

JAPANESE BOY-LOVE MANGA AND THE GLOBAL FANDOM:
A CASE STUDY OF CHINESE FEMALE READERS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BL: Boy Love, Boys' Love, Boys Love or Boy-Love

BBS: Bulletin Board System

LGBT: lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people

PWP: Plot? What Plot?

YAOI: *yamanashi* (no climax), *ochinashi* (no point), and *iminashi* (no meaning)

INTRODUCTION

In Japan, *manga* refers to popular comic or printed cartoon, an art form “akin to an American comic book or comic strip” (Perper & Cornog, 2002, p. 4). In order to cater to a niche market, *manga* productions are classified by the age of audiences and along clear gender lines. For example, Japanese comic market provides *shojo manga* for girls, *shonen manga* for boys, *seinen manga* for young adult men, *seijin manga* (mostly erotica) for adult men, and *redi komi* or *redisu*, a romantic/erotic *manga* drawn by women, for adult women (Perper & Cornog, 2002). Among them, *shonen manga*, which focuses on action and adventure narratives and *shojo manga*, which presents most romantically oriented stories, are considered to be the most popular genres among adolescent readers (Wood, 2006).

Ironically, the earliest *shojo manga* for female readers was produced by male artists following “the familiar tropes of heterosexual romantic love” (McLelland, 2000a, p. 275). It was not until 1970s while women artists started to take over the *shojo manga* market from men, a new genre named boy-love emerged as a subgenre of *shojo manga* (McLelland, 2000a; Welker, 2006). And it is predominantly produced and consumed by women who are ordinarily committed to heterosexual relationships (McLelland, 2000a). According to McLelland, the term boy-love (*shoonenai* in Japanese), which is also termed as BL, boy love, boys love or boys’ love, refers to “the homoerotic attraction the male heroes in a genre of Japanese women’s *manga* (comics) feel for each other” (2000a). It is a historical tradition for Japanese writers to create romantic stories featuring “male love” (*nanshoku*) which “highlights homosexual attraction between a priest or samurai lover

(*nenja*) and his acolyte (*chigo*) or page (*wakashu*)” (McLelland, 2001, para. 17). However, they were mostly written by men to meet the taste of male audiences.

Unlike gay comics or boy-love *manga* we read today, which assumes same-sex attraction is something inevitable between the lead characters, homosexuality in 1970s women’s *manga* was “largely incidental to their plots, which concerned their heroes’ search for love, acceptance, and identity” (McLelland, 2000a, p. 276). Stories at this phase were thus described as bildungsroman, an “entirely appropriate term given the moral seriousness with which both writer and readers approached them” (McLelland, 2000a, p. 276). Another distinctive characteristic of early boy-love *manga* is homoerotic stories always take place in “other” places such as in an ancient Japanese palace or in a Western boarding-school. Likewise, homosexual issues in these stories were unconcerned with social realism (McLelland, 2000c). Women producers and readers seem to emphasize a distance between the readership and the social consciousness.

It is notable that representations of homosexual men in boy-love *manga* were significantly differed from the politically constructed images of gay men in contemporary European and US media, and even in Japanese gay men’s comics (McLelland, 2000a & 2000c). It is difficult for readers to distinguish women-produced boy-love *manga* from gay comics if they are not familiar with the illustrative style and the narrative tropes of them both. Indeed, homosexuality performed in boy-love *manga* and gay men’s comics is completely distinctive. Gay comics, which have more in common with straight men’s comics, tend to highlight scenes of sadism and violence (McLelland, 2000a), while women’s *manga* is more likely to feature romantic and erotic interests of beautiful boys’ on each other and such attraction is often depicted in a sensational way (Welker, 2006).

Comparing with gay comics, romantic stories in boy-love *manga* lack direct references to the social and political life of sexual minorities. In boy-love *manga*, time is needed to establish an emotional connection between the lead characters. Sex scenes are featured but seldom shown attaining orgasm, and the penetration is “frequently followed by a scene in the shower, or at the breakfast table” (McLelland, 2000a, p. 281).

Initial difference can be also identified from the images of characters. In boy-love *manga* even adult males are drawn as slim, long-legged, flat-chested teenagers with few or no facial or pubic hair, while in gay comics and gay magazines, such feminine image is rejected and replaced with hyper-masculine figures which appears to be more attractive to gay men (McLelland, 2000b, p. 13-14). In fact, the theme adopted by boy-love illustration is deeply affected by the Japanese culture of transgenderism, which emphasizes sex identity is fluid and perceives men’s femininity as a positive characteristic (Wood, 2006; McLelland, 2000a, 2000b & 2000c).

Age difference is another distinctive trope that is applied in different ways while describing homosexual relationships. Sex in gay comics is always addressed as something that senior men have done to juniors. While the junior are abused by the senior, he always shows loving such treatment in much the same way as the female victims in mainstream straight comics, which are represented as both “deserving and desiring the abuse they receive” (McLelland, 2000a, p. 279). In contrast, homoerotic relationships in boy-love *manga* are generally constructed between youth of approximately the same age, whereas boys engaging in sex with much older men are frequently depicted as tragic plots such as being abused or raped. The actual age of characters can range from the prepubescent stage such as ten years old or even younger to about twenty-five. Although

adult men are not absent in these romances, they are more likely to be drawn as teenagers (McLelland, 2000a).

In fact, the two genres are created to suit the taste of different audiences. As Camper notes, “Gay male filmmakers and boys’ love *manga* publishers both insist that their audiences are separate...comics, porn, science fiction, and gay writing have all been separate markets. It may take a while for fans and fictions to find each other” (Camper, 2006, p. 26). It also explains why many BL-oriented websites emphasize that they are directed at women and that men, including gay men, are not their expected visitors (McLelland, 2000a).

Amateur *manga*, a new form of *manga* circulation, played a crucial role in the dissemination of BL *manga*. Amateur *manga* is a *manga* produced, printed and distributed by artists themselves. At the beginning of the 1970s, generalization of printing and photocopying technology endowed young artists who had little relationship with *manga* publishing press to print their works by using services provided by mini printing companies or on their own. Instead of sending their works to professional publishers for editing and distribution, they edited and distributed them at their own cost within private *manga* clubs, at comic markets, and through ads placed on specialist information magazines (McLelland, 2000a). Major producers and consumers of amateur *manga* were young, working-class girls, who were usually called YAOI girls for their interests on “violent homosexual romance between male hermaphrodites” (Kinsella, 1998, p. 289). Many boys were also attracted by amateur *manga* and what turned them on was baby girls armed with weapons, and they were always identified as *rorikon* boy (Kinsella, 1998).

The way women create and consume their favorite *manga* stories was thus revolutionarily changed. Despite the fact that commercially published women's *manga* may be subject to male censorship, *manga*, illustrations, and stories published by amateur artists on the Internet or distributed privately at comic market were able to escape male supervision and control. It hence sustained BL fandom in Japan a unique women's culture which is free of male interference and influence (McLelland, 2000a), while, on the other hand, relevant legislation was believed to be inadequate to regulate the distribution and consumption.

Nevertheless boy-love fandom is not a lonely cultural phenomenon. In fact, links can be found between amateur *manga* made by Japanese girls and fanzine produced by Western women. Since the mid-1970s, while market was opened for Japanese animation companies, animation and *manga* have become a popular source for American and British fans to foster their enthusiasm with this cultural artifact (Kinsella, 1998). Like their Japanese counterparts, women in Western countries have created an exclusively female orientated genre to appreciate male homosexuality. Almost at the same time in the 1970s, while Japanese women started to create girl-oriented *manga* for themselves, Anglo-American female fans of cult television series began to distribute their own imagined stories about the homosexual relationships they envisaged taking place between the male heroes in series, which was known as slash fictions (Penley, 1992; McLelland, 2000a). Its pioneers were a group of fans of Star Trek active in mid-1970s, who wrote stories pairing Kirk and Spock romantically and sexually with each other. Then the genre was expanded to include almost "any TV series where the bond between male characters is sufficiently intense to permit sexual readings" (McLelland, 2001, para. 26).

However, comparing with the prevalence of BL *manga* in Japan, social acceptance towards slash fandom is still low in Europe and North America. While the former can be sold openly in bookstores of metropolitan cities, slash fiction is generally collected and circulated online or in forms of private printed fanzine. The genre is fairly less visible than Japanese BL *manga* or girl's *manga* with homosexual awareness. Even within the English-speaking community and academic field of cultural studies, this particular women's culture appears to be underground and invisible (McLelland, 2001).

In the early 1980s, women artists of amateur *manga* began to produce not only original works but a new genre called parody *manga*, or *dojinshi*. It is a *manga*-like fanzine in which friendship between heterosexual male characters in published commercial *manga* is transformed into homoerotic romance which is considered superior to male-female love (Kinsella, 1998; Wilson & Toku, 2003). Parody *manga* can be seen as a Japanese equivalent of Anglo-American slash (Kinsella, 1998), though the former places more emphasis on the visual images than on the written content (Wood, 2006). Both of them are a kind of fanzine that highlights romantic and sexual relationships between two or more male characters who may not be engaged in relationships in the canon universe¹, and they both celebrate “the absence of a strong narrative structure and the particular fascination with space exploration adventure” (Kinsella, 1998, p. 307). The crossover between these fan-created works and mainstream media is based on the fact that much material derives from male-oriented or heterosexual works containing male-male interactions are perceived by fans to imply homosexual attraction (Welker, 2006, p. 26).

Despite of the similarities with slash fiction, McLelland argues writing and drawing fanzine derived from Japanese commercial *manga* and anime, no matter in

English or in Japanese, should be seen as an “independent genre that developed out of the extensive *manga* and anime fandom” (McLelland, 2001, para. 27). Its popularity among Western adolescents suggests its membership is much younger than the slash’s. Moreover, characters exploited by parody fans are predominantly beautiful and young, which is different from Western slash as the latter usually features mature heroes (McLelland, 2001).

Responding to the increasing explicit erotic depiction in BL *manga*, another term YAOI, which is an acronym of the first letters of the Japanese phrase *yamanashi* (no climax), *ochinashi* (no point), and *iminashi* (no meaning), was created to identify boy-love *manga* which highlights the sex scenes between male characters (McLelland, 2000a). It is also frequently cited to describe parody *manga* that lacks the basic narrative structure (Kinsella, 1998). The Western slash fiction, on the other hand, developed a parallel genre known as PWP (Plot? What Plot?) to identify stories with “the slenderest of pretexts for getting the male stars of popular television dramas into bed together” (McLelland, 2000a, p. 277).

Wood compares the traditional BL *manga* (or stated by her *shoonenai manga*) with YAOI *manga* through the interpretation of erotic scenes. She makes a descriptive analysis of the different ways of establishing romance in BL and in YAOI: “(*shoonenai manga*) tend to emphasize elaborate romances that contain imagery more suggestive than sexually explicit” (Wood, 2006, p. 395). Erotic tension could be addressed and maintained predominantly through visual cues including “sudden longing looks, unexpected caresses, suggestive body language, and intimate kissing scenes” (Wood, 2006, p. 395), leaving more space to readers’ imagination. In contrast, the often

pornographically explicit boy-love *manga*, like YAOI, generally ignores the establishment and development of coherent plots. In favor of meeting reader's eyes, every available opportunity is caught to "get the beautiful male characters in bed together" (Wood, 2006, p. 395). With the increasing representation of violence, sadomasochism and sex abuse, YAOI *manga* appears to become a field where BL *manga* converges with gay comic. McLelland concerns the prevalence of YAOI may seriously undermine the fantasy element of the story, especially when the boy-love world is invaded by a sexually aggressive adult male, suggesting an familiar power dynamic from the patriarchal world (2000a).

Because not all boy-love *manga* are like YAOI *manga* focusing only on sex explicit sex description, the article employs the general term boy-love, or BL for short, for further argument.

With the rapidly developing global market and the increasing demand of international readers, producing and consuming same-sex romance between beautiful men is no longer a regional fandom. Not mentioning the influence of slash fiction in Western countries, the Japanese-style BL *manga* has won a large following among non-Japanese fans. The comic market, which provides a significant sphere for BL circulation and fans interaction, has spread from Japan to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, and even the China Mainland and the United States (Wilson & Toku, 2003). Currently in U.S., BL *manga*, as well as other genres of Japanese *manga*, has been marketed and advertised at some major bookstores including Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Waldenbooks. Big publishers such as Tokyopop are trying to bring these comics out of the realm of the underground mini circulation and into the mainstream. Similar as their business partners

in Japan, Reid argues major consumers of BL *manga* in America should be women: “Tokyopop claims that their overall *manga* readership is about 60 percent female and, as in Japan, this percentage for their *shoonenai* readership is presumably higher given that they are being marketed primarily towards teenage girls” (as cited in Wood, 2006, p. 408). Even YAOI titled *manga* with explicit sex illustration are becoming more widely published and rapidly available in some mainstream bookstores (Wood, 2006).

But in countries where homosexuality is still stigmatized as an implicit social threat, publication on youngsters’ homosexuality remains marginalized or even criminalized. Unlike the situation that amateur BL writers in Japan can pursue their career as professional *manga* artists and publish original works on specialty boy-love comics such as *June* and *B-boy* (McLelland, 2000a), restrictive laws on publication and publication import have caused significant setback on the production and consumption of BL works in China, especially in the mainland. Most *manga* were prohibited in the name of “obscene publication” or “violation of the mainstream ideology”. Few were circulated underground with copyright violation. For most fans in China mainland, the Internet became the only access to BL titled stories. Most graphical works circulated online are scanned from *manga* books published in Hongkong and Taiwan, where due to the comparatively open political environment Japanese BL *manga* are allowed to be published with restrictions. The online interaction between Chinese and Japanese fans keeps Chinese fans updated with the most prevalent Japanese BL publications. Fans who know Japanese language well download the original scanlations from their Japanese peers by using special programs, and share them online with the Chinese subtitles created by themselves.

Nevertheless, the explicit portraits of beautiful boys' sexuality render BL *manga* a very problematic genre for the public censorship. Even in its motherland Japan where is thought to have the most open social environment for *manga* production and consumption, BL culture has encountered a lot of criticism for its responsibility of intervening socialization, advocating deviant sex and featuring child porn. Anxieties regarding the negative influence of *manga* on Japanese youth grew through *manga* censorship campaigns between 1965 and 1975, resurfaced between 1990 and 1992 and were redirected toward amateur *manga* – currently the most uncontrolled area of the *manga* medium (Kinsella, 1998).

In Japan, *manga* has always been criticized for being responsible for the immaturity and escapism of post-war generations, especially from 1960s more and more adolescents, including college students, picked up this medium which was primarily designed for kids. As Kinsella (1998) explained, “By spending hours with their noses buried in children’s *manga* books, obtuse students demonstrated their hatred of the university system, of adults, and of society as a whole” (p. 292). Readership of children-orientated *manga* was therefore considered deviant and the culture went underground. Since that time, *manga* was linked to youth’s “introspection, immaturity, escapism, and resistance to entering Japanese society” (Kinsella, 1998, p. 292).

Most controversies against BL *manga* were concentrated on the popularity of amateur *manga*. Due to its unique method of distribution, through the 1980s amateur *manga* boomed fast underneath the radar of public attention and academic awareness. In 1989, amateur *manga*, along with its culture group, suddenly became the focus while a serial infant-girl killer was found to be a fan of Japanese girls’ *manga* (Kinsella, 1998).

Revealed by mass media, the bedroom of this 26-year-old printer's assistant was “crammed with a large collection of girls’ *manga*, *rorikon manga*, animation videos, a variety of soft pornographic *manga*, and a smaller collection of academic analyses of contemporary youth and girls’ culture”² (Kinsella, 1998, p. 308). Since the killer was also found to be a writer for several animation reviews in *dojinshi* and an attendee of Comic Market, concerns regarding this particular subculture thus instantly rose into a “moral panic” (Kinsella, 1998, p. 308). As an extremely liberal art form that used to be free of supervision, amateur *manga* is ultimately “dragged from their teeming obscurity to face television cameras and journalists, police interrogation and public horror” (Kinsella, 1998, p. 290).

Spreading through the mass media, artists and fans of amateur *manga* were suddenly identified as *manga otaku* or “*manga* nerds” and blamed by the society for being antisocial through creating and consuming this “dangerous” genre. Moreover, in the moral panic about the threats of amateur *manga*, the term *otaku* was rapidly symbolized to represent the Japanese young generation in general and “took center stage in the domestic social debate about the state of Japanese society that continued through the early 1990s”³ (Kinsella, 1998, p. 290).

Criticism of amateur *manga* had largely focused on its lack of “originality”, which was used to describe to which degree *manga* stories reflecting political and cultural environment. Because of its shortage in narrative structure and non-professional editing, amateur *manga*, no matter original work or parody, was judged to be low in quality for making little references to the social reality. With the support of new media technology such as Internet, amateur *manga* grew rapidly into an independent culture that was isolated from the rest of society and became “an appropriate focus for this sense of chaos and

declining control over the organization and communication of younger generations” (Kinsella, 1998, p. 314).

Its follower *otaku*, as quoted in *Shukan posuto*, was a group of “isolated people who no longer have any sense of isolation” (as cited in Kinsella, 1998, p. 313). Due to the inadequate social associations, *otaku* had no fixed social roles and identities and the antisocial quality drove them ultimately become someone who found themselves disabled in communicating with others (Kinsella, 1998). It thus raises public concern that reading massive volumes of *manga* books may cause problems for the youngsters’ socialization. As psychoanalyst Okonogi Keigo worried, “the danger of a whole generation of youth who do not even experience the most primary two- or three-way relationship between themselves and their mother and father, and who cannot make the transition from a fantasy world of videos and *manga* to reality, is now extreme” (as cited in Kinsella, 1998, p. 309).

Moreover, amateur *manga* was believed to project a problematic feeling of those who were frustrated with gender stereotypes and sexuality. As Kinsella claimed, amateur *manga* addressed a disjuncture between the expectations that Japanese men and women held for each other, especially for young women who became increasingly resistant to see their images bonded with the subordinates of men. Consequently, they began to ridicule the “macho sexist behavior-like” male images presented in boy-orientated *manga* and mass media by writing and reading parody *manga* to fantasize male sexuality in a different way, and such play appeared to attract young men who felt uncomfortable with social constructed masculinity as well (Kinsella, 1998).

The hostile attention on unpunished amateur *manga* led to a couple of enforcement ideas to prevent the wider distribution. Despite the fact that major producers and

consumers of amateur *manga* were minors, the Comic Market Preparation Committee attempted to prohibit the sale of sexually explicit materials to those under 18 years old (Kinsella, 1998). The first guidance on regulating sexual images in parody *manga* was also issued and distributed at Comic Market in 1993. Correspondent to the “independent and unregulated” movement of amateur *manga* and artistes, local police forces started to censor unpublished *manga* sold at conventions and in specialist book shops as well. Eventually, *manga* fan culture, as well as the unpublished amateur *manga*, became “the target of extensive harassment” by both the police enforcement and the *manga* industry (Kinsella, 1998, p. 311). Interestingly, although amateur *manga* was predominantly created and sold by women, criticism over *otaku* culture was overwhelmingly emphasizing on male fans who have read and adopted girl’s *manga* as their own.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

Based on diverse ideologies and different levels of social constraints, it is not surprising to learn that homoerotic productions for women burgeoned almost at the same time in America and in Japan, but only in Japan it went foreground and crossed over into mainstream publishing while understanding the particular culture of transgenderism in Japan. It is thus riskful to find a universal explanation for this phenomenon without considering contributions of individual fantasies and the influence of cultural contexts. Reasons for why women would like to consume media productions regarding men's homosexuality could differ considerably from case to case. However, previous research (Aoyama, 1998; Behr, 2003; McLelland, 2000a; Wilson & Toku, 2003; Wood, 2006) suggested that such fandom cannot be simply identified as a twisted phenomenon that should be pathologized or stigmatized. Therefore, the aim of this study is to probe feedback of straight (or bisexual) women readers to explore how they appreciate BL artworks and transform their readership or fantasy into social life. Answers regarding whether BL literature has potential influence on converting women's sex orientation and twisting their values are anticipated. And then, it can assert with evidence that BL *manga* as a very popular production of women's culture, should be circulated legally and fairly in the global market or not.

Key research questions of this study are listed as follows:

1. Who consumes BL productions in Chinese-speaking communities?
2. How is BL fandom formed in Chinese-speaking communities?
3. What are the patterns of BL fandom in Chinese-speaking communities?

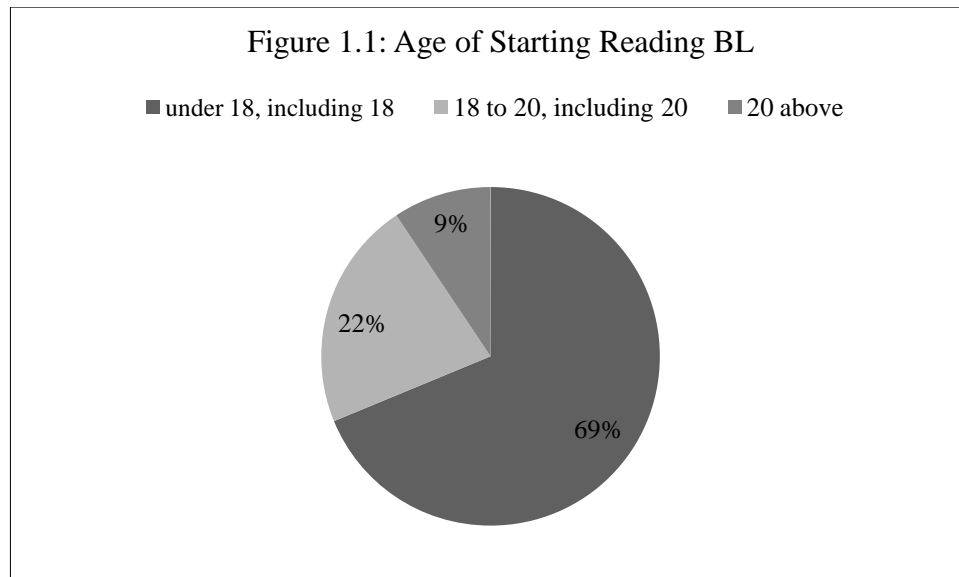
A survey using snowball sampling, a type of nonprobability sample in which respondents are asked to identify additional members in their networks to be included in the sample, was adopted for this study. An initial group of respondents who were identified as boy-love fans was randomly selected from the network of the researcher. There was no control on respondents' gender selection, although the population of female members was anticipated to be significantly larger than that of males. Respondents accessed the survey questionnaire via professional survey tool at <http://www.esurveyspro.com>. The questionnaire was consisted of twenty-six items, including rating scale questions, single choice questions, multiple choice questions and open-ended questions (see Appendix). Questions basically focused on respondents' motivation for reading, their interpretation of BL genre, their preferences of character designing and narrative plots, and their attitudes towards men's homosexuality and stigmatized sex in BL *manga* and in reality.

A detailed introduction of the study was attached on the first page of the questionnaire. Since some questions might make respondents feel psychologically uncomfortable to answer, they were notified that they could quit the survey at any time. Because BL *manga* are considered adult-only publications, the age of the respondent was inquired at the beginning of the survey. Those who were younger than eighteen years of age were asked to quit the survey.

FINDINGS

The survey was released at an online community formed by Chinese-speaking fans of boy-love *manga* and stories. It ran as a public forum and anyone could join the membership anonymously. Among the 32 effective responses, 31 claimed female while one skipped this item. 78% of them identified themselves as heterosexual, while 13% identified themselves bisexual and the rest stated they were not clear. The average age was reported 21.9.

Degrees of hardship in understanding Japanese-style illustrations and plot lines were significantly low. As for the first question, who consumes BL production in Chinese-speaking communities, the answer is young straight women. The result thus supports previous studies that BL genre attracts a predominantly heterosexual female readership (McLelland & Yoo, 2007) and such readership could be transcultural.



Even though minors were asked to quit the survey, the average age they started to access BL was 16.6, below the age 18 (which is considered as the divided age between minors and adults in China). According to Figure 1.1, 69% of the investigated readers

started their readership under the age of 18. It thus implies age restriction on circulation of BL productions could be of little usage especially while teenage girls can find a way to access them other than the traditional media.

Because BL culture in other countries may encounter a variety of social resistance and harsh legislations, no doubt most of the time the fans have to struggle for any accessible resource and opportunities to get in touch with each other. Therefore, in order to answer the second question that how is BL fandom formed, it is very necessary to identify the primary media that women utilize to obtain BL *manga* and to develop their own group.

The survey showed the Internet was unsurprisingly chosen as the most popular information source. Even though respondents were allowed to select multiple sources as their media references, more than 90% had chosen Internet when they were asked what kind of media they utilized to access BL contents. And 62.5% reported they read BL *manga* in forms of book, which ranked the second place. The tendency therefore confirms that as same as their English-speaking counterparts, the primary medium chosen by Chinese BL fans is the Internet (McLelland, 2001).

Such unique preference can be interpreted by using Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur's model of dependency theory, which is established on the basis of uses-and-gratification approach that views audiences as actively utilizing media contents to gratify needs rather than being passive receivers (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005). It also predicts that audiences may rely on certain media information to gratify their needs and achieve certain goals, but they do not "depend on all media equally" (as cited in Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 287).

In most patriarchal countries where women's erotic interests have been underserved and suppressed by mainstream media, the opportunity women used to have to share and develop their sexual fantasies with other women was quite limited before the Internet was introduced as a new technology for group and interpersonal communication (Penley, 1992, 1997; McLelland & Yoo, 2007). In China mainland, the restrictive legislation on importing Japanese *manga* and circulating sex explicit publication makes purchases of BL products especially tough, not to mention the lack of public forums for women to expose and discuss topics about their most intimate desires. While Internet was invented and introduced to them with its advantages in file swapping and digital interaction, it makes itself rapidly become an ideal media tool for those who want to gratify their needs of sharing common interests with a rich multimedia experience. On the other hand, because anonymity of online identities enables Internet users to reveal their fantasy with high-level privacy protection, it benefits constructions of cultures that may be perceived "deviant" or "twisted" by mainstream perspectives.

Because of the sensitivity of this genre, the survey proves BL fans mostly like to share their reading experiences exclusively with those who they consider are peers within the same group. Indicated by Table 1.1, they were either other fans who shared the similar interests or those who were involved with the producing process of BL resource. While BL publication and its readership remain marginalized by the mainstream culture, the Internet provides a secured space for women to express their communal sexual fantasy through mutually supportive ways. It is confirmed that the opportunity offered by the Internet for young women to form virtual communities or fans clubs on sex-related topics is based on its property as a "convenient communication channel allowing youth to

connect with peers both locally and internationally while enabling participants to maintain a safe degree of distance and anonymity” (McLelland & Yoo, 2007, p. 101).

Therefore, it can be concluded that women go online for BL *manga* and novels because it is the most reliable and safest source of media leaks. In sum, the advent of the Internet promote BL readership growing into “an international, Internet-based fan activity” (Perper & Cornog, 2002, p. 31).

	Parent	Sibling	Classmate /Colleague	Close Friend	Partner/ Spouse	BL Producer /Editor	Peer	Anti-BL Individual	Stranger
Very agree	0	3	2	12	4	13	19	1	0
Agree	0	4	2	10	10	11	7	3	0
Don't mind	5	12	17	8	14	6	5	13	13
Disagree	9	5	6	0	2	0	0	4	6
Very disagree	18	8	5	2	2	1	0	11	13
Skip						1	1		

With its controversial focus on featuring male homosexuality and sexuality of children, BL readership is marginalized and stigmatized in many conservative countries, which renders its fandom grow in a unique way. Symbolic convergence theory, or fantasy-theme analysis, is probably the best theory to distinguish the formation of the underground BL culture.

Symbolic convergence theory is a well-developed theory that is generally applied to analyze narratives in communication. According to this theory, stories and meanings that reflect how things are believed to be can be created through symbolic interactions within small groups and they can guide the members’ view of reality. These stories can

be chained from person to person and group to group to generate larger dramas consisted of longer and more sophisticated stories which researchers call rhetorical visions (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005).

A rhetorical vision is a unified set of shared fantasy themes that have been swirled together to provide a coherent interpretation of reality. According to Foss, the term fantasy is designed to capture “the constructed nature of the theme” (Foss, 2004, p. 110). Fantasy themes therefore instill participants a constructed image of the reality that the group has developed on its sharing experience. Based on the assumptions emerged from a majority of rhetorical visions, a group (or many groups sharing the same interest) can compose knowledge and structure a sense of how things have been, are, or will be.

Fantasy themes, as well as the larger rhetorical visions, consist of characters, plot lines, scenes, and sanctioning agent (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005). Corresponding to elements which constitute a drama, the perspective shared by a group can be described by three types of fantasy themes. According to Foss, they are setting themes, character themes, and action themes (2004). A fantasy type is generated when these three type of themes are intertwined to form a scenario which is familiar to the experiences of members. They are not only dramatic in nature but also can be characterized by their “artistic and organized quality” (Foss, 2004, p. 111). In order to make sense out of experience, fantasy themes are always designed in an artistic manner to motivate consistent and intelligible interpretations, since experience itself can be discursive and chaotic. Once a fantasy type is formed, it may encourage members of the community to fit new events or experiences into these familiar patterns (Foss, 2004).

Another characteristic of rhetorical visions is they are rarely told as an entire unit but built up with pieces of associated fantasy themes shared by participants. In other words, symbolic convergence only occurs on the premise that participants have reached a general agreement on the subjective meanings they share. As Bormann explains, “if several or many people develop portions of their private symbolic worlds that overlap as a result of symbolic convergence, they share a common consciousness and have the basis for communicating with one another to create community, to discuss their common experiences, and to achieve mutual understanding” (as cited in Foss, 2004, p. 110). Therefore, symbolic convergence can be detected through frequent mentioning of a term, a phrase, a theme or a narrative within or among chained groups.

In order to pick up the entire vision, participants must attend to these themes which can be perceived in group conversations and discussions. Because fantasy themes are repeated so often, a certain episode could become so well known that sometimes it can be set off by a symbolic cue without reviewing the whole story (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005).

While people gather to share experiences and reach certain consensus, they are generating fantasy themes which finally shape into a rhetorical vision. On the other hand, rhetorical vision renders people converge to hold a mutual interpretation of perceived reality by giving them a sense of identification for the fantasy themes they share. In fact, the share of rhetorical visions and the use of fantasy themes can be seen as evidence that convergence has occurred (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005).

With its advantages in explanation and narrative construction, rhetorical vision can direct the members to view and understand the reality in a certain way. Furthermore,

the feature that it imitates similar ways of seeing things attracts those who find it familiar with their existing perspectives to join in and contribute their knowledge as part of the vision. In other words, rhetorical vision can function as a sense-making machine to build and maintain sharing consciousness of a group. While people participate in a rhetorical vision and develop a series of fantasy themes in common, a rhetorical community is founded and members can “share common symbolic ground and respond to messages in ways that are in tune with the rhetorical vision” (Foss, 2004, p. 113).

In this research, the metaphor created and developed by BL fans to substantiate their shared rhetorical vision could be taken as the evidence that symbolic convergence has been triggered. It can be observed that in most BL-oriented forums and communities, topics and discussions regarding characters and narrative plots were always involved with a lot of jargons designed and disseminated by fans, with the purpose to not only communicate but also to reinforce individual identification. Furthermore, at the pre-study phase of this study, the questionnaire was conducted following the same jargons fans used in order to reduce the confusion. For instance, in the survey those who play the role of “top” in homosexual relations are named as “*seme*”, which is translated from a Japanese word precisely meaning “attacker”. Because the “*seme*” plays as a penetrator during sexual intercourse, he is always interpreted as the dominant role in the relationship. However, once a “*seme*” is identified as a “passive attacker”, it means he may be dominated psychologically by his partner, “*uke*” (or “receiver”), who plays the role as being penetrated or the “bottom”. And under this circumstance, the “*uke*” is usually identified as an “active receiver”. The *seme-uke* dichotomy is universally adopted

in BL *manga* and fanzine for the producers and artists to design characters and plots, and it also works as a cue for BL fans to find each other.

According to Foss, once a fantasy theme has been established people may charge it with meanings and emotions that can be triggered by “an agreed-upon cryptic symbolic cue” (Foss, 2004, p. 110). In this case, it is confirmed fans have reached a certain level of convergence through using particular term to identify the genre. While they were asked to select the most precise term to define what they have read, 75% selected the same one that they believed BL (boy love, boy’s love or boy-love) was the best term to conceptualize the Japanese style stories and illustrations that describe romantic and homoerotic relationships between beautiful boys and attractive young men. YAOI, on the other hand, was considered to be a special category or subgenre within BL that highlights explicit sex scenes with little sophisticated narrative structure. The assumption that readers in eastern countries interpret YAOI in a different way from Western readers is thus confirmed. The word “BL” would be continually applied in the rest of article since this study is focusing on the general impact of this genre on Chinese-speaking female readers.

Such convergence of opinions is quite remarkable, since fans only learn the shared vision through mutual interactions within their fans communities. There is no authoritative view or guideline existed for them to follow, except several disciplines emerged automatically through massive volumes of online communications. The generation of BL fandom thus fits the formation of a fantasy theme, which is constructed through “creative and imaginative interpretation of events” (Foss, 2004, p. 110), and is accomplished through the process of mutual communication.

Once consciousness is created among early adherents and is fostered into a rhetorical vision, the consciousness can be disseminated, as more and more people are converted through consciousness-raising communication. In BL fans culture it works pretty well in terms of recruiting members. Some passionate fans even created instructional brochures to help junior readers to understand jargons and disciplines which are already taken-for-granted among senior fans. But there are also some exceptions during the process. For example, in the survey, one respondent reported she had problems in understanding the designing of lead characters, while there were other two feeling significantly difficult to understand narrative plots. Among them, one claimed to have ten-year reading experience. Comparing with the average length of 5.3 year, it implied that even a senior reader of BL literature can still feel uncomfortable with a certain theme that has already been taken-for granted.

With the emphasis of symbolic convergence theory on individual member's creation and contribution of rhetorical knowledge, it could be appropriately applied to enhance understandings about formation of a culture that is constructed on mutual interaction and experience sharing. It is also predictable that symbolic convergence theory may be more theoretically meaningful in analyzing cultural phenomena happened in the cyberspace, while the latter always serves as a great arena for free speech to take place and may trigger a lot of communications in this form.

While symbolic convergence occurs, fans in different countries are perceived to be able to understand and appreciate this particular cultural artifact through a trouble-free process. Results show respondents reported little difficulties in enjoying character portraits and interpreting narrative plots. According to Table 1.2, the biggest frustration

they experienced through the reading turns to be the language barrier; almost half of them admitted they lacked capability in interpreting *manga* in Japanese, while *manga* with traditional Chinese and simplified Chinese subtitles seemed to be acceptable at an equal level.

	Order of <i>Manga</i> book	In Traditional Chinese	In Simplified Chinese	In Japanese	Characters portrayed	Plots
Yes, I can understand it very well.	17	18	23	1	17	13
Yes, I can understand it to some extent.	8	8	5	1	10	13
No comment.	5	4	4	2	4	4
No, I can't understand it to some extent.	1	2	0	14	1	0
No, I can't understand it at all.	1	0	0	14	0	2

The third question, which asked what are the patterns of BL fandom in Chinese-speaking communities, can be answered in four dimensions. First, in the culture scale, BL fandom can be identified as a highly exclusive underground culture established on the basis of collective sex fantasies that heterosexual women have formed about male homosexuality. It is very difficult to make sense of the essential meaning of the stories shared by the fans without being sufficiently saturated in the relevant rhetorical visions, which has been demonstrated by symbolic convergence theory above.

Second, considering about reading motivations, results suggest most women read *BL manga* for the purpose of entertaining themselves or enjoying the artwork: When they

are asked to rate their attitudes on a couple of factors that motivate them to read BL *manga*, the top two answers are “two cute/beautiful men are better than one” and “features of male depicted in BL *manga* are more attractive than those in the real life”. Indeed, a former review of English YAOI websites revealed that fans like YAOI simply because it is entertaining (Yoo, 2002). Even though they acknowledged that description of sex violence and deviant sex, as well as the lack of reflection of social reality in BL *manga*, especially with YAOI title, can be problematic, the fans emphasize a pure entertainment value of this genre. According to their statements, reading YAOI is all about consuming beauty and sexuality of young men. Interestingly enough, the “two pretty people are better than one” fantasy also works well for the opposite gender, which has been proved by the phenomenon that straight guys tend to be turned on by the images of lesbians (Camper, 2006, p. 24).

A handful of studies have contributed with sociopsychological and behavioristic insights to interpret women’s passion on same-sex romance between men by suggesting women may have a higher degree of sympathy over men’s homosexuality. Nevid (1983) conducted a research to test the attitudes toward homosexuality among Americans after they watched explicit sexual films featuring either male or female homosexual relationships. One hundred thirty-three self-reported heterosexual college students participating in four classes about human sexuality were investigated. Outcomes showed both male and female viewers associated their experience of viewing homoerotic stimuli with heightened levels of anxiety and hostility, and such reactions were extended across both same-sex and opposite-sex homoerotic stimuli (Nevid, 1983). However, consistent with other research, the hostility male viewers held toward homosexuality was

significantly deeper than females. And male students responded with more negative feedback to the same-sex homoerotic stimuli, while no such differences were found among females. Moreover, Nevid discovered such anti-homosexuality is not based on the fear of homosexuals, but on the fear of one's homosexual arousal elicited by the homosexual stimuli. The study supported the theory that "males are more sensitive to homosexual threat and consequently adopt more negative attitude toward homosexuals" (Nevid, 1983, p. 251), while further evidence indicated that women are more likely than men to react positively to opposite-sex homoerotic stimuli. Similarly, psychologist Muscarella (2000) presented a theoretical model for the evolution of homoerotic behavior of human beings, contending homoerotic desire, despite of individual's sexual orientation and same-sex behavior, lies in the instinct psychology of human beings.

However, results of this study indicate that although women exposed to BL literature tend to hold a more open and friendly attitudes of homosexual people, to understand and support LSBT group is not the initial goal for their readership. The artistic portrait of male appearance and dedicative description of their personalities, instead of their homosexuality, is proved to be the essential attractiveness for Chinese women. Therefore, this research addresses a weak association between BL readership and acceptance of gay men, since women are accustomed to treat *manga* as an art form, with little consideration of its references to the social life.

While female readers may be attracted by the hermaphrodite appearance of male characters in BL, however, it does not mean they would like to accept their femininity in terms of temperament and behavior as well. In fact, the study reveals their attitudes tend to be the opposite: They prefer both "*seme*" the top and "*uke*" the bottom are enriched of

masculine traits instead of feminine traits, and both of them are expected to act actively and dominantly within romantic relationship. Such phenomenon is consistent with open discussions I observed in some other BL fans communities, that many members disclosed they hated the idea that lead characters should be designed with exactly the same values and features that social authorities have generally assigned to women. Therefore, the third pattern of BL fandom can be addressed in accordance with the contradictory interpretations made by BL fans in regards to the characters and plots in same-sex romance. Consistent with Kinsella (1998) and McLelland (2000a), such contradictory interpretation can be comprehended as a sign that women readers try to replace the stereotyped, submissive and vulnerable images of female in traditional heterosexual romance with an idealized strong and free male image, while remaining sex ambiguous in features makes the transformation much easier to happen in their fantasy world.

Based on the gender ambiguity highlighted in BL *manga*, Wood (2006) suggests women might be driven by a lesbian desire to appreciate those highly feminized images, for the very androgynous appearance of lead characters allows them to “be read inside a variety of different gender and sexual paradigms, though they are superficially gendered male” (Wood, 2006, p. 399). However, this hypothesis can be hardly supported by the survey. While half of the respondents claimed they had been exposed to *manga* featuring lesbian romance, one among them thought same-sex attraction depicted in lesbian *manga* was unacceptable while another thinks it was not acceptable to see it happen in the real life. But both of them supported homoerotic relationship between men, both in BL *manga* and in reality. Although such discovery is not significantly enough to conclude women who are obsessed with BL *manga* do not have the same level of acceptance with lesbian

manga, it may imply that portraits of male homosexuality and female homosexuality in Japanese *manga* could be treated differently by female readers.

Whether *manga* as a youth media have ethological or psychological effects on its audience always leads to controversies, therefore, the fourth pattern of BL fandom lies in the ways that BL fans turn their fantasy into reality.

Feedback probed from the respondents on homosexuality and stigmatized sex issues indicate they are conscious with the lines between the fantasized stories and the real life. Among the 32 respondents, only three believed BL stories truly reflect the life of gayd, while 19 though BL *manga* described male homosexuality in a different way and 10 of them expressed no interests in this topic. The most significant agreement they reached was on accepting homosexuality in BL literature. BL readership also appeared to gratify their curiosity of understanding gay men's life style; 19 stated their knowledge of homosexuals was enriched because of reading BL *manga*, whereas 13 showed no interest to answer. Regarding stigmatized sex, four types of sex behaviors frequently featured in BL but generally perceived as immoral in Chinese ideology were listed for respondents to compared their attitudes with situations happened in *manga* and in reality: violence within the relationship, sadism and masochism, pedophilia and incest. Respondents were clearly against all these forms of immoral sex while they took place in real life, and among them violence within the relationship was the most unacceptable behavior. When the same scenarios were performed in BL *manga*, however, more sympathy and tolerance were stirred and grades showing their hostility were comparatively low.

Specific items were designed to project their reflections on sex scenes with children involved. Respondents were asked to rate their attitudes towards five scenarios,

that children as subordinate role in homosexual relations with adult non-relatives, children as subordinate role in homosexual relations with adult relatives, children as dominant role in homosexual relations with adult non-relatives, children as dominant role in homosexual relations with adult relatives, and children play both subordinate role and dominant role with each other. Results show neither of those scenarios has received deprecation rate over the half, even counting individuals who skip these questions as the dissenting vote. Comparing with the feedback that 72% thought pedophilia in reality was not acceptable and 18% chose not to comment on that issue, such reaction is not that hostile. It thus implies that pedophilia may not be considered as a sin in BL fantasy, since ambiguity of character's age in Japanese *manga* has been generally taken-for-granted as a aesthetic tradition for a long term, even though the art form itself is still struggling for social acceptance.

The study also confirms that women indeed bring part of their same-sex fantasy into their real life, but again, they keep clear distance between their fantasy and their own personal life. Results suggest mostly BL fans tend to occasionally fantasize of homosexual relations and sex behaviors between strangers and homosexual behaviors between those who are already identified as gay men, though sometimes they may ignore the sex orientation of whom they are fantasizing of. While they were asked if they would like to have gay men friends, twenty-eight circled "yes", two answered "no", while three said "not sure". But when they were asked if they can accept gay men as the lifetime partner, only ten chose "yes", whereas thirteen said "no" and nine went with "not sure". The data thus indicates a tendency that the less intimate they are with those they fantasize of, the more acceptable and comfortable they are with fantasizing of homosexuality of the

latter. Although transformation from women's homoerotic fantasy to the fact does exist, it appears to be not significant enough to make substantial influence on women's orientation. In addition, the distance that women try to keep between their fantasy and the social life implies women who are obsessed with BL culture desire to play as a spectator rather than a practitioner when they encounter with men's homosexuality and stigmatized sex, for these issues may still be perceived as a threat to their social identity, their psychological health and their personal life.

DISCUSSION

Although boy-love *manga* and Western slash fiction were burgeoned almost at the same time, it was in Japan where production and consumption of men's homosexuality was proliferated into a popular and influential women's culture. Even though the appreciation of BL subgenre has been shaped into a transnational fandom, the general tolerance of fantasy and artistic tradition make Japan a dreamland for successful amateur BL artists to produce original works and publish them commercially like other mainstream *manga* artists.

By examining the social sphere where BL *manga* grew into such a unique culture, it is clear that the boom of BL *manga* in Japan can be partly attributed to the significant role of *manga* as one of the most popular cultural production in Japanese publishing market. Today, "nearly one in every three books published in Japan is a *manga*" (Sales, 2003). Because *manga* industry, as well as animation and video games industry, is such a large business for Japanese national economy, the government places fewer constraints on *manga* circulation, which leaves a huge space for artists' creativity. In fact, censorship remains prohibited in the 1947 Japanese constitution, and Japanese laws are quite liberal about depicting sex in comics. It is not until early 1990s that depicting pubic hair or genitals in public media is judged as illegal, but it also suggests that representing sexuality in other forms are acceptable (Perper & Cornog, 2002).

The Japanese tradition of presenting male beauty also catalyzes such unique cultural phenomenon. In Japanese culture, men's homosexuality is structured through the representation of transgenderism and cross-dressing. The Japanese history has an abundance of stories of transgenderism and homosexuality as well, which provides

sufficient sources for women to fantasize of same-sex romances. Common tropes of cross-dressing and mistaken identity in Japanese popular culture can be dated back to the Heian-period (794-1185) (McLelland, 2000b). It is believed that Japan has comparatively higher social acceptance toward LGBT group than other Asian countries, even though beneath such acceptance is a very different picture of Japanese gay population. Cases of discrimination on the basis of sexual preference are uncommon (McLelland, 2000c), however, from Western perspectives, gay issues and gay identity in Japan are almost ignored both by public opinions and by gay people themselves. “The gay press in Japan was and still is primarily interested in sexual entertainment, providing images and stories for masturbation. Little space is given to exposure on issues concerning gay rights, gay lifestyle or a gay identity” (McLelland, 2000c, p. 460). In addition to that, “representations of homosexual men (less so women) in other Japanese media are also quite common where they are almost invariably pictured as gender deviant, transgressing over to the feminine in both appearance and sensibility” (McLelland, 2000b, p. 13). Even some of them are not actually cross-dressed or transgendered, they are still labeled as transgressing into the feminine domain in other ways (McLelland, 2000d). However, despite such representation tends to undermine a Western-defined gay identity, the image of gay men as “feminine” is more likely to be perceived positively by Japanese, and particularly, by Japanese women. Just as McLelland (2000c) contends, the mass media in Japan is selling women an idea that gay men are women’s best friends: “media directed at women in Japan, including women’s magazines and movies, often present gay men as preferable marriage partners for straight women because gay men, considered to be ‘feminine’ are understood as more sympathetic to women and their subordinate position in Japanese society” (p. 465). Moreover, the

nature of Japanese society for females' heterosexuality and males' homosexuality is dichotomic. On the one hand, the patriarchally oppressive environment constrains Japanese women within the marriage and family, tying their sexuality to child rearing and submission to the husband (McLelland, 2000b; Wood, 2006). While on the other hand, homosexuality, especially male's homosexuality, and mobile gender identity are generally appreciated and lay at the core of Japanese culture: The celebration of same-sex love and sexuality between males can be dated back to Edo era (1603-1868) (McLelland, 2000a), while gender as performance has been an integral part of Japanese theater and popular culture for a long time (Welker, 2006).

As McLelland (2000a) notes, "different cultures obviously have different ways of structuring sexuality, and what is considered unremarkable in one society may generate great offense in another" (p. 284). Based on cultural tradition of aestheticizing male beauty and women's enthusiasm of consuming male homosexuality, Japanese society clearly responds to depictions of male homosexuality in a very different way from other countries (McLelland, 2000a). In Japan, producing and reading *manga* that featuring beautiful boys making out is not pathologized as it might be for Western audiences. While on the other hand, same-sex romance is accepted as a fantasy trope that signifies cuteness and pure form of affection for women, even though Japanese society is no more tolerant of disclosing one's gay or lesbian identity than many Western countries (Wood, 2006; McLelland, 2000a, McLelland 2000b). Therefore, as Schodt (1983) indicates, stories of male homosexual romance are "the best illustration of the Japanese tolerance of fantasy, and of the unique dichotomy between fantasy and reality" (p. 137).

Since in Japan dreaming of two beautiful men falling in love with each other is not thought to be a severe deviation from social norms, it becomes possible for mainstream bookstores to sell BL *manga* with YAOI title, which contains descriptions of bed scenes and illustrations of anal sex and fellatio between teenage boys, to their largest group of consumers, the high school girls. Under the increasing exposure on homosexuality, transgender issues and sex in general, the younger generation is reported to be more tolerant and comfortable with feelings or interests diverting from monogamous heterosexuality (Lunsing, 2005).

The patriarchally oppressive environment that Japanese women live in and the status quo that their female sexuality is confined to the reproductive role within the marriage convince many researchers that fantasizing same-sex romance should be more likely a psychological therapy rather than a symptom for women (Aoyama, 1998; Behr, 2003; Kinsella, 2000; McLelland, 2000b; Wood, 2006). Pleasure women derive from appreciating boy-love stories, on the other hand, reflects the disappointment they feel towards conventional social norms that they may encounter in everyday life. Kinsella contends obsession with *manga* like YAOI, boy-love and parody reflects “the frustration experienced by young people, who have found themselves unable to relate to the opposite sex, as they have constituted and located themselves within the contemporary cultural and political environment” (1998, p. 306). Likewise, Wilson and Toku (2003) note BL signifies women’s dissatisfaction with the traditional female identities and their desire to experiment with new identities and new power relationships.

Sagawa, the editor of Japanese BL magazine *June*, offers a more extreme interpretation applied to his readers: “*June* is a place of therapeutic rehabilitation for

those women who have experienced mental and physical abuse.” According to him, reading BL is a therapy that helps “heal the wounds and struggles of women who are not equal to men in this society” (as cited in Wilson & Toku, 2003, para. 24). However, the belief that women’s interests in homosexual love arise from their failure to satisfactorily engage in heterosexual romantic relationships is criticized by McLelland as a tendency to marginalize or even pathologize women’s homoerotic fantasy (2000a). In the article McLelland (2000a) introduces and analyzes Japanese BL fandom, he contends “since heterosexual attraction is natural, taken for granted, and thereby transparent, it needs no justification...However, the expectation that in an ideal world women would prefer to fantasize about love between men and women is itself a patriarchal or at least a heterosexual assumption” (p. 288-289). His argument is endorsed by Wood (2006), who addresses the stigmatization of women’s readership of BL a byproduct of homophobia by stating “sex scenes in YAOI *manga* have the potential to catalyze certain homophobic fears” (p. 401). Based on the heterosexist understandings of gender, being penetrated is commonly affirmed to be de facto disempowered and ultimately feminized. As a result, penetration must be performed as “an act that asserts power and masculine primacy” (Wood, 2006, p. 401). Boy-love *manga*, however, tends to destruct such heterosexist belief by emphasizing the pleasure of both penetrating and being penetrated, and by displaying relationships equally and mutually between male characters on at least an “emotional level”, especially while depicting their erotic moments together (Wood, 2006, p. 401).

While analysis of the local context of Japanese readership contributes a valuable cultural perspective in identifying the originality of this particular women’s culture, it is necessary to point out its limitation in explaining the growing popularity of BL *manga* in

the global market. According to Wood (2006), cultural analysis “risks oversimplifying the situation and Japanese women’s responses to it” and also render problems while examining the transcultural fandom because it is hard to provide “an equally accessible frame of reference” (p. 396) to take readers of other contexts into account, especially when the original texts are constrained by certain culture values. Similar as Wood, McLelland argues referring women’s obsession of BL genre simply to the frustration generated from their restrictive gender roles and reproductive capacity within the family may promote a “hegemonising and static view” of Japanese women. And he supports his point by commenting women of the younger generation who have enjoyed more freedom in choosing their own lifestyles are still enthusiastic buyers of BL *manga* (2001).

Therefore, fascination of BL genre might not be originated only from the often-cited differences between the role of women in the United States and Japan but also from a certain degree of similarity of their experiences. The popularity of Japanese animation and *manga* and the rise of Japanese-style cuteness in youth culture in the United Kingdom and the United States during the 1990s suggest that young people living in those countries are experiencing some sort of similar circumstances with Japanese youth (Kinsella, 1998). The phenomenon that international *manga* and fanzine subculture emerged spontaneously from both amateur media and the official organizations of mass media also implies that a certain cultural artifact can be extensively shared and reproduced by individuals with diverse cultural values, understandings and perspectives.

With the advent of Internet, BL culture has certified its fascination with the growing population of women readers all over the world. In particular it promotes the boom of amateur *manga*. Before that, most authors of amateur *manga* and parody *manga*

have to print their work at their own cost and to travel to domestic comic conventions for distribution. However, with the establishment of fan websites they can disseminate their work online with little cost and more chances to have international exposure.

Countless websites have been established to present the numerous fantasies women derive from different stories, in different forms. Some sites consist of illustrations drawn by the site owners or the guests, while some are exclusive for collecting text-based fictions. But majority of them combines both illustrations and texts and may include some other components to make themselves more personalized, interactive and fun. For example, a basic fan site should include a brief description of the owner's interests, the story that the site is based on, and the couple it supports. The aim is to avoid misunderstandings from those who support different couples or have no idea about this culture but "click by error". Some websites may have extensive functions such as a blog where the owner can write her dairy or a bulletin board system for owner and visitors to exchange ideas and information with their interested couples. In fact, some sites are so well refined with digital technology that they can even present fan-made multimedia productions such as music, flash and animation video.

Confirmed by McLelland's Google search result on word YAOI in May 2006⁴, International YAOI fans have been so proactive in creating global on-and-offline communities for circulating and sharing BL *manga*, animations, and stories. The Internet has confirmed its unsubstituted role in facilitating women's access of amateur BL contents and trading in printed BL material (McLelland & Yoo, 2007).

Since BL culture still encounters significant resistance from the mainstream social ideology and among others who like Japanese youth culture but reject male homosexuality,

many website owners believe it is very important to clarify the topics they are discussing before the space is invaded by unexpected visitors. Under general circumstance, a clear announcement is posted on the entrance page, stating the site is exclusively designed for women who can accept BL *manga* or same-sex romance. Some even request everyone who clicks the link to pass an age check to make sure the anticipated visitors are older enough to view sex explicit illustrations.

With the increasing diversity in BL fans group, it is the time to consider the new meanings of the heterogeneous texts contributed by people through different cultural lens. Indeed, the growing popularity of BL *manga* among readers in the United States and British suggests cultural difference and language barrier are not obstacles to appreciate this genre, nor is necessary for those Western readers to interpret BL *manga* in exactly the same way as their Japanese counterparts in order to build fan identification. Cross-cultural intersections occurred during the formation of transnational fandom may prevent researchers to evaluate the popularity of the genre by segregating communities of readers along cultural lines, since it causes over-generalized interpretation of communities of readers without considering diversities within their cultural contexts. On the other hand, tendency of bringing individual desires and fantasies of audiences into the reading can mask such interpretation as well (Wood, 2006).

McLelland (2005) explains it is hard to speculate how women in many countries appreciate and participate in the global BL fandom, since “different factors are liable to be at work in different social contexts, regions and language groups and there is simply no research in place that might enable us to answer this question” (p. 17). Surveys and case studies can probe important feedbacks from small individual groups, while at the same

time they lack the capability to present a full picture of the “large and nebulous public” and are very difficult to address “definitive or collective truths about fluid and instinct fantasies and desires” (Wood, 2006, p. 405). Indeed, it is discovered even within the same cultural group or fans community, women’s motivations and preferences of reading BL *manga* are so discursive and hard to summarize. For example, they can generate thousands of individual interpretations of femininity or masculinity, submission or domination, love or friendship, and so forth.

Though transnational readership of BL *manga* leaves us a tough bone while reexamining this local phenomenon beyond the confines of Japanese culture, it is not completely impossible to explore some common characteristics sharing among fans despite of their different cultural backgrounds.

Wood (2006) therefore proposes to consider the global readership for BL *manga* as a counterpublic that “establishes discursive connections between strangers, reflecting their intimate engagements with texts and their differing subjective and cultural contexts for reading boy-love *manga*” (p. 405). Similar as slash fiction, BL fandom is ‘highly self-reflexive and self-critical’ (Penley, 1992, p. 484), which reserves a space for critical thinking and deconstructive analysis of the taken-for-granted patriarchal notions of gender and sexuality (McLelland & Yoo, 2007). According to Wood (2006), women’s support for BL characters to overcome all sort of social constraints and obstacles to embrace their homosexual desire together can be interpreted as a fantasy of a resistant counterpublic. Her theory was echoed by the comments left by a high school girl on a BL fans oriented BBS, which she said she liked stories featuring same-sex romance between men because they were more pure. In order to be together, the partners have to risk all they have by rejecting

the socially defined normality (McLelland, 2000a, p. 287). Furthermore, the interests shared by transnational readers in such queer texts enable them to be part of the counterpublic sphere to subvert the accustomed expectation for women to be only interested with heterosexual romance, whereas the latter is deemed more acceptable by social authority for the purpose of reinforcing the gender status quo (Wood, 2006, p. 404).

The counterpublic property of BL fandom can be easily observed in lots of online fans clubs, where readers gather to conduct and exchange their fantasies on same-sex romance in many forms, including peer reviews, comments, illustrations and fanworks. In this Utopia-like community, male homosexuality and same-sex romance are not only appreciated but also advocated with spiritual love and earnestness. Members usually have a strong attachment to the community that sometimes they can mobilize and fight against any idea or judgment that tries to invade into their particular space to correct their fantasy.

In addition, the fact that BL *manga* can be shared and appreciated through different subjective lens implies the “fundamentally queer facets” of this genre (Wood, 2006, p. 403). Though whether women is driven by a lesbian desire to approach BL readings is hard to tell through the study, the gender indeterminacy presented in BL *manga*, that sexual identity can be fluid and blended, reserves enough space for expressions of queer, transgender and transsexual desires. It thus challenges the dominant belief that gender and sex should be “coherent, contained, and one dimensional” (Wood, 2006, p. 397). As Eve Sedgwick argues, “queer” involves “the open mess of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonance, lapses and excess of meaning [that occur] when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (as cited in Wood, 2006, p. 397). It can conclude that at the heart of

transnational BL culture is a queerness that refuses complete coherence to the heterosexist view of male identity and traditional romantic narratives that women are supposed to consume (Wood, 2006). In other words, BL texts are queer because they subvert the monolithic understanding regarding gender or sexual identity, which is embedded in its unique aesthetic style and narrative trope: The androgynous feature of lead characters implies gender or sexual identity can be ambiguous and floating, while the assumption that homoerotic attraction between males is normal troubles taken-for-granted heterosexist mateship. Therefore, part of the pleasure women derive from BL readership can be attributed to the idea that “sex is not in plain view” (Wood, 2006, p. 400).

As a consequence, BL readership transgresses and queers the dominant ideology about how and what straight female readers are expected to fantasize of sex and gender identity. Indeed, an essential force motivating women to create BL *manga* is to “reconfigure male identity in terms of female desires” (McLelland, 2005, p. 18). Whatever their figures are depicted in a feminized form or their personalities are blended with socially-defined femininity, they are created to serve as eye candies to amuse women and to fit their most intimate desires about the opposite sex. “The global nature of this counterpublic in fact facilitates subversive queer identifications and desires by generating productive tensions between heterogeneous and incoherent transcultural contexts and the intimate fantasies and engagements of readers that are never fully explicit, accessible, or quantifiable” (Wood, 2006, p. 410).

Demonstrated by symbolic convergence theory, BL readership as a counterpublic fandom is constructed on basis of the concatenation of meanings. Prevalence of parody *manga* and slash fiction already proved readers of BL *manga* do not remain passive

receivers but are more likely to participate in the process of recreating texts. When concatenation of texts has happened, a certain degree of consensus is reached on the basis of a series of shared terminology despite the cultural backgrounds of members. Regardless of an individual's native language, words like YAOI, *shoonenai*, *doujinshi*, *uke*, *seme*, and *bishonen* have become part of the collective jargon of this particular counterpublic discourse. By using these specific cues, fans can easily identify their peers even cross different nations.

As a mechanism for globalization, the Internet plays a crucial role in catalyzing local BL fandom and broadening it to the world. First, it has proved itself an incredibly valuable tool for fans to share scanlations, illustrations and fictions, though sometimes illegally, from commercially published *manga* to fan-produced amateur work. A greater concatenation of texts then occurs cross cultural and language boundaries, while at the same time it builds a stage for amateur artists in different countries to distribute their work with minor charge and wider impact. Through the process of facilitating discourse and intertextuality among fans with diversities, the Internet catalyzes a global counterpublic that Wood (2006) identifies as “both subversive and fundamentally queer in nature” (p. 396).

While networks are established and reinforced, more audiences discover the benefits of utilizing the Internet to enrich their culture and turn their attention to develop more sophisticated ways of presenting the fandom. For instance, the earliest BL communities were formed with the focus on sharing fan fictions in texts. Then with the intervention of scanning technology and computer-mediated graphic design, illustrations and artworks started to disseminate on the web. Today, when digital technology becomes

more well-known and easier to handle, fans with special skills show their enthusiasm of BL culture through making online multimedia products such as fan-made songs, slide shows, videos and games.

For book sellers, the Internet helps to uncover the commercial value of BL *manga* by visualizing the growing number of consumers. It may thus significantly promote circulation of BL *manga* in the global market, even contents of this particular genre is still controversially queer and deviant (Wood, 2006). Like their Japanese counterparts, the audience U.S. book sellers select to target is generally young, straight female, while online interactions indicate some male audiences also show their interests of this girl-orientated publication.

With tendency of legalizing BL publication is the strong effort that has been made to regulate its readers. Remarkable warning has been places on the covers of most BL books and magazines emphasizing those publications are “for adults only” and all these books are shrink-wrapped. In some countries publishers even add supplementary disclaimers stating that all characters depicted are adults, though they may look like teenagers.

Many scholars find this regulation intriguing because characters in BL manag are always portrayed with a young appearance even though they are treated as adults or even middle-aged men in the stories. Ironically, despite such ambiguous description of age is actually an aesthetic style inherited from traditional Japanese girl-orientated *manga* featuring heterosexual romance, publishers have to reassure the public that adolescents, who are supposed to be the major consumers, are restricted to access this genre.

In Western countries, a number of statutes have been issued in order to both prevent minors to be exposed to erotic media and prohibit representation of minors in pornography. Similar as China, minor refers to every human being under the age of eighteen years. In some states of United States, even mainstream booksellers such as Barnes & Noble have been prosecuted for distributing art books authorized by reputed artists that happen to include portraits of child nudity. In Britain and the US, parents could be arrested for printing private family photos containing images of their own naked children. These regulations do not just apply to photographs of actual children but, under a clause contained in the US Child Pornography Prevention Act of 1996, apply also to “computer generated images”. According to Lane, this was “the first time that Congress banned the sale and distribution of images that do not feature real people” (as cited in McLelland, 2001).

In contrast, the comparatively liberal public sphere in Japan allows teenage girls easily purchase BL *manga*, including the more explicit YAOI title, with less social constraint (Wood, 2006). Such different treatments, as many scholars believe, result from the different ways that child sexuality, or the general pornography is perceived in Western countries and in Japan.

While legislation against images and narratives that have been judged to be pornographic can be dated back to over a century, however, there is no agreement reached yet to categorize pornography or the more general term, obscenity (McLelland, 2001). In fact, United States, as well as other Anglophone countries, has had a difficult time determining what constituted obscene.

Obscenity is a legal term that applies to anything offensive to morals and is often equated with the term pornography. Pornography, however, is a more limited term, which refers to the erotic content of books, magazines, films, and recordings. Obscenity includes pornography, but may also include nude dancing, sexually oriented commercial telephone messages, and scatological comedy routines. (“Obscenity,” n.d.).

In Great Britain and the United States, sexually explicit material was not subject to statutory prohibition until the mid-nineteenth century and the Victorian era. In 1957, Justice William J. Brennan Jr. of the U.S. Supreme Court stated that obscenity is “utterly without redeeming social importance” and therefore was not protected by the First Amendment. He announced “whether to the average person, applying contemporary community standards, the dominant theme of the material taken as a whole appeals to a prurient [lewd or lustful] interest.” The new test was applicable to every level of government in the United States, and proved difficult to use because every term in it eluded a conclusive definition. The Supreme Court justices could not fully agree what constituted “prurient interest” or what “redeeming social importance” meant. Justice Potter Stewart expressed this difficulty at defining obscenity when he remarked, “I know it when I see it” (*Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184, 84 S. Ct. 1676, 12 L. Ed. 2d 793 [1964], as cited in “Obscenity,” n.d.).

Assessing whether an activity or object is obscene based on community standards is problematic as well, especially when community values tend to be timely and geographically specific. In the 1980s, involvement of radical feminist rhetoricians raised arguments over what constituted obscene and pornography to a new level by stating “political correctness” for women, since pornography was considered to encourage domination and humiliation of females (“Obscenity,” n.d.).

In Japan, however, even though *manga* industry has encountered nationwide censorship campaigns questioning its role in misguiding adolescents' mental and sexual development, arguments and judgment over the erotic contents of *manga* follow a very different trajectory. According to McLelland, authority attitudes of Japanese government and Anglophone countries in defining pornography are significantly different. Comparing with Western laws, Japanese censorship appears to be more dedicated to prohibiting exposure of genitalia and pubic hair, while remains ambiguous in judging "sexually suggestive situations" and scenes containing violent sex and other deviant sex behaviors (McLelland, 2001). In addition, tolerance on presenting children's sexual precociousness in comic books projects the more relaxed attitude in age of consent laws in Japan, which is thirteen years of age. This is among the lowest ages of consent in the world for heterosexual intercourse. For Western researchers, it is more surprising to see that homosexuality is not addressed in the criminal code of Japanese law, which may imply that no age of consent applies for those engaging in same-sex sexual activity.

McLelland believed such peculiar phenomenon can be attributed to the inadequacy of fundamentalist Christian belief and feminist lobby groups in Japan and the aesthetic tradition of featuring young people's innocence and childhood as a beautiful and pure form of cuteness (2000a, 2001). In a word, Western laws insist to enforce a rigid distinction between adult and child sexuality in order to "protect a mythologized ideal of erotic innocence" (Kincaid, 1998), which in Japan is not traditionally seen as an issue. It is thus understandable why comic books like BL *manga* containing visual description of child sexuality can be circulated with less restriction in Japan but are under strict scrutiny in U.S. and some other conservative countries, including China mainland.

Despite of the influence from Japanese culture and the artistic theme inherited from girl's *manga*, the efforts artists make to remain ambiguous of character's age also represent part of the queerness facet of BL content, since the line between adolescents and adult is fuzzed in much the same way that gender identity is bent. Such ambiguity is found to be meaningful for its readers, which consist predominantly of girls who are "at a luminal stage between childhood and adulthood", since BL *manga* showcases "certain cultural anxieties about sexual control surrounding bodies, and specifically female ones, that do not satisfactorily fit into the child or adult category" (Wood, 2006, p. 408).

On the other hand, the worldwide consumption of BL production and the accompanying fan-made projects echo the increasing dissatisfaction women feel with the current pattern of romance offered by mass media and mainstream hereonormative narratives. In addition to provide audiences in diverse cultural and artistic contexts a queer vision of love and desire, the erotic nature of BL *manga* enables it speaks to intimate fantasies of women in both conscious and unconscious ways (Wood, 2006).

The unique features of characters, that they are beautiful, androgynous youth, their personalities synthesize favored masculine qualities and favored feminine qualities while they are biologically male, make sociologists believe women are seeking for ideal images of human beings in BL illustrations (Kinsella, 1998; McLelland, 2000b; Welker, 2006). Despite the blurred gender difference, such ideal images mirror what women may desire for themselves or for their ideal partners. Although there is no clear clue about what exactly the favored masculine qualities and favored feminine qualities are, Kinsella (1998) explains why the gender of ideal characters must be male: "In the context of the obvious range of restrictions on behavior and development that women experience in contemporary

society, young female fans feel more able to image and depict idealized strong and free characters if they are male” (p. 302). Meanwhile, McLelland makes a further analysis to compare the power women find in manipulating male characters in BL *manga* and parody *manga* with the gender constraints they encounter in contemporary Japanese society: Under the lens of a strict double-standard regarding the sexual expression of men and women, gay men’s intersexual status is presented as uniting the best features of both sexes, while women’s sexuality is associated with pollution and taboo (McLelland, 2000b).

It seems like BL stories attract women by subtly describing love between equals in status-conscious Japanese society (McLelland, 2000a). Evidence can be found from the tactics that artists use to dismiss patriarchal power relation in these stories. Differences based on gender are eliminated by making both lovers the same gender; differences based on age are limited by representing characters of similar age; and differences based on desirability are removed by representing both characters as beautiful, androgynous boys. Projected by the survey, Chinese women appear to embrace their homosexual fantasy with the desire of equality as well through having both characters equipped with masculine traits and sharing their relationship as being both active and dominant roles.

However, there are also considerable controversies inherent as to whether male partners in same-sex romance share power equally. McLelland (2000a) asserts the characters in boy-love *manga* cannot be considered as exactly equal even though they are both male and quite close in age. Correspondently, Wood (2006) contends although the narratives “emphasize the need for lovers to develop an equal romantic partnership”, Japanese artists do tend to clearly position their heroes in distinctive roles (p. 401), which can be identified from the dichotomous character designing. Typically, artists of boy-love

manga are accustomed to construct a *seme-uke* dichotomy when they create the lead characters. *Seme-uke* dichotomy is generated from the common trope BL producers used to identify male characters engaged in homosexual relationship: *seme* (from *semeru*), means the person who takes the role “to attack”, while *uke* (from *ukeru*) refers the role of “to receive” (McLelland, 2000a, p. 280). Such identification does not only apply to roles they take in sex behaviors that *seme* is acting as the “top” and *uke* is the “bottom”, but also links their personalities to a degree of masculinity or femininity. Generally, *seme* is featured with masculinity traits such as being aggressive, physically strong, and sexually active, while *uke* possesses more femininity traits like being passive, nurturing, and emotional. Within homoerotic relationships, sex is rather like something the dominant partner *seme* “does” to the submissive partner *uke*. Such narrative trope is similar to the sex association between men and women represented in mainstream media or power dynamics within relationships of senior and junior men in gay comics (McLelland, 2000a).

Sometimes the dichotomy can be perceived through the age difference between lead characters as well. The difference of age, although is not as obvious as it is in gay comics, remains a significant element in constructing romance. “Although women’s boy-love stories manage to sidestep the power differentials inherent in all cross-gender relationships in Japan, they are (to a certain extent) still bound up with notions of power based on age” (McLelland, 2000a, p. 280). Because hierarchy remains a core value of Japanese ideology, *seme* are always described to be older, or more superior than *uke*, no matter they are both visualized with androgynous young appearance. In consequence, the establishment of *seme-uke* dichotomy in BL *manga* is considered to be consistent with the conventional Japanese cultural norms. As McLelland (2000a) claims, the representation of

equal relationships is not a simple issue since Japanese society is very sensitive to status differentials based on age and gender. “Even through women’s comics attempt to depict sex between equals and therefore choose to depict homoerotic relationships between boys of approximately the same age, the structure of Japanese society makes this difficult” (McLelland, 2000a, p. 279-280).

Therefore, it is not surprise to learn that when mainstream media turn their attention to this particular women’s culture, despite criticism they always reach a very normative conclusion, that BL *manga* “portray relationships that are heterosexual at their foundation” (Wood, 2006). For example, an article on *Los Angeles Times* asserts with the very safe assurance that these comics, because they are romantic narratives aimed at women, must “portray relationships that are heterosexual at their foundation” (Wood, 2006, p. 396-397). It is thus reasonable to see the fact that, regardless of all controversies related to BL topics and readership, a general agreement has been reached to categorize readers of boy-love *manga* into a group of “straight” women.

It is partly true while Welker (2006) claims the specific homoerotic romance in BL story is actually in common with mainstream heterosexual romance since the former does not violate dominant idea that romance should be constructed on the difference. Even though impact of gender dichotomy is diminished in BL *manga*, gender superiority existed in heterosexual narratives sustains but is replaced by a hierarchy of masculinities. Similar as gay comics, inequality in BL can be politicized and eroticized in terms of fantasies about violence on the basis of different degrees of masculinities (Padva, 2005). Violence, including sex violence within couples, is not absent in BL *manga*. However, it is depicted in such an aesthetic and emotional way that can easily turn women on. It thus explains why

women are less likely to be hostile with violence plots in BL *manga* than in the real life, as confirmed by the survey that 44% respondents reported they disliked featuring violence in BL *manga*, while 91% reported violence in the real life was unacceptable.

In parallel with Welker's thesis that BL is another form of heterosexual romance, Salmon and Symons (2004) classify slash fiction into a particular category of romance novels, according to the similar themes they adopt from plots designing to character setting. The major distinction they highlight is in ordinary romance novels heroes must have one or more traits like the "warriors" while the heroines do not need to, whereas in slash both male lovers take the role as warriors and share their adventure together. Nevertheless the much-touted feminine sensibility associated with men loving men with whom they have shared friendship, trust, and adventure is by no means universal in slash (Scodari, 2003). Such discovery suggests slash fiction in Western culture might be more dedicated to establish an equal relationship between same-sex lovers than BL *manga* in Japanese culture. They also hypothesize male-female slash will not be likely to replace male-male slash in the hearts of fans because the pleasure derived by slash writers and readers from imagining romantic or sexual relationships is built on the foundation of an established male-male friendship. The reason women find this kind of friendship more adorable than heterosexual romance is male-male friendship is considered more durable and secure than sexual or romantic passions in male-female relationship and thus is closer to women's desire of ideal mateship.

On the other hand, however, Wood (2006) contends that power assigned to same-sex partners engaging in *seme-uke* dichotomy is not as static as it is in heterosexual relationship. "Despite the fact that the more rigidly upheld *seme-uke* dichotomy tends to

reinforce notions of active/passive sex roles, it is important to emphasize that in general there comics do not visually infuse the role of *uke* with negative or disempowering connotations” (Wood, 2006, p. 403). In particular, she finds something interesting about the *seme-uke* dichotomy is the possibility of switching roles and it always serves as a sense of humor or even the probe of sexual excitement between partners. It thus assumes that BL comics are “much more cognizant of the performative nature of such roles than one might imagine” (Wood, 2006, p. 401). Such phenomenon is consistent with the queerness characteristics of BL texts that gender identities are fluid and sex roles can be switchable.

Another theory that can be applied to interpret women’s obsession with men’s homosexuality is perhaps Mary Sue complex, which claims women may seek to construct “a subject position within which the writer-reader projects herself as the focus of attention for idolized and idealized male heroes” (Scodari, 2003, p. 115). Though this theory is primarily adopted to examine fandom of slash fiction, it can be effectively applied with BL readership since the two genres are so parallelized. Through reading BL *manga*, women are enabled to enjoy the patterns that lead characters, with the androgynous looking and sensibilities, place themselves in roles that are normally designed for females in sexual interactions and romantic relations, while with the male bodies they are unencumbered with the burdens of reproduction and the restraints of family system (McLelland, 2000b). It therefore demonstrates why women can accept or even celebrate the absence of women protagonists in these stories, and also makes sense with the fact that straight women are more likely to be turned on by homosexuality of men instead of women.

No wonder homosexual narratives in BL genre arouse a certain extent of homophobia for the deconstruction of masculinity and male-dominant sex behavior. While

BL *manga*, especially those with YAOI title, depict detailed, hard-core sex behaviors between male characters with high exposure of genitalia, it raises questions regarding the identification of readers and the fantasies they derive. The heterosexist view of masculinity is subverted by the voyeuristic pleasure women gain in observing anal sex and fellatio between beautiful men, while according to Halperin (1993), a male desire to be sexually penetrated is negatively perceived as “a voluntary abandonment of the culturally constructed masculine identity in favor of the culturally constructed feminine one” (as cited in Wood, 2006, p. 401). In heterosexist view, the action of penetrating or being penetrated significantly determines which gender identity should be assigned to the individual. While the former is performed to assert power and masculinity, the latter always represents disempowerment and ultimately femininity (Wood, 2006). However, since penetration in BL *manga* is depicted as a pleasure that can be appreciated by both of the roles of penetrating and being penetrated, it actually leads to an emotionally equal and mutual interaction between same-sex lovers, which might be rejected by audiences with normative understanding of gender identity and romantic relationship. In fact, the threat of BL *manga* may not simply stem from its aesthetic methods of featuring male homosexuality but from its potential of troubling patriarchal notions of masculinity and femininity and hindering the hegemonic view of human sex and romance.

Despite criticism of *manga* for intervening socialization process of adolescents and confusing their cognition of the realistic world, the Chinese BL fans demonstrate their readership and fantasy harmless through creating a clear line between what they read in BL *manga* and their real life and maintaining it intentionally. Corresponding with Chinese readers, Western BL fans report to keep their fantasies away from the real world as well.

According to testimonies collected by McLelland (2001), while he is defending the right of fantasizing deviant sex, owners of English YAOI websites tend to diminish the negative influence of their fandom by stating that “not all of us actually want to live out our fantasies” (para. 40). In fact, a significant factor that women find twisted sexual fantasies performed by men are more attractive is they are too unrealistic to be applied in the realistic world, just like “a man raping a man seems less real so women can view it as a fiction and not a potential future” (McLelland, 2001, para. 40).

There are some other theories being adopted to interpret women’s passion of same-sex romance. McLelland identifies some of them in one of his articles when he examines the history of BL and BL fandom. Among those academic points, Matsui (1993) argues that women’s consumption of men’s homosexuality is “a case of penis envy” (p. 179), while Aoyama (1988) claims the desire of some women to place boys in sexually explicit and at times violent scenes is motivated by “a psychology of revenge, because reading BL makes women ‘become a spectator rather than a prey’ (p. 196)” (as cited in McLelland, 2000a, p. 286). Popular writers and editors of BL *manga* also contribute insights towards the prevalence of this particular genre. In Wilson & Toku’s 2003 article “Boys’ Love,” *YAOI, and Art Education: Issues of Power and Pedagogy*, which is a chapter in *Visual Culture: Research in Art and Education*, they disclose some interesting feedbacks from BL producers. Among them, *manga* artist Takemia, who was one of the pioneering BL writers and made profound influence on BL illustrations, provides a subtle analysis of gender relationships in BL *manga*. She believes that making boys play the roles of both males and females is an efficient way to explore relationships between love and sex, because “if the relationship between love and sex is expressed through the love

of man and woman, gender is unavoidably emphasized” (as cited in Wilson & Toku, 2003, para. 19). Her thesis is echoed by Fred Schodt (1983, 1996), a scholar who has made extensive studies of Japanese *manga*. He addresses BL as a fantasy is created by women who wish to make a symbolic escape from the roles that the society seems prepared to give to them. In such fantasy they can experiment with love and lovemaking without the usual anatomical or sociological encumbrances (as cited in Wilson & Toku, 2003).

CONCLUSION

BL fandom in itself is a young, growing transnational culture, which therefore requires an equivalent update of relevant studies. In fact, BL *manga* have been through different stages to grow into the contemporary genre we see today. In 1970s' BL *manga*, bed scenes were rare and implicit and they were delicately designed as a metaphor to signify the psychological and physical "union" of same-sex lovers, while today's YAOI *manga* offers much more "money shots" (ejaculation scenes), serving for nothing but to turn women on (McLelland, 2000a). However, the fact that the term "BL" instead of YAOI is more universally adopted by Chinese women to identify the culture implies female fans may still seek for dedicative relational attachment between their favored male characters. Sexual scene, on the other hand, is more likely to be a plus or a proof for such desirable intimacy.

Part of the foundation of BL tropes still follows heteronormative patterns that romance should be built on the power difference. However, its queer texts provide numerous possibilities for artists to experiment deviant fantasies, especially when readers become increasingly unsatisfied with the over-feminized images of lead characters and call for a more equivalent relationship.

In response to the complicated pleasures women derive from reading BL works, artists are observed to start creating stories with more sophisticated narrative tropes. Some are very similar to gay men's comics to display romance between men with dramatizing their masculine traits, some devote to presenting social reality of GLBT group to highlight their experiences of fighting for happiness, while some are stick to the classic fashion to serve readers of the older generations. Among them, a group of artists are perceived to be

inspired by breaking the themes that have been taken-for-granted in story designing. One of the tactics they use is to change or even reverse the power notions assigned to characters of same-sex couples. For example, despite the rigidly upheld *seme-uke* dichotomy that reinforces notions of active/passive sex roles (Wood, 2006), *uke*, the “receiver”, is portrayed older, stronger, more aggressive and sexually active than *seme*, the “attacker”. The only element inherited from the *seme-uke* dichotomy is probably the roles they play in the anal sex, that *uke* remains the “bottom”, being penetrated by *seme* the “top”. Interestingly, a few artists have tried to subvert the dichotomy completely by switching the role of *uke* and *seme* in different occasions.

In fact, the possibility of reversing sex roles is proved to be favored by the audience, and is consistent with Wood’s assumption of the performative nature of roles within *seme-uke* dichotomy (Wood, 2006). Women may find humor and fun by culturally reconstructing sex roles, while at the same time challenging them through questioning the necessity of sustaining such dichotomy. In fact, Nagaike asserts BL *manga* in Japan has a subgenre that highlights reversible couples “who never draw borders between *uke* and *seme* sexualities” (as cited in Wood, 2006, p. 402).

The growing popularity of boy-love *manga* in the United States indicates that differences existing in Japanese and Western cultures cannot prohibit readers to enjoy this particular genre. The preoccupation with converting serialized dramas into homoerotic parodies that emerged spontaneously among women in the United Kingdom, America, and Japan drops a hint that women living within different cultural contexts may have some similar social experiences to share. On the other hand, gender ambiguity and sexual fluidity in BL *manga*, which can be read or perceived through diverse artistic and cultural lens,

extend a specifically local genre to a transnational women's culture, and with the erotic nature of the content these stories can speak intimately to the desires and fantasies of different women on an increasingly global scale. It is thus important to take into account the ways in which different cultural contexts may contribute to new interpretations of texts and to enhance the sense-making process. Because social contexts, as well as social constraints, might differentiate from country to country and affect readers' perceptions in different ways, it runs the risk of oversimplifying to address a universal explanation for the phenomenon without considering individual fantasies and certain cultural values.

The Internet has been proved to be an essential force in the globalization of BL culture. Indeed, for a marginalized publication which encounters strict rules of circulation in many countries, it significantly accelerates the transmission of "images, ideas and a certain sensibility" from Japan to the West societies while at the same time endows the cultural artifacts with new local meanings (McLelland, 2001), not mentioning its role in promoting both the online and offline distribution of amateur *manga* and relevant fanwork.

Despite of all the cultural and individual diversities, the Internet reserves ample room to transform BL readership to a certain fan culture in terms of symbolic convergence. When BL readers with similar interests gather to reach certain consensus by sharing a series of fantasy themes that consist of characters, narrative plots and scenes, symbolic convergence occurs and a perceived reality is constructed. Online interactions have been proved to facilitate the process through promoting mutual interpretation of the perceived reality and giving members a sense of identity which is "resistant to social constraints surrounding age, gender, race, class, and sexuality" (Wood, 2006, p. 409). Furthermore, the protection from anonymity encourages women who try to publicly declare their dissent

with heteronormative and hegemonising sexual discourses to gradually become part of the counterpublic triggered by BL readership (Wood, 2006), though the rhetorical space that they occupy in terms of their respective cultures could not be more different (McLelland, 2001).

In other words, the Internet serves as a gateway among teenagers for sharing and communicating with their erotic fantasies while at the same time restricts the access of potential protesters who are not familiar with the culture or are unaware with such unique methods of textual circulation and networking (Wood, 2006). The protesters of BL *manga*, as being identified by the respondents in the survey, turn to be their parents, strangers and any anti-BL people.

Nevertheless, the transnational prevalence of BL fandom encounters significant resistance from mainstream ideologies and legislations. Despite some cross-over with Western slash, the characteristic of BL *manga* in highlighting sexual fantasies about “beautiful boys” instead of adult men renders it more problematic in relation to online censorship and raises new questions for virtual child pornography censorship (McLelland & Yoo, 2007). Moral system is also challenged by the increasingly explicit depiction of stigmatized sex in BL *manga*. Sex harassment, incest, pedophilia, sadomasochism, prostitution, and sexual perversion are generally perceived as common romantic elements since many women believe the most charming pattern of homosexual relationship is any action characters take to transgress social boundaries to realize their homoerotic desire, which may be considered very brave, exciting and romantic.

Whether description of deviant sex in BL *manga* harming teenagers’ psychological health and misguiding their sexual behaviors remains under discussion, however, the

intention of building, maintaining and reinforcing a serial of codes for behavior which stands in contradiction to dominant values may shape BL fandom into a delinquent sub-culture, leading to a more critical situation for BL *manga* to go mainstream (Sykes & Matza, 1957). The disequilibrated BL circulation that in some conservative countries the productions are prohibited and stays underground, while in other countries with more liberal political climate they are allowed to be sold restrictively raises new problems. Because bed scenes and children pornography are so common that most books are marked “adult only” on the front cover to drive children away. However, if circulation in some regions remains marginalized, it could push readers to access relevant resources through mini-communication media like Internet or other private channels. It is possible that such restriction and protection may turn to be meaningless due to the loose public control of the latter, which has been proved by this research. More ridiculous, the target consumers of BL *manga* are most adolescent girls who are actually restricted to purchase this sort of publications. Hence further research is necessary to focus on how to position the sensitive status of BL *manga* and how to identify the boundary of women’s fantasy, or should it be a boundary.

The 1990-92 anti-*manga* censorship movement in Japan questioned the negative influence *manga* may have on Japanese youth’s sexuality development (Kinsella, 1998), while a thread of thoughts in mass media believed reading BL *manga* can change women’s sex orientation. However, the study shows there is no apparent sign of women to switch sex orientation through reading BL *manga*. Neither direct relation between women’s interests of homoerotic affection between beautiful males and their attitudes towards LGBT group can be found, although women who appreciate the genre tend to be generally open and

supportive upon LGBT issues and more comfortable with deviant sex. Further studies should be conducted to determine whether reading BL *manga* results in such acceptance or such acceptance catalyzes their readership.

In addition, women readers turn to intentionally protect their fantasy from the social life by addressing a clear line between them, which should render their readership and fantasy harmless. Indeed, in the survey only 3 among the 32 respondents slightly agree that BL reflects the reality, whereas 19 disagree with the statement. It echoes with research done by Japanese scholars that has shown the motivations underlying participation in the YAOI community do not seem to threaten or harm children (Fujimoto, 2004; Mizoguchi, 2003; Nagaike, 2003). Although those who exist in the real world may activate their fantasy and imagination about same-sex romance from time to time, they seldom take men who have intimate relationship with themselves as the object. However, due to the lack of in-depth interviews such findings are not conclusive and still call for supplementary evidence.

It is extremely interesting to study how and why women pursue their interests even through risking the possibility of being stigmatized and pathologized by social authorities. Although there is no simple answer to explain why they are attracted by homoerotic relationship between beautiful men, nor does significant evidence show what the best type of romance is to turn them on, since BL *manga* is created in such a dedicative and sophisticated way, it can confirm the pleasure derived from the readership fulfill part of the most intimated fantasy women have about human sexuality and homosexuality.

It is necessary to point out, again, that concerns about women who are interested in the homoerotic romance between men would confuse their fantasy with their real-life

experience should be diminished. The negative impact of *manga* on reader's socialization and sexuality development should be assessed but not overestimated. Even in Japan where *manga*, especially amateur *manga*, has been setback by several influential censorship campaigns, media criticism and hostile awareness is overwhelmingly on male audience who are deeply obsessed with girl-oriented *manga*. Since the fantasy world generated from BL narratives is so obviously unreal that women can hardly enter, it is a world that has never prepared to fit homosexuals nor heterosexuals. The foundation of romance is heterosexual, while sexual identity of characters involved is queered. Just as the doubtlessness of male-female attraction in heterosexual romance, homoerotic attraction in most BL stories appears to be so taken-for-granted that little effort is made to expose the social realism of gay rights, gay lifestyles or gay identities. What the artists try to present is a homophobia-free utopia where nobody would be stigmatized by his sexual orientation or so-called deviant behaviors, and everyone successfully finds a same-sex soul mate at the end of story.

Just because it is a fantasy so far away from the reality, women find themselves are able to speculate and experience another kind of romance distantly and safely, without being threatened to their social life or gender identity. "Not surprisingly, therefore, most considerations of the phenomenon continue to categorize readers of boy-love *manga* as a group of 'straight' women" (Wood, 2006, p. 396-397). In fact, the worldwide consumption of men's homosexual romance (BL *manga* in the East while slash fictions in the West) assumes a cross-cultural dissatisfaction with the fantasies offered by the dominant heterosexual culture (Wood, 2006). In consequence it should be avoided to examine the issue through the lens of heterosexist, as McLelland points out,

“the expectation that in an ideal world women would prefer to fantasize about love between men and women is itself a patriarchal or at least a heterosexist assumption” (McLelland, 2000a, p. 289).

Although Wood argues the transnational BL readership signifies a global counterpublic to the heterosexist romance readings that reinforce the gender status quo, it seems that intervention perceived from feminism is minor in Japan. After investigating many Japanese YAOI-orientated websites, McLelland (2001) contends most of them “do not engage with the political rhetoric that characterizes many YAOI sites in English” (para. 24). He notes none of those who publish BL fanwork or comment on the sites refer the fantasy derived from BL genre to Freud’s psychosexual theory or Western feminist perspective, nor do they apply Western terminology such as patriarchy or homophobia to describe their interests (2000a, p. 287), even though their readership can be understood as a typical feminist strategy that deconstructs masculine identity and authority. Instead, they tend to emphasize on the fantasy and entertainment value of BL stories and illustrations (McLelland, 2001).

Consistent with his finding, the study reveals Chinese readers, as same as their Japanese fellows, admit they read BL *manga* simply because they like the themes. They are obsessed with portraits of cute and beautiful young men and feel sympathetic of the pure and transgressive homosexual attraction between them, despite at the heart of these same-sex romance stories still lays the heteronormative idea that relationship is established on the basis of differences.

To this extent, McLelland argues BL fans share a lot in common with Western slash fiction fans, just as both BL contents and slash texts that were “most amenable to feminist

readings were seldom written by women expressing feminist identities” (Jenkins, 1992, as cited in McLelland, 2000a, p. 287). Interestingly enough, homophobia issue among fans of slash fiction is still under heat debate, since many slash writers tend to emphasize their protagonists are “most decidedly straight men who cannot help but be sexually attracted to one another because of their shared experiences and abiding trust”, while other fans doubt such denial of gay identity sounds like a sign of homophobic (Green et al., 1998, p. 22-24). Though such phenomenon can be hardly observed in BL fans community, it could be advantageous to be cautious with the diverse attitudes of fans over homophobia issues while designing studies in the future.

The global popularity of BL *manga* is realized upon the acceptance of a serial of shared patterns and themes, including the indistinctive age difference between partners, the androgynous looking of characters, and the *seme-uke* dichotomy. Besides, it requires audience to be familiar and comfortable with some basic skills of reading Japanese *manga*. For example, all the texts, including speech bubbles, words and sound effects, should be read from right to left. Most BL *manga* involve a large volume of imagistic reading practice that can trigger discourse by sharing illustrations rather than words. On the other hand, “the concatenation of texts has also established a certain degree of shared terminology among all language groups” (Wood, 2006, p. 405). Terms like YAOI, *shoonenai*, *doujinshi*, *uke*, *seme*, and *bishonen* emerge and become part of the collective jargon of this particular culture. They are deployed as an efficient tool to bring members together and stay coherent, but also render problematic interpretations while definitions of the terms are inconsistent. A typical sample found in this study is fans in Eastern countries tend to address the whole concept of Japanese style homoerotic romance with the term

“boy-love” while Western scholars apply “YAOI” for the same concept. However, for Easterners YAOI is generally used to identify BL *manga* with explicit bed scenes, which to some extent is closer to describe gay pornography. Establishing universal definitions to explain terminologies used in BL fandom studies is thus very necessary and it will facilitate the conjuncture of Eastern and Western academic criteria.

It should be aware that most literatures about BL *manga* rely overwhelmingly on mass media investigation, industry reports or interviews with artists and publishers to examine this particular cultural artifact. Nevertheless it should not ignore the role played by the fans in the process of global circulation in order to obtain a complete picture about what is the core value of BL culture, how and why it becomes such a popular genre among young women, and how audiences within diverse cultural contexts interpret and contribute meaning and understanding to the genre. Follow-up studies are recommended to further explore position of readers in the culture and to verify findings of this study.

However, special attention is needed while considering choosing an appropriate methodology and designing the entire research. Because not everyone reads and understands BL *manga* in the same way, as well as the fantasies generated are always unpredictable, it is recommended to “consider the growing global readership for boy-love *manga* as a counterpublic that establishes discursive connections between strangers, reflecting their intimate engagements with texts and their differing subjective and cultural contexts for reading boy-love *manga*” (Wood, 2006, p. 404-405). In fact, since readership of boy-love *manga* is generally becoming part of a visual culture favored by young women, borrowing and synthesizing methodologies from studies on popular culture, media effects and women study would probably facilitate studies on BL genre and its fandom.

APPENDIX

Questionnaire: Your understanding and attitudes of BL *manga*

Part I: Personal information

1. Your age is ()

(Please quit the survey if you are not eighteen years old, thanks.)

2. (single choice) Have you ever read BL/boy's love/YAOI/DANMEI*/*doujinshi* and do they make some kind of sense to you?

- Yes
- No

* DANMEI is a Chinese pronunciation of BL.

3. (single choice) Where is the area for your long-term residence?

- China Mainland
- Hongkong, Macau, or Taiwan
- Japan
- Other Asian countries
- Western countries
- Other ()

4. (single choice) What is your current gender category?

- Female
- Male

5. (single choice) What is your current sex orientation?

- Heterosexual
- Homosexual

- Bisexual
 - Transgender
 - Not clear
6. (single choice) What is your current marital status?
- Single
 - Have heterosexual partner(s)
 - Have homosexual partner(s)
 - Have both heterosexual partner(s) and homosexual partner(s)

Part II: Reading preferences of BL *manga*

7. (multiple choices) What channel you choose to access BL/boy's love/YAOI/DANMEI/*doujinshi manga*?
- Book
 - Magazine
 - Internet
 - Other ()
8. How long have you been exposed to BL/boy's love/YAOI/DANMEI/*doujinshi manga*?
- () years
9. (single choice) In the following statement, which one explains the relation between BL and YAOI in the most precise way?

- Definition of BL is as same as YAOI. They both describe homosexual attraction between beautiful young boys. Such description can be either emotional or sex explicit.
- BL emphasizes on describing emotional homosexual attraction between beautiful young boys, while YAOI is more sex explicit.
- The category of BL is larger than YAOI. The former can be used to identify any sort of stories and illustrations highlighting male homosexuality of beautiful boys, while the latter is used to specify the sex explicit scenes.
- Other ()

Please indicate your attitudes of the following situation.

- Very agree
- Agree
- Does not matter
- Disagree
- Very disagree

10. The purpose for me to read BL/boy's love/YAOI/DANMEI/*doujinshi manga* is:

- To kill time
- For entertainment
- To appreciate the art
- To enrich my understanding of gay men
- To find a topic that I can share with others

11. Usually when I am reading the *manga* I:

- Have no trouble with the order of pages and conversations.
- Have no trouble in interpreting traditional Chinese subtitle.
- Have no trouble in interpreting simplified Chinese subtitle.
- Have no trouble in interpreting Japanese texts.
- Have no trouble in appreciating the lead characters.
- Have no trouble in appreciating the narrative plots.

12. I like to read BL/boy's love/YAOI/DANMEI/*doujinshi manga* because:

- I don't like female characters in common *manga*.
- I don't like male characters in common *manga*.
- I don't like straight women in reality.
- I don't like straight men in reality.
- I don't like lesbian women in reality.
- I don't like gay men in reality.
- I want to escape from the role I have been assigned in my social life (e.g. do not need to think about my role as a woman, a wife or a mother).
- Two cute/beautiful men are better than one.
- I am curious with the emotional attachment between gay men.
- I am curious with the sex action between gay men.
- The love between gay men is superior to the love between heterosexual couples.
- I feel sympathetic with gay men.

- Features of characters in BL/boy's love/YAOI/DANMEI/*doujinshi manga* are perfect.
- Features of male depicted in BL/boy's love/YAOI/DANMEI/*doujinshi manga* are more attractive than those in the real life.
- Personalities of male depicted in BL/boy's love/YAOI/DANMEI/*doujinshi manga* are more attractive than those in the real life.

Please indicate your attitudes of the following situation.

- Very like
- Like
- No comments
- Dislike
- Very dislike

13. My attitudes towards features and personalities of the lead characters

- *seme** character with masculine appearance and traits
- *uke*** character with masculine appearance and traits
- *seme* character with feminine appearance and traits
- *uke* character with feminine appearance and traits

**seme* is a jargon used among BL fans to identify the active role within homosexual relations. It is equivalent to the “top” role in sex intercourse between gay men.

***uke* is a jargon used among BL fans to identify the passive role within homosexual relations. It is equivalent to the “bottom” role in sex intercourse between gay men.

14. My attitudes towards the age setting of the lead characters

- The age of the *seme* should be significantly older than the *uke*, or the *seme* should be more senior than the *uke*.
- The age of the *uke* should be significantly older than the *seme*, or the *uke* should be more senior than the *seme*.
- They are close in age and experiences.

15. My attitudes towards the relationships between characters

- Both *seme* and *uke* are dominant in the relationship.
- The *seme* is dominant while the *uke* is subordinate.
- The *seme* is subordinate while the *uke* is dominant.
- Both *seme* and *uke* are subordinate in the relationship.
- No matter what kind of roles they play, the relationship is shared equally.

16. My attitudes towards the following description in BL/boy's

love/YAOI/DANMEI/*doujinshi* manga

- Minor *uke* has sex with non-relative adult *seme*.
- Minor *uke* has sex with relative adult *seme*.
- Minor *seme* has sex with non-relative adult *uke*.
- Minor *seme* has sex with relative adult *uke*.
- Minor *seme* has sex with non-relative minor *uke*.

- Love triangle - within a certain relationship one character has an affair with another male character.
- Love triangle - within a certain relationship one character has an affair with another female character.
- Same-sex romance between a teacher and a student
- Stories of incest
- Description of sado-masochism
- Description of other deviant sexual behaviors and sexual perversions, such as exhibitionism, stalking, voyeurism, transvestitism and necrophilia

17. (single choice) For BL/boy's love/YAOI/DANMEI/*doujinshi manga* I read, it appears to me that:

- Narrative plots are more important than the art style.
- The art style is more important than narrative plots.
- Plots and art are equally important.
- I have no requirement.

18. (single choice) My favorite component of BL/boy's love/YAOI/DANMEI/*doujinshi manga* is:

- The detailed portraits of sensational attraction
- The description of sex
- Both sensational attraction and the description of sex
- I have no requirement.

Please indicate your attitudes of the following situation.

- Very agree
- Agree
- Does not matter
- Disagree
- Very disagree

19. I would like to reveal my obsession of BL/boy's love/YAOI/DANMEI/*doujinshi manga* to the following groups of people:

- Parent
- Sibling
- Classmate/Colleague
- Close Friend
- Partner/Spouse
- Producer and Editor of BL Productions
- Peer
- Anti-BL Individual
- Stranger

20. After reading BL/boy's love/YAOI/DANMEI/*doujinshi manga*, I believe:

- The genre reflects the real life of LGBT people.
- Male homosexuality in the *manga* is acceptable.
- Male homosexuality in the reality is acceptable.
- Sado-masochism among homosexuals in the *manga* is acceptable.
- Sado-masochism among homosexuals in the reality is acceptable.
- Sex violence among homosexuals in the *manga* is acceptable.

- Sex violence among homosexuals in the reality is acceptable.
- Pedophilia in the manga is acceptable.
- Pedophilia in the reality is acceptable.
- Incest among homosexuals in the manga is acceptable.
- Incest among homosexuals in the reality is acceptable.
- The character in the *manga* is enviable.
- I want to become a certain character in the *manga*.
- My understanding of gay men is enriched and I feel more comfortable with their behaviors.
- My sex orientation might have been changed.
- My sex fantasy has been fulfilled.

Part III: Reading preferences of lesbian *manga*

21. (single choice) Have you ever read *manga* highlighting lesbians and lesbian relationships?

- Yes
- No

If you choose “Yes” please go to the next item. Otherwise please go to item #23.

Please indicate your attitudes of the following situation.

- Very agree
- Agree
- Does not matter

- Disagree
- Very disagree

22. After reading lesbian *manga*, I believe:

- Female homosexuality in the *manga* is acceptable.
- Female homosexuality in the reality is acceptable.
- My understanding of lesbian women is enriched and I feel more comfortable with their behaviors.
- The character in the *manga* is enviable.
- I want to become a certain character in the *manga*.
- My sex orientation might have been changed.
- My sex fantasy has been fulfilled.

Part IV: Fantasy-reality transition

Please indicate your attitudes of the following situation.

- Yes, always.
- Yes, occasionally.
- No.
- Not sure.

23. Have you fantasized of the homosexuality of those you met in the social life, if they are:

- Men who are not close with you and their sex orientation is unknown
- Men who are close with you and their sex orientation is unknown

- Men who are not close with you and their sex orientation is known as heterosexual
- Men who are close with you and their sex orientation is known as heterosexual

24. Have you fantasized of the homosexual activities of those you met in the social life, if they are:

- Men who are not close with you and their sex orientation is unknown
- Men who are close with you and their sex orientation is unknown
- Men who are not close with you and their sex orientation is known as heterosexual
- Men who are close with you and their sex orientation is known as heterosexual
- Men who are not close with you and their sex orientation is known as homosexual
- Men who are close with you and their sex orientation is known as homosexual

25. (single choice) Would you like to make friends with homosexuals who are of the opposite gender (e.g. women make friends with gay men, men make friends with lesbian women.)?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

26. (single choice) Would you like to choose an individual who are homosexual of the opposite gender as your lifetime partner (e.g. women choose gay men, men choose lesbian women.)?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

NOTES

¹ See Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slash_fiction#Terminology

² A comprehensive photographic survey of the rooms of Japanese youth living in and around Tokyo in the late 1980s and early 1990s confirms that Miyazaki's room, stuffed with a large collection of *manga*, books, and videos, was in fact fairly typical. K. Tsuzuki, ed., *Tokyo Style* (Tokyo: Kyoto Shoin, 1993, as cited in Kinsella, 1998, p. 308).

³ *Otaku*, which translates to the English term "nerd", was a slang term used by amateur *manga* artists and fans themselves in the 1980s to describe "weirdos" (*henjin*). The original meaning of *otaku* is "your home" and, by association, "you," "yours," and "home." The slang term *otaku* is witty reference both to someone who is not accustomed to close friendships and therefore tries to communicate with peers using this distant and overly formal form of address, and to someone who spends most of his or her time alone at home (Kinsella, 1998, p. 310 - 311).

⁴ A Google search for the word YAOI in May 2006 produced 3,740,000 English, 639,000 Spanish, 181,000 Italian, 41,200 Chinese, and 24,500 Korean web page results. When a YAOI search was conducted in the Korean alphabet, a Google search yielded about 1,200,000 web pages in Korean. In addition, many young female users of MySpace.com, a popular Internet community site in the United States, list YAOI as one of their areas of interest. There is also a growing international market for commercial YAOI products online via Amazon.com, eBay, and other Internet book dealers (McLelland & Yoo, 2007).

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