

Boys' Love Fiction and Boys' Love Fan-Fiction: Origin and Division

Jingchi Zhang^{1,*}

¹ Department of Sociology, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, 999077, China

*Corresponding author. Email: ajcz1122@hku.hk

ABSTRACT

As one of the inspired foundations of Chinese Boys' Love fictions, Chinese fanfictions have commons and similar origin as those danmei (Boys' Love) fictions, but the progress of the popularization and influence of the two fictions on Chinese literature, subculture, and targeted groups are slightly different on the Internet. To fulfill the gap in the study of the current importance of Boys' Love fanfictions, this paper aims to find out the differences and similarities between Boys' Love fanfictions and Boys' Love fictions from three different areas, the legalization, motivation of the creation, and the values these two fictions aiming to deliver by comparing 18 papers in both Chinese and English to demonstrate how current Chinese scholars regard the relationship between fanfictions and Boys' Love fictions.

Keywords: *Boys' Love, Fan-fiction, Feminism.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The shift of tastes from Romantic fiction to boys' love fictions/danmei (BL) relates to the traditional values on recognitions of love and genders [1]. Boys' Love (BL) fictions are popular because, in both the real and virtual world, men are believed to have more social roles than women in societies, and female characters are consistent with similar personalities and roles in fiction. In other words, the personalities of the female figures are similar to each other in BL fictions even they are portrayed by different authors. Moreover, the authors and readers both have the desire for a romantic relationship that in real-life they want to be loved and love others, and such a desire is eventually presented in their work by portraying a romantic relationship among the characters. Furthermore, BL fictions have been regarded as a tool of revolution for females against the patriarchal reality. Based on these facts, authors would feminize the male characters who are the dominators in such a same-sex relationship in these fictions. The rise of feminism in either fanfictions or BL fictions is related to cyberfeminism [1][2]. Female netizens intend to prove that there are different roles that females are supposed to play and be able to play, and fiction authorities the authors to invent more creation and imagination to prove that they have such an ability to achieve their goals. To sum up, the fictions reveal the unequal treatment that female face in reality.

BL fictions are a grey area in China since homosexuality is still a sensitive topic in public discussion [3][4]. Like BL fictions, fanfictions, which discusses the relationship between same-sex and fanfictions that involve more sensitive topics, has been seen as another grey area in literature [3]. The current Chinese fanfictions were inspired by the Japanese subculture and further under the influence of European, American, and other Asian subcultures [4][5][6]. In its early development, BL elements accounted for a large proportion and inspired the creation of fanfictions. As a result, fanfictions and BL fictions are closely linked in both histories of development and creation. Since BL fictions have been considered as females' Utopia and the production of feminism [6], it is possible to make an association between feminism and fanfictions. In this paper's further discussion, the paper will discover whether BL fanfictions have shaped the idea of feminism like BL fictions; or will these BL fanfictions influence people's attitudes towards cyberfeminism. To achieve this goal, this essay will select 18 papers (See Table 1) in both Chinese and English to discuss how the precious researchers conduct the study on the features of fanfictions and BL fictions and the potential relations among these two types of work.

Table 1. Analysis of 18 papers

Similarities, differences and comparisons	Marginalization	Motivations on creation	Values and inspirations
[1] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]	[4] [11] [13] [14]	[8][12][13] [14]	[2] [11] [12] [13] [14] [15] [16] [17] [18] [19]

2. SIMILARITIES, DIFFERENCES, AND IMPACT OF BL FANFICTIONS AND BL FICTIONS (DANMEI)

The previous study on boys' love fictions has mentioned the shift of tastes from Romantic fictions to boys' love fictions related to the traditional values on recognitions of love and genders [1][5][7][8]. Scholars pointed out that BL fictions are popular because men have more social roles than women in both the real and virtual worlds, especially while female characters are consistent in the fiction. In other words, the personalities of the female figures are alike to each other even they are portrayed by different authors.

Danmei, a Chinese translation of boys' love, origins from the Japanese word, is now used as a specific reference of original boys' live fictions in China [4][5]. The word danmei originates from Japanese ACG (Anime, comic, and game) culture, and in the 1990s to 2010s, the Chinese BL culture divides into two categories, BL fan culture and BL origin culture [5][6]. In other words, the current BL fictions have partially been under the influence of fanfictions in the early generations [4][5][7]. Yet the research problem is that some scholars summarized the process of danmei in China as the process of being marginalized to being centralized in fields like TV dramas, animation, radio dramas, and so on, but the study on fanfictions is still limited in this field.

The current fanfictions can be categorized into five types, ACG-based, fiction-based, drama-based, historical-based, and real person slash (RPS)[5][6]. ACG-based fanfictions' elements and characters origins from Japanese ACG works, fiction-based fanfictions' characters origin from fiction. Drama-based fanfictions' characters are based on TV dramas. Historical-based fanfictions characters came from real history, and real person slash characters are real people (can be anyone) in reality, frequently are the celebrities [4][5][7][8][9].

The primary sensitive topic of all fanfictions is the copyright issue [3][4]. Fanfictions' works usually involve the problem of plagiarism since the original copyright of the characters and the context of the work belong to the original author. As a sensitive topic, fanfictions might need to consider the issue of copyright in its creation. Especially for commercial use, unless the original author authorizes the second creation of fans' works, any creation without empowerment will be

defined as copyright infringement. Since the definition of copyright infringement is not regular in China, fanfictions' creation is considered a grey area, and the authors might refer to any copyright problem riskily.

The second topic which makes the creation of fanfictions sensitive is the acceptance of homosexuality in reality. Even though more and more BL original fictions have been adapted to TV dramas in recent years, the "romantic relationships" origins from work have been changed to "socialist brotherhood [5]". Since many fanfictions satisfy the desire of authors and readers on the romantic relationship between the same-sex characters, the element "same-sex love" makes the creation harder while the "same-sex" relationship has been defined as the crime under the same category as rape, sexual assault sexual violence and so on by the China's National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) [10].

The third problem is about the rate of the work. In 2020, AO3 (Archive of Our Own), a well-known worldwide fanfictions' platform, has been reported to be blocked by the government in mainland China after some fans of a Chinese idol (Xiao Zhan) reported the words were "obscene" on the website [9][11]. Some commenters on the Internet summarized the conflict in this 227 Issue (AO3 was blocked on February 27th, 2020) as the conflict between real persons' fans and other fans who participated in the tongren creations (second creation/ fan work) [9][11]. Yet the problem is, after 227, the spaces for Simplified Chinese tongren creation/fan work have been aggressed.

2.1 Being Marginalized, The Legalisation Of Writing Boy's Love Fictions And Fanfictions

Based on the previous summaries in this paper on the acceptance of fanfictions and the potential risks in fanfictions' creation, it can be summarized that the current creation for fanfictions is not as friendly as danmei (original BL) works since tongren/fanfictions involve more sensitive issues. For example, both fanfictions and danmei works might contain the same elements as homosexuality, danmei work does not have the problem of copyright infringement and the label of "obscenity" or "limited spaces" for creation since danmei can be published. Generally, the successful adaption might also inspire more audiences to be fond of the original work (the fiction) and other editions like TV dramas or radio based on the fiction itself, and further create a virtuous circle to

the coming dramas based on the original work. However, unless original BL fictions may attract more audiences through different trends, fanfictions only target those fans who are already fond of the original work. In contrast, fanfictions could not attract as many audiences as the original BL works, while they can only attract more audiences when the original work becomes successful, which encourages more potential audiences and fans to join in the second creation of fanfictions and other fan works. As the previous paragraph mentioned, the development of danmei work in the past few years can be categorized as a successful process of from being marginalized to being centralized [6][7][8].

2.2 Motivation, What Makes the Fans Keep Writing

Chinese scholars have been categorized the inspiration of fanfictions' authors into four types [12][13][14]. Some fanfictions' authors are not satisfied with the characters' original context or endings in work, which inspires their creativity to change the "fate" of the characters or original work through second creation. Also, if the original characters' relationship cannot satisfy the fans' taste, fans might use fanfictions to create their ideal relationship with the characters themselves to satisfy their tastes and desire. Moreover, the convenience of creating fanfictions can also inspire fans' creations. Compared with the original fiction, the characters and background are already created perfectly. Under this condition, fans would not need to recreate any character to suit their stories. At last, the writers are seeking acceptance from similar persons like themselves who are also fond of the same work with similar interests and desires as a social tool.

According to Wu, Wang, and Liu, fans will seek group identification in their circles [8][13][14]. In other words, fans are looking for both the identification from the group to self-identify themselves and resonances from the characters' personalities or experiences of the original work, which could be similar to their experiences and characteristics. This defines the importance of fanfictions as the bridge to tide the relationships between the characters and themselves [13][14]. As a result, the fanfictions creators would be more active in creating more fiction, aiming to tide the relationships between the characters and the creators themselves.

The previous summary on the features of fanfictions has been proved that the creation of the fanfictions is also connected with the fanfictions, which make the values in the fanfictions impact the traditional values of the society. In the meantime, fans in the same communities might contain similar values given by the original work to enhance their relationship with the original work. In a word, values in fanfictions are given by both fanfictions' creators and original authors. The background and characters have been decided by the original authors, but

the storylines and the context of the work can reveal the values of the fanfictions' authors since they are the second writers of the work. With these rights, fans can decide the progress of the story depending on their interests.

This is somehow similar to the creation of the danmei fictions. Unlike fanfictions, danmei fictions share more freedom to create more details on the background and the personalities of the work. In the past, some scholars have been defined danmei fictions as a tool to satisfy women's needs on perusing gender equality. Since both danmei fictions and fanfictions involve the features of delivering one's pure interests and desire about the word, and both involve homosexual elements, it is possible to raise the question of whether BL fanfictions also share similar characters as BL fictions on the Internet to pursuing females' desires and features to against one certain value or the problem of gender equality.

2.3 Feminism And Value Value Among The Work

The online report about females is still dominated by male discourse in terms of quantity and quality [2]. From quantity, there are more males than females report. For those reports about females, the reports are limited, which proved that females had been marginalized in public [11][12][13][14]. Stereotypes and stereotypes can be found in the words and descriptions among these reports related to females. In the previous paragraph, it has been proved that both BL fictions and BL fanfictions contain authors' and creators' ideas about the work and value [12], and the difference is that original work would deliver pure ideas of the authors' value. However, the idea and the value in the fanfictions is constructed by both the original author and fanfictions' author, which may deliver more than one value in work [13][14]. This may cause a problem that if the original work of the fanfictions does not deliver a feminist idea [16][17][18][19], the fanfictions' values about the fanfictions is built upon by the fans merely [8][12]. In other words, in such fanfictions, the characters and background only offer a platform for fans to create as a tool to deliver the fans' ideas, instead of popularizing multiple values of the fanfictions. On such an occasion, fanfictions might not deliver the idea of feminism as strong as it's in a danmei work [19].

3. CONCLUSION

In China, fanfictions, particularly BL-type fanfictions, have the same origin and background as BL fictions. Unlike the characters and personalities in BL fictions are created by the author, the original creators have decided the characters and personalities in fanfictions' works, the value of the work still belongs to the fanfictions' creators. In other words, on the one hand,

the value in fanfictions is under both the original author and the author of the fanfiction, and the idea of feminism might be presented distinctively than the origin BL fictions. On the other hand, the current environment of creation and stigmatization towards fanfictions could curb the enthusiasm of the fanfictions' authors, which could also be counted as an influential factor in the popularization of values like feminism. In further research, researchers might potentially study the relationship between fanfictions and feminist values and identities among the works since there is limited work on this trend.

REFERENCES

- [1] Y. Xiao, Female-targeted Internet literature's gender experiment-BL fictions as an example, in *Modern Chinese Literature Studies* (8) 2016, pp. 39-46. DOI: 10.16287/j.cnki.cn11-2589/i.2016.08.004
- [2] Y. Lan, Study on the stigmatization of females in cyber era, Doctoral Dissertation, Heilongjiang University, 2018.
- [3] Y. Li, The Right of Adaption of Fanfictions, in *Journal of Jinggangshan University* (S1) 2007, pp. 73-5.
- [4] X. Wang, The past and the present of fanfictions, in *Shuwu* (10) 2017, pp. 9-17.
- [5] N. Deng, M. Han, Danmei being famous: a brief summary on development of mainland China boys' love culture, in *Journal of Chongqing University of Science and Technology* (01) 2021, pp. 94-120. DOI: 10.19406/j.cnki.cqkxyxbskb.2021.01.017
- [6] Q. Zhao, On the Changes of Network Tanbi Novel-Based on the Jinjiang Literature Website, in Master of Contemporary Literature thesis., Tianjin Normal University, 2018.
- [7] X. Wu, Study on fanfictions of Internet literatures, in *Journal of Lishui University* (06) 2009, pp. 31-5.
- [8] J. Song, M. Wang, A psychological thought on the popularity of Internet danmei subculture, in *Heihe Journal* (08) 2011, pp. 22-4. DOI: 10.14054/j.cnki.cn23-1120/c.2011.08.080
- [9] DR. X. 2020, I used 10 minutes to write a brief summary of Chinese modern fan culture, Bilibili Video, May 15, 2020. <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1ai4y14745>
- [10] China's National Radio and Television Administration. General Rules About the Content of Television Dramas, China Television Drama Production Industry Association, August 8, 2019. <http://www.ctpia.com.cn/index/sousuo/detail?id=178&isid=6&isflag=1>
- [11] X. Zheng, Internet fanfictions as transformative writing and its intertextuality, in *Literary and Artistic Contention* (12) 2020, pp. 93-101.
- [12] Z. Wang, The built of imagination and another world- study on Internet literatures in Shanghai Culture (08) 2017, pp. 19-33+125.
- [13] Y. Wu, J. Wang, Y. Liu, Why do They Write Voluntarily on Fanfiction Communities: From Perspectives of Group Identity and Emotional Investment, in *Journalism & Communication* (S1) 2021, pp. 108-25+128.
- [14] C. Yu, The study of network fan fiction, Master of Chinese Language, thesis., Shandong Normal University, 2021.
- [15] Y. Xue, Equal Love: The Rise of Boy's Love Fiction and the Transformation of Women's Expectations, in *Journal of Shandong Women's University* (05) 2021, pp. 54-65.
- [16] D. Liu, 'Fan' and 'face-lifting': the theory of modern renovation of bear the relationship with the current fan fiction novel, in *Guangbo dianshi daxue xuebao* (04) 2013, pp. 30-5. DOI: 10.16161/j.issn.1008-0597.2013.04.001
- [17] M. Stanfill, A. Lothian., An Archive of Whose Own? White Feminism and Racial Justice in Fan Fiction's Digital Infrastructure. in *Transformative Works and Cultures* 36, 2021, pp. 09-14.
- [18] C. Zhang, When Feminist Falls in Love with Queer: Dan Mei Culture as a Transnational Apparatus of Love, in *Feminist Formations* 29(02) 2017, pp. 121-46.
- [19] J. Chang, H. Tian, Girl Power in Boy Love: Yaoi, Online Female Counterculture, and Digital Feminism in China, in *Feminist Media Studies* 21(04) 2021, pp. 604-20.