

COMPLETION REPORT

Chinese Boy's Love Fiction and Alternative Transnational Cultural Flows in East Asia

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Our research focused on the reception and localization of Japanese BL (Boys' Love) genre in China in relation to transnational cultural flows. From April 2013 to September 2014, I and my research partner Yanrui Xu conducted online ethnography of four major Chinese BL websites, completed in-depth interviews with twenty-seven BL creators and fans, and investigated BL distribution networks in Taipei, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Wuhan, and Changsha. Through extensive online and offline research, we find out that in China BL is no longer associated solely with Japanese popular culture. Instead, it has successfully merged with a diverse range of local and global media and celebrity cultures and developed into a transnational, overarching, and female-dominated meta-fan culture. Chinese BL represents a model of grassroots globalization that subverts heterosexual normativity, fosters alternative social and economic networks, and generates a convergence of cultural and media flows from both the East and the West.

The emergence of Chinese BL culture is closely linked to the development of the Internet, which has played a crucial role in the formation of fan identity, the building of fan community, and the production and circulation of original and derivative BL works. The anonymity of the Internet also provides a relatively safe space for fans to 'come out' and share their hobby with fellow fans. While the production, distribution, and consumption of BL content mainly depend on the Internet and other state-of-the-art communication technologies, traditional print media and the physical infrastructures like comic markets and ACG stores are also indispensable to the healthy survival of the fandom. As a form of low-end globalization that operates in an unconducive legal environment, Chinese BL production has concentrated in areas that require less training and capital like fiction, audio drama, and cosplay, rather than the time-and-capital-intensive manga and anime.

Through two decades of fan dissemination, the genre has spawned three major fan circles: the original BL circle that focuses on the production and consumption of original Chinese-language BL novels, the Japanese circle dedicated to the translation of Japanese BL works and the fan re-creation of Japanese ACG series, and the Euro-American circle devoted to the production and translation of slash fanfic of Euro-American media products. Fans of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Euro-American pop stars and sports celebrities have also set up their own real person BL/slash fanfic circles, but generally with less influence and smaller reach than media fandoms. The constant intersecting and merging of those fan circles have made BL a significant cultural force to be reckoned with in China. Many first generation Chinese BL fans had devoted their time and efforts to the translation and dissemination of Japanese BL manga and novels. About 120 Japanese BL writers have seen their works translated into Chinese. Yet with the rapid growth of indigenous BL fiction, Chinese readers have gradually fallen out of favor of Japanese BL fiction and its invariable high school or work office background. Today the majority of Chinese fans are drawn to the Japanese circle by its unique BL-oriented ACG products.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

<p>Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. July 3-5, 2013, National University of Singapore, Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society Conference 2013, “‘Rotten Women’ ‘Rotting’ Men: Transnational Subculture and the Transformation of Chinese Cultural Industries”, Ling Yang. 2. December 8, 2013, Xiamen University Library, The Cultural Forum Series, “Boys’ Love in Transnational Cultural Flows: From Gender Politics to Imagination of the World”, Ling Yang. [in Chinese] 3. January 4-5, 2014, Fujen University, Taipei, 2014 Annual Conference of the Cultural Studies Association of Taiwan, “Erotic Desires and Gender/Sexuality Politics in Chinese Boys’ Love (BL) Fiction”, Yanrui Xu and Ling Yang. [in Chinese] 4. March 22-24, 2014, Comix Home Base, Hong Kong, “Modern Women and Their Comics: Changing Local Identities from the 1960s to the 2000s”, “Passion, Profit, and Censorship: The Production and Distribution of Boys’ Love (BL) Manga in China”, Ling Yang. 5. May 7-9, 2014, Capital Normal University, Beijing, “Culture and Arts in the Micro Age”, “Online Activities of Women’s Reading and Writing Communities on the Internet”, Yanrui Xu and Ling Yang. [in Chinese]
<p>Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yang, Ling and Yanrui Xu. “Queer Texts, Gendered Imagination, and Popular Feminism in Chinese Web Literature”, in <i>Queer/Tongzhi China: New Perspectives on Research, Activism and Media Cultures</i>, eds. Elisabeth L. Engebretsen, Will F. Schroeder, and Hongwei Bao, Copenhagen: NIAS Press (Gendering Asia Series), 2015. 2. Xu, Yanrui and Ling Yang. “Erotic Desires and Gender/Sexuality Politics in Chinese Boys’ Love (BL) Fiction”, <i>Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies</i>, under review. [in Chinese] 3. Xu, Yanrui and Ling Yang. “Queer Texts and Gendered Imagination in Women’s Online Writings”, <i>Cultural Studies</i>, under review. [in Chinese] 4. Xu, Yanrui and Ling Yang. “Rotten Women ‘Rotting’ Man: Boys’ Love, Rotten Culture and the Re-making of Masculinities in Transnational Cultural Flows”, <i>Cultural Studies</i>, under review. [in Chinese]
<p>Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lavin, Maud, Ling Yang, and Jamie Jing Zhao, eds. <i>Queer Fan Cultures in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan</i>. Hong Kong University Press, 2016.