tong ren* fandom represents the birth of female consciousness in Chinese society. It reflects an expectation of a group of Chinese females on intimate relationship, power, and especially, on the selves.

Like Dong, from the beginning of the story, who is planning to take a temporary resignation in her career and preparing for the application in graduate programs in Singapore and Hong Kong, mentions that, "I only the fan of two 'couples': Captain America and Iron Man from *The Avengers*, and Harry Hart and Merlin from *Kingsman*. I'm not that kind of person who falls in love with a 'couple' in each movie." I think her statement conveys something about her attitude towards intimate relationship.

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