



LUND UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Social Sciences

Graduate School

Master of Science in Social Studies of Gender

Major: Sociology

Course: SIMV07

Term: Spring 2017

Supervisor: Charalambos Demetriou

Resistance and Compromise under Power Structures of Sexuality: A Case Study on Real Person Slash Fans in China

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Abstract

RPS (Real Person Slash) refers to the fandom in which female fans form homoerotic fantasies based on two real men such as actors, politicians and historical figures. This paper tries to see this group of women under power structures of sexuality in China and how such structures influence their fan practices. Through online observations, group discussion and in-depth interviews with 16 fans in total, I argue that Chinese RPS fans' practices could be understood in both resistance and compromise to the current power structures of sexuality in China. These fans on one hand show their resistance to the traditional gender norms by expressing desires and creating alternative masculinities; while on the other hand they compromise in a way in which they regulate their fantasies within a certain place to prevent themselves as well as the real persons involved in the RPS fandom being judged by the dominant social norms. This paper hopes to foreground an indigenous discussion on Chinese slash fan communities under the power structures of sexuality.

Keywords: RPS, real person slash, China, fandom, sexuality, power structures

Acknowledgements

I gained a lot of support from many people through the process of doing this master thesis. Without them, this project would never be finished.

First of all, I would like to show my gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Chares Demetriou for his kind supervision and suggestion through the whole process.

Secondly, great appreciation goes to all my interviewees who trusted and shared their life stories with me. I want to show my thankfulness to all KG/GK fans who together created this lovely community.

I also want to thank my colleagues and friends Qian Ding, Fredrik Eklund, Shangchanhui Feng, Wai Ling Mak, Ling Tang, Lucia Amaranta Thomposon, Salla Turunen, Lu Zhang and Zhiyin Zhang. Thank you for all the warm supporting and great suggestions to me.

Finally, I want to thank my mum for her forever love and support.

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List of Abbreviations

ABO	Alpha, Beta, Omega (a kind of slash fiction)
ACG	Animation, comic and game
AO3	Archive of Our Own
BL	Boys' love
ICTs	Information and communication technology
KG/GK	<i>Kai/Ge</i> or <i>Ge/Kai</i>
<i>K/S</i>	<i>Kirk/Spock</i>
LGBTQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer
OOC	Out of character
RPS	Real person slash

1. Introduction

1.1. *Fujoshi*, Slash Fan and Real Person Slash

‘I am *fujoshi* if you are asking me in general; I am KG/GK slash fan if you are asking me in specific fandom. I don’t think the terms bother me in identifying who I am. They just mean differently.’

--Interviewee F, *fujoshi* for 8 years, KG/GK fan since November 2016

Fujoshi is a Japanese term occurred in 1970s describing women who create and consume BL (Boys’ Love) products including ‘commercially published original manga, novels, animation, video games, and fan-produced *dōjinshi* (self-published writings and drawings)’ (Zhang, 2016, p.249) which mainly deal with the romantic and erotic relationship between two pretty boys (Galbraith, 2011; Jacobs, 2016; Louie, 2012; McLelland, 2005). As *fujoshi* could be literally translated to ‘rotten girls’, it also embeds a negative image of the public on this group of women, regarding what they like is actually ‘no climax, no punchline, no meaning’ (Zhang, 2016, p.249). Meanwhile, there is a similar group of women existing in western societies: slash fans. Apart from the language difference between these two terms, slash fans are referring to a narrowed group of women who mainly have their fantasies derived from non-BL products such as *Star Trek*. The word ‘slash’ derives from the label ‘/’ indicating the paired couple in fantasy, such as *Sherlock Holmes/John Watson* and *Harry Potter/Draco Malfoy*. That is to say, slash fans are actually a subgroup of both fan and *fujoshi*, who imagine ‘same-sex romantic paring’ (Mazar, 2006, p.1147) based on the original male characters who are not necessarily homosexual. Traditionally, slash fans mainly have their fantasies on novels and TV-series, and they could only share their slash fiction in a covert way (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Coppa, 2006).

Because of the development of Internet in 1990s, *fujoshi* culture gradually entered into China and later Chinese *fujoshi* tended to become a large creation and consumption group (Zhang, 2016). On the other hand, the Internet also helps to

connect western and eastern culture in a way that Chinese *fujoshi* are becoming more and more familiar with slash genre which is also increasing its diversity under virtual influence. Take one of the most famous English-based archive nowadays AO3 (Archive of Our Own) as example. With millions of users registered, millions of works uploaded and over 20,000 fandoms involved, one could easily find any fandom she¹ interested in. Searching keywords by Chinese in AO3 could sometimes result to some slash fiction written in Chinese or English ones based on Chinese characters. This kind of variety in slash fiction could also be taken as a positive result under the age of Internet. As argued by some scholars (Busse & Hellekson, 2006; Coppa, 2006), the transition of slash fandom since 1990s creates spaces for some subcultures in slash genre to develop as people tend to have a freer online place to discuss any minor idea with fans all over the world. Furthermore, this increasing diversity also makes what used to be a taboo in slash genre visible and even popular.

RPS (real person slash) is apparently one of these taboos. RPS is a slash fandom based on the interactions between two real males, usually famous people². As slash genre often involves certain erotic description, this kind of fandom is criticized by some slash fans as over objectifying real people; while RPS fans defend themselves as rational that they clearly know the performativity of the public figures and their being partly real and fictional (McGee, 2005). Therefore, some of the RPS fans think they are not different from other slash fans as they actually regard these real persons as created characters that are exactly the same with those occurring in fiction and TV series (Busse, 2006; McGee, 2005).

1.2. Aim and Research Question

Many previous studies suggested that slash fiction could be regarded as a way in which women try to fulfill their imagination on equal romantic relationship under the reality where they could not have, thus it is both a sign of women's resistance to gender norms and an expression of desire (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Penley, 1997;

¹ Here I use 'she' to refer fans who using AO3. As AO3 is a fan archive mainly composed slash fiction, I would like to follow the previous scholars' idea on slash fiction as products 'by women and for women'.

² More subdivision under RPS could be found on AO3 under the category 'Celebrities & Real People': https://archiveofourown.org/media/Celebrities%20*a%20Real%20People/fandoms

Russ, 2014). This notion would cause more discussions when it comes to Chinese society, which has a rather different social and cultural background comparing to western ones. In nowadays Chinese society, talking about sex openly is still oppressed and regarded as less moral, and the situation for women is even more severe as they would be considered as not acting properly (Farrer, 2006). On the other hand, although homosexuality is decriminalized in 1997 and later is not an illness in 2001, it is still viewed as unfilial and abnormal by the public as many Chinese people still directly link heterosexuality to marriage and reproduction, which are considered as a must in their life (Kam, 2013; Li, 2006; Pan, 2006; Wong, 2015). As a result, Chinese *fujoshi* are being double stigmatized because of their expression of sex and their interest in homoerotic relationships. Besides, Chinese government's ban on online BL-related erotic products even worsened the situation for Chinese *fujoshi* (Jacobs, 2016).

As specific to Chinese RPS fans who build up their communities mainly online, there are also differences between them and western ones. Among Chinese RPS fans, there is a famous saying that 'keep the fandom within circle, do not disturb the real person (in Chinese 圈地自萌, 勿扰正主)', which is barely observed among western slash fan or mentioned by scholars previously discussed RPS fandom. This saying could be regarded as a self-regulation among fan communities to pervert fandom from overexpressing to the public. However, no one really knows how it was firstly proposed. Taken the nowadays situation in China where homosexuality is still not largely accepted, it is reasonable to doubt whether this regulation is related to the social norms on homosexuality.

Therefore, this study aims to take Chinese RPS fans as a specific case to investigate this group of women's behavior under the power structures of sexuality. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) How could Chinese RPS fans' practices be understood as a resistance under the power structures of sexuality?
- 2) How is the regulation 'keep the fandoms within circle, do not disturb the real person' influenced by the gender norms?

By asking these two questions, I aim to have a deeper understanding on Chinese RPS fans' practices from a feminist perspective. The first question is essential for me to build up this kind of understanding based on the power structures of sexuality, especially together with the Chinese local context. While the second question takes the famous regulation within Chinese fan community, which is barely discussed in previous studies, as a local example to discuss one specific fan practice in China in order to have an investigation one step further.

1.3. Structure of the Study

In order to answer the above research questions, this study is built up in the following structure. Chapter two begins with outlining the previous researches on slash fiction and Chinese slash fans. Following this, theoretical framework will be built on a Foucauldian approach and Butler's queer theory in conceptualizing power structures of sexuality and the space for resistance, with discussion on Chinese local contexts as well. Some emphases on the influence of the Internet and its relationship with feminism will also be elaborated in this chapter. Chapter three focuses on the methodological concerns including the choices of study group, doing netnography as an outsider within and the process of conducting the research. At the end of this study, chapter four analyzes the data gained from the field and forms a discussion on the Chinese RPS fans' resistance as well as the compromise to the power structures. These perspectives could be observed through their expression of sexual desire and eagerness for equal romantic relationship, creating spaces for alternative masculinities and strict practicing of the regulation 'keep the fandoms within circle, do not disturb the real person' as both respect and compromise.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This part is divided into three sections. In the first section, I would have a review on previous studies on slash fiction and Chinese Slash fans in order to find the research gap that this study could fill in and have a contribution on. In the second section, I would like to form a discussion on the theoretical framework based on power structures of sexuality. This presentation of theoretical framework would also combine Chinese current social norms on women's sexual expression and homosexuality to have a deeper analysis on Chinese RPS fans. Since Chinese RPS fans' community is developing more and more online, some studies on cyberspace's influence and feminism based on the Internet would also be added into discussion in the last section of this part.

2.1. Slash fiction and Chinese Slash Fans

2.1.1. Slash fiction: Debates and Development

Slash genre was generally regarded as a kind of fan fiction first appeared in early 1970s when the pairing *Kirk/Spock* from *Star Trek* is viewed as its starting point, and it later caught many scholars' attention in 1980s. The researches on slash fiction and slash genre since then, mainly based on English speaking areas, have a large scope of focus and cover many disciplines including anthropology, cultural studies, psychology and law (Hellekson & Busse, 2014; Lothian, Busse, & Reid, 2007). Among these studies on early stage which largely took *K/S* as study sample, debates on how slash fiction should be regarded as became a central topic. Russ (2014, p.82) argues that slash fiction is a kind of 'pornography by women for women' where women could use the male characters to express, share and also discuss their sexual fantasies which are limited in a heterosexual reality in 1980s. In doing so, women are able to have a space 'to create images of male bodies as objects of desires', which is exactly opposite to the traditional pornography created by men (Russ, 2014, p.90). However, Jenkins (1992) disagrees with Russ's idea in defining slash fiction as pornography. Rather, he argues that instead of being a sexual expression of women, slash fiction also focuses on emotional intimacy and reconstruction of male characters which are not presented in pornography, thus

‘represents a reaction against the construction of male sexuality on television and in pornography’ (Jenkins, 1992, p.194). Later some scholars such as Driscoll (2006) tend to form an understanding on slash fiction based on the combination of pornography and romance. According to Driscoll (2006, p.94), slash fiction actually severs as a platform to present ‘a commentary on the interpenetration of romance and porn’ and this kind of ‘romance of pornography’ on one hand shows the ‘truth of sex by reducing the sex/gender system to a currency of exposure’ and on the other hand moves the readers by its ‘closed fantasy system’. Hence, slash fiction is actually a combination of pornography and romance in which both sex scene and emotional intimacy are paid equal attention to. This understanding of slash fiction also leads to another major debate among scholars on the reason why women started slash fiction.

In analyzing different mechanisms as driving forces for women to enter slash genre, there are varied approaches and standpoints. Both the work by Lamb and Veith (2014) and Russ (2014) took a feminist approach to discuss women’s increasing agency and power in writing and reading slash fiction. They suggest that engaging in slash genre is actually a way for women to express their oppressed sexual desire as well as their eagerness for gender equality under the patriarchal society in 1980s (Lamb & Veith, 2014; Russ, 2014). On the other hand, by taking a cultural approach and being a complete outsider to do an ethnography, Bacon-Smith (1992) discussed the influence of the characters from the original fiction, from which the slash fiction derived. According to Bacon-Smith (1992), one reason for women to choose to both write and read slash fiction is the absence of female character in visual media such as film and TV shows in 1980s. As the women shown in visual media are either following a traditional gender role or being independence to some extent but without a sexual relationship, it is difficult for women to write or to imagine an equal romantic relationship with a ‘believable female heroes’ (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p.242). Therefore, at least in 1980s when Bacon-Smith did her fieldwork, social norms on women and the visual media had a relatively large influence on women’s imagination on intimacy and romantic relationships. Besides, departing from a psychoanalytic perspective and being both a researcher and a fan

of *K/S*, Penley (1994) mainly analyzed how women form imagination in slash fiction. As suggested by Penley (1994), slash fans, mostly heterosexual women, could have a diverse identification and fantasy both on enjoying the love between two men and involving in the love by imagining being one of them. In other words, in slash fiction, women could have a dual identity as being both a pure observer and a participator. From the above studies, we can witness a large scope of study area in an early stage on slash genre where scholars tried to form a rather general understanding on slash fiction and slash fans.

Additionally, some studies are also done to discuss the slash genre under the influence of the Internet where fans keep changing their practices and scholars tend to switch to more specific areas in slash genre. As more and more fan communities built up their own network based online, one significant change in slash genre under such generation is the way of sharing fiction and fantasies. Before 1990s, slash fans could only use mail to send fanzines or to hold meetings in small scale; but later fans could create their online identity by using platforms such as LiveJournal.com to share their fantasies with fans all over the world (of course this should and could only happen under the condition that they share the same language) (Coppa, 2006). As a result, more topics are brought up into discussions while scholars also tend to focus on different areas of slash genre, from fan practices to the content of the fandom, and from ethical considerations to queer theory. For instance, McGee (2005) brought RPS fandom, which used to and still to some extent be regarded as taboo in slash fandom, into discussion in which she analyzed different arguments from fans who in favor of it and those who are against to it, where they either regard RPS as similar to other slash fiction or take it as an offence to real persons. As public figures are shown to us more and more frequently in the mass media, their characteristics are presented in many angles, thus people may have more clues on how celebrities really are. However, McGee (2005) also brought further questions on how real the celebrities are and where the line between fictional figures and the celebrities is. Therefore, how people should regard RPS fandom is still in question. On the other hand, Busse (2006) discussed how fans interact with each other in virtual communities with a comparison to the RPS fandom. Echoes McGee's (2005)

notion on RPS fandom's pairing up the 'real persons' such as actors and celebrities who are also considered as made-up characters, Busse (2006) argues that fans are actually also making up their personas shown online to have interaction with others. Moreover, this kind of interaction is developing within online fan communities together with more notions of Big Name Fan discourses, where certain fans with more fame are being admired both because of their work and online personas within the whole community (Busse, 2006). Busse later did another research with Lothian by using a queer lens to see how male bodies are being imagined and presented in slash fiction (Busse & Lothian, 2009). In their study, they focused "'genderfuck' fiction' (Busse & Lothian, 2009, p.105), in which male bodies are temporarily changed into female ones and thus some transgender and feminist politics are brought into discussion. By using such way of writing slash fiction, women are actually presenting their personal politics in a minor way and use the characters in the fiction to argue for themselves.

From the previous studies discussed above, we can observe a trend in slash fiction studies that scholars start focusing more and more detailed domains in slash genre. Especially under the influence of the Internet, subgroups used to be unknown within slash genre such as RSP and 'genderfuck' fiction start to be shed light on to more fans within the community. As discussed above, nevertheless, many current researches on slash fiction are still having a strong focus on English speaking areas and not paying enough attentions to others. One reason for this situation may result from the different use of language, both in fiction and in academia, in western and Asian societies. For instance, when searching different keywords for studies in English, 'slash fiction' mostly directs to large number of works related to western slash while 'Boys' Love (BL)', 'yaoi' and '*fujoshi*' lead to several Japanese and Chinese ones. Therefore, this study also wishes to serve as an insight to the Chinese slash fan community to fill in the current gap.

2.1.2. The Chinese Slash Fans

Apart from the studies based on western societies that have been discussed above, there is also an increasing number of researches focusing on Chinese slash fandom published in recent years, from *fujoshi* in general to specific fandom

practices. Similar to the use of 'slash' in describing this genre in western context, the Japanese term *yaoi*, which is 'an acronym for *yamanashi*, *ochinashi*, *iminashi* (no climax, no punchline, no meaning)' is used to refer to the Japanese BL fandom (Zhang, 2016, p.249). Such fandom emerged in Japan in 1970s, the same time as slash fiction, and later has its increasing influence in Chinese society since 1990s. In researching on the reasons why *yaoi* genre became more and more popular in Chinese society, several scholars took a historical perspective in analyzing this trend (Martin, 2012; Wang, 2011). In Asian context, BL genre could be traced back to Japanese girls' comics where the romance between boys and girls are presented and hence slash fiction from this tradition could also be understood as a way to express a romantic imagination with a focus on both romantic love and sex scene (Martin, 2012; Wang, 2011). Wang (2011, p.322) suggested that this fantasy could be understood as young women's 'desire to share the pleasure produced by phallus' where male bodies are being taken 'as the object of their desire'. From this perspective, Chinese *fujoshi* also shares some similarities with western slash fans under a patriarchal society where embedded power structures of sexuality.

This heterosexual romantic origin, nevertheless, also have a further influence on implying heteronormativity to BL genre where male characters are usually assigned a binary role of either being '*seme*' (top) or '*uke*' (bottom) (Wang, 2011, p.321) when having sex, thus Asian *fujoshi* are sometimes also being blamed by gay communities 'as naïve straight women appropriating queer imagery for their own romantic and sexual fantasies' (Martin, 2012, p.369). This notion is further developed by Zhang (2016, p.253) that she conceptualized Chinese *fujoshi*'s entering to slash genre because of 'voyeurism', by which she mainly showed straight women's curiosities on knowing gay's life. Therefore, Zhang (2016, p.263) argued that there are dangers in which slash genre may on one hand 'promote fetishizing gay sex while disavowing fan readers' own heterosexual privileges' and on the other hand increase 'objectifying gay men as a sexual spectacle' that may 'result in reinforcing mainstream stereotypes of gay community members'. Apart from the over objectifying gay communities, the focus on male characters' appearance of being young, good-looking is another element causes criticism

(Jacobs, 2016; Wang, 2011). No matter being *seme* or *uke*, all the male bodies and personas tend to follow a formula of beautiful masculinity in BL products. However, Jacobs (2016, p.368) witness a changing trend within Chinese *fujoshi* where a ‘loser type’ of imperfect body such as being older and ‘mediocre-looking’. This transformation of preference for male characters within *fujoshi* community both shows new possibilities on masculinities and opens more spaces for abnormalities and illness in slash fiction (Jacobs, 2016). Therefore, how male characters are presented in slash fiction and its relation to power structures of sexuality also become focuses in this study.

Besides, Jacobs (2016) also discussed some resistance by Chinese *fujoshi* to government restriction in the current Chinese society. Since the Chinese government regard BL fiction having ‘evil impact on youth’ (Jacobs, 2016, p.367) and strictly prohibit any sexual content published online, Chinese *fujoshi* is actually facing a dual discrimination under such power structures of sexuality: on one hand, they are regarded as deviant of expressing too much sexual desire; and on the other hand, they are viewed as abnormal to have a fantasy on homosexuality which is already being taken as abnormal in the society. According to Yi (2013), several Chinese *fujoshi* were even arrested by the police in 2011 because of spreading too much BL content online. Later online surveillance became more severe and some websites would automatically delete posts containing sensitive or sexual content. Thus, in order to avoid being blocked, Chinese *fujoshi* have to take strategies such as using ‘XXOO’ to represent sex scenes and make all words into a picture to prevent being auto-checked (Jacobs, 2016, p.368). Therefore, Chinese *fujoshi*’s practices is actually undergoing a transformation in all kinds and their resistance to power is also shown in varied perspectives. Hence, how Chinese *fujoshi* could be linked to feminism and how their practices could be understood under the power structures of sexuality is still worth researching.

Apart from the above studies focusing on Chinese *fujoshi* in general, there are also several researches dig deep into some specific topics. However, as the main focus group, Chinese RPS fan does not cause a huge concern in academia. Recently in 2017, by using the concept of media reflexivity, Gong (2017) published a study

on Chinese RPS fans who mainly have fantasies on male European football players, which is the only English journal article focusing on Chinese RPS fandom. Taking the nowadays Chinese political economy into consideration, Gong (2017, p.179) regarded these ‘urban, salaried middle-class, Chinese slash football fans’ using this football RPS fandom to practice a kind of class formation where they showed their rationality on drawing the line between reality and fantasy that differs them from other fan communities such as J-pop and K-pop fans. These fans’ preference on white strong male bodies, nevertheless, also reflect a huge influence of mainstream media where certain masculinities are being more emphasized and the reflexivity of these Chinese football RPS fans are actually ‘situated in and restricted by the constraints of the discursive and ideological environment they claim to have overcome’ (Gong, 2017, p.181). Therefore, based on the previous studies, in this research I would like to discuss Chinese RPS fans’ practices from a sociological perspective, in which I don't aim to mark their social class but rather regard them as a group of women, to see how they act under a power structures of sexuality.

2.2. Power Structures of Sexuality and Space for Resistance

As reviewed in the previous section, the power structures of sexuality play a significant role in analyzing slash fan’ practices. Thus, in order to have a more comprehensive understanding on Chinese RPS fan, it is essential to conceptualize the power structures together with Chinese local social context. Foucauldian approach could then serve as an entry point in discussing this issue. Foucault (1990) took a historical perspective in analyzing the formation of discourse of sex, through which he argued that sexual behavior is linked with language and later internalized into individual’s daily practices as a kind of social norms. Through confessing and later regulating sex in medical and legal ways, people got more and more knowledge on sexual behaviors and categorized them in a scientific way in which sex related to marriage and reproduction are regarded as ‘normal’ and ‘licit’ while other forms of sex and sexualities are grouped as ‘perverse’ and ‘illicit’ (Foucault, 1990, p.36-38). Hence, the distinction among sexualities under power structures emerged where a huge emphasis was put on heterosexual marriage, population and reproduction, and it later formed a ‘circular incitement’ (Foucault, 1990, p.45). As

suggested by Foucault (1990, p.48), 'it is through the isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexualities that the relations of power to sex and pleasure branched out and multiplied, measured the body, and penetrated modes of conduct'. Under such power structures where power is later practiced in detail through legislation, people tended to regulate not only themselves but also people they knew in every institution to act based on heteronormativity, which is taken as a normal way both by the 'legislative power' and 'obedient subject' (Foucault, 1990, p.85). In other words, homosexuality and women's openly talking about sexual desire, for instance, are either be illegal or viewed as abnormal. This kind of power, nevertheless, is something has its overall effect on individual's ideology formation instead of something concrete such as the government or the law. Rather, as suggested by Foucault (1990, p.92), 'the sovereignty of the state, the form of the law, [and] the over-all unity of a domination... are only the terminals forms power takes'. Therefore, in analyzing Chinese RPS fans, it is not central to discuss how Chinese government took efforts to regulate people's sexualities, but rather how these regulations imply the power structures of sexuality.

Although Foucault discussed this issue referring to the 19th century's western social context, it is able to be addressed in nowadays Chinese society as well. Historically speaking, different from the western context where sexuality could be taken as independent category, sexuality in China is usually tightly linked with and understood through other domains such as 'marriage, reproduction, health, [and] age', thus it positioned in a 'primary life cycle' which reflects 'the totality of the functions and relations between the most fundamental aspects of human activity' (Pan, 2006, p.25). Therefore, sex and sexuality in traditional Chinese society could be regarded as highly relevant to heterosexual marriage and reproduction, and women were even simply taken as tools for reproduction where their pleasure and desire for sex are totally ignored (Pan, 2006). The power structures of sexuality from Foucauldian perspective could then be observed where sex relating to marriage and reproduction are emphasized and taken as normal while other sexual desires and sex only for pleasure are given no place for mentioning. Later, this situation changed better after the introduction of one-child policy in 1981 during

which the government actively promoted knowledges on contraception and abortion in order to successfully control the population, thus people started to notice the existence of the sex for pleasure other than the one aiming for reproduction (Pan, 2006). The previous power structures of sexuality, nevertheless, are still having effects on many domains of individual's life in the current Chinese society. Domestically in heterosexual marriage, although women feel freer than before to have sex, the sexual behavior is still to some extent regulated within the marriage and some women also reported their feeling of obligated to meet their husband's sexual needs (Pan, 2006). This kind of restriction on sex and sexuality in which female chastity is highly emphasized can also be observed in Chinese adolescent education. In order to prevent dating among students, for instance, the school authorities took a strict prohibition on 'premature love' which is regarded as against 'civilized sexual morality and behavior' (Farrer, 2006, p.105). And problematically, through implying such discourse in adolescent education, boys and girls are taught differently in which boys should learn to 'understand, respect and take care of girls' while girls need to 'learn to be outspoken but proper, and keep an appropriate distance from boys' (Farrer, 2006, p.105). Through such education, not only the traditional gender roles are reproduced and reemphasized, but more importantly women's position in love, sex and desire is totally submissive. This further resulting in an unequal situation where, comparing to boys, girls are indicated to be the ones taking more responsibilities for being morally behaved and therefore are more easily judged under the power structures of sexuality. By using such discourse as regulation, youth, especially girls' sexuality and sexual desire are under sever control and this later would have influence on their attitude towards sex and sexuality when they grow up. To add more, this kind of power structures of sexuality in China to some extent also echoes Foucault's (1990) notion on the differentiation of discourse of sex where scientific discussion on sex is allowed while expression on sexual desire is taken as deviant.

Homosexuality in Chinese society, on the other hand, also reflects the power structures. As discussed above, heterosexual marriage is taken as a central part in individual's life in China through the history and hence it positions homosexuality,

which has nothing to do with reproduction, in a deviant place under such power relation, just as in the 19th century's western society where Foucault (1990) took for his analysis. During Maoist period, forced sodomy and sodomy with minors was taken as a form of hooliganism which faces social prejudice and criminal penalty, and this later led to a misunderstanding on all anal sex, which is a symbol of gay, as criminal (Li, 2006; Wong, 2015). Apart from these penalties, homosexuality was also defined as a mental illness under psychological discourse. It was not until 1997 did homosexuality be decriminalized and it was delisted from mental illness in 2001. However, the social status of homosexuals did not change better afterwards since homosexuality, especially anal sex between gay men, is later strongly linked with HIV/AIDS and thus the public tended to think homosexuality more immoral together with the stigmas formed previously (Wong, 2015). Therefore, homosexual in China, especially gay men, are discriminated under such stigmas. As indicated by Kam (2013), comparing to gay, lesbian in China are less obvious to the public as people tend to take the intimate expressions such as holding hands and hugs between women as symbols of their close friendship; while these intimate expressions between men are not that acceptable. This may be resulted from the social norms on gender roles where women are supposed to be tender and could be able to comfort others while men are expected to be tough. Among all these pressure, the obligation to have a heterosexual marriage still situates in the center as the formula for being filial in China is still to a large extent equals to marriage and reproduction (Wong, 2015). This kind of imperative heterosexual marriage not only reflects the power structures of sexuality in China where sexualities other than heterosexual are being marginalized, but more terribly it leads to many unfortunate families without love and sex where gay men married with innocent straight women in order to fulfill their obligation as filial sons (Wong, 2015). This kind of unethical practice was later exposed by mass media and consequently put more stigmas on the whole gay communities. Therefore, homosexual, especially gay, are still facing a lot of social prejudice in the current Chinese society.

However, just as indicated by Foucault (1990), where there is power relation, there is always resistance to the power. In discussing how to deconstruct such a

power relationship, Butler (2006) offered us a queer lens of looking at different expression of gender and sexualities. She analyzed how gender and sexuality are constructed through a heterosexual matrix which is derived from patriarchal power where the division between men and women is strongly highlighted (Butler, 2006). Within this heterosexual matrix, gender and sexuality are linked together in a way in which people tend to form their sexuality through bodily arouser based on the opposite gender; and this linkage further has its influence on the formation of masculinities and femininities by which people act according to their gender and those who are not falling into this heterosexual matrix, for instance homosexual, try to oppress their sexual desire and pass as heterosexual (Butler, 2006). By following a Foucauldian discussion, Butler (2006, p.41), nevertheless, argued that ‘sexuality is always constructed within the terms of discourse and power, where power is partially understood in terms of heterosexual and phallic cultural conventions’ and thus the heterosexual matrix is problematic in a sense that it gives no space for sexuality other than heterosexuality. In order to deconstruct such binary understanding on gender, Butler (2006) suggested that gender should be departed from sex and it is performative in the daily life. From this perspective, queer theory aims not only to show the diversities of gender and sexuality people may have; but more importantly it tries to deconstruct the power structures of sexuality by emphasizing the equal relations among different gender performance. By using Butler’s queer lens, a theoretical support in discussing the possibilities of resisting the power structures of sexuality thus exist and it is worth being used in analyzing Chinese RPS fans’ practices.

Therefore, together with the literature reviews on slash fiction and slash fans and the analysis of power structures of sexuality, it is obvious that slash fans’ practice could be understood under such power relation as some previous studies suggested that slash fans are taking slash genre as a platform to resist gender norms. Besides, the expression of sexual desire and sexuality is also worth investigating under such framework where Butler (2006, p.31) emphasized that gender is regulated to a binary relation through differentiation between masculine and feminine, which is ‘accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire’.

However, the desire shown in slash genre is not exactly the same as heterosexual desire, rather it also includes the heterosexual women's desire of voyeurism on gay men (Zhang, 2016). Thus, the slash fans' sexuality and desire from this perspective is also worth discussing from a queer perspective.

2.3. Internet and Feminism

From the previous studies on slash fiction and slash fans, the increasing influence of the Internet could be easily observed. As suggested by some scholars, the Internet contributed a lot to the transformation of both fan practice and the content of the discussions among slash fans since 1990s (Busse & Hellekson, 2006; Coppa, 2006). This kind of transformation not only helped slash fan communities grow larger and larger based online, but it also served as a platform for women to practice their agency freer under the existing power structures of sexuality. Thus, the influence of the Internet could then be discussed from a feminist perspective.

One of the most significant changes brought by the information and communication technology (ICTs) to the fan community would be their changing identity from pure consumers to 'prod-users' (Zhang, 2016, p.60). For example, Zhang (2016, p.71) took Chinese online translation communities as a case to suggest that this kind of volunteering fan practice, which 'is driven by the fans' own deliberate choice' and produce fan products for others, is on one hand showing fans' agency in actively choosing and sharing the products they like but more importantly it reflects the essential role that ICTs plays in the formation of virtual communities. This huge impact on fan communities is also discussed by Busse and Hellekson (2006) that as one subgroup of active fan products slash products are enlarging the diversity in which fiction are not the only form of fan product anymore, but others such as illustrations, fan-vids, fan-songs and photos are all expanding their space. Moreover, this kind of volunteering online fan practice also enables slash fans to learn more knowledge and skills such as editing videos, using Photoshop and proofreading (Busse & Hellekson, 2006). However, this kind of fan practice could also be related to commercialization in China. As argued by Tang (2016), some slash writers would first publish their slash fiction online to attract readers and later on they would sell these fanzines either in 'Comic Market' or ship them direct to

the buyers, during which the writers tend to run a business. In order to attract more buyers, some commercial slash writers would intentionally add more sex scenes on the selling version as these content is sensitive to post online in China (Tang, 2016). Although as Jacobs (2016) stated that there are several ways to avoid being checked online, only printing these extra sexual scenes on the commercial slash fiction are still taken as a way to both earn money and escape online surveillance as these fanzines are not officially published in the system and none of them has ISBN code (Wang, 2011). The Internet in this sense could then be regarded as a tool for gathering popularity for the commercial slash writers in China. Therefore, the influence of the Internet on Chinese slash fans remain to be further investigated as it tends to both liberate and limit their fan practices.

Besides, Internet also opens more space for discussions among slash fans. Lothian et al. (2007, p.103) used the term 'queer female space' to suggest that the discussion among slash fans online is actually creating more opportunities for women to talk about queer topics, including sex, sexualities and different fantasies, regardless of ones' status in real life. Especially under the online pseudonymous, people may feel freer, less judged and more equal to have conversations with those who are likeminded (Lothian et al., 2007). This kind of space helps women to express thoughts that they might not have chances to say in daily life, considering their social background and status in reality. Thus, the online space for slash fans just serves as a platform for them to temporally escape from the patriarchal society they live and create a utopian for themselves. This notion on queer female space could also be linked with the practicing of feminism. As discussed by Youngs (1999), one of the most essential part for women to practicing feminism is to gain the knowledge of the unequal social structure. Thus, cyberspace in this sense severs as a tool for women, whoever has access to Internet, to break the geographical limitation and learn more about knowledge in order to deconstruct the existing gender norms. Therefore, Internet plays a major role to gather women from all over the world together and voice together. Especially in recent decades where occurs a huge increasing development of online social networking such as Twitter, it becomes easier and easier than before to gather women and launch campaigns (Munro, 2013). This trend also reflects an emphasis on personal politics under the fast development of the Internet (Munro, 2013). However, Chinese slash fans

are not actually linking slash fandom with feminism, even though some of them claimed finding more equal romantic relationship within slash genre (Tang, 2016). Therefore, Tang (2016) argued that Chinese slash fans are still making a distinction between feminism as political and slash fiction as a hobby, which may result from the lack education on feminism in China.

From the analysis above, it is clear that the Internet plays an essential role in the transformation of slash fans' community formation and creation of queer female space. On the other hand, the cyberspace is also helpful for developing feminism in contemporary society, especially in recent decades. However, taking the political influence on free expression, no matter online or not, and the limited education on gender equality in China in to consideration, it is still uncertain whether Chinese slash fans' practice could be linked with feminism or not. Therefore, this study aims to fill in this gap and investigate how Chinese slash fans' online practice could be understood under the power structure of sexuality and to see whether it could be discussed from a feminist perspective.

3. Methodology

As being a both RPS fan and a researcher myself, this study aims to take Chinese RPS fans as a case to investigate their fan behavior under gender norms and how they reflect upon this. As suggested by Blommert and Jie (2010), fieldwork is highly linked with language as a way in which language not only forms how local people interact with each other but it also contributes a lot for researchers to have a better understanding on the communication and the hidden norms. This is just appropriate to use here as I, being an insider, aim more to reveal the hidden voices of some women who might not have a chance to express their ideas freely, instead of concluding a certain pattern as community behavior. Just as argued by Spivak (1988), fieldwork could help the subaltern to voice more, even though Chinese RPS fans may not necessarily be a group of subaltern, they may be regarded as a group of deviant who may also lose some voices. Therefore, fieldwork is chosen as a suitable method for this study in order to gather more deeply reflexive data. However, as reviewed in the previous section, slash fans nowadays are largely based on the Internet to form virtual communities to have a more open space to communicate with fans all over the world. This is also true with Chinese RPS fans as they took many different online discussion forums to share their fantasies (Gong, 2017; Zhang, 2016). Taken this virtual influence into consideration, I narrowed down fieldwork to use netnography (Kozinets, 2010, p.7-9), or in other term ‘virtual ethnography’ (O’Reilly, 2008, p.215-219) as a method to have a better understanding on this online group of fan. Nevertheless, taking fieldwork as a method also requires the researcher, especially me being an insider, to be highly reflexive on certain encounters such as my position the field, the ethical considerations and the power relation between the me and the researched (Blommaert & Jie, 2010; Crewe, 2014; Davies & Spencer, 2010; Eklund, 2010; O’Reilly, 2008).

Therefore, in this part I would first introduce the study group and the reason why I intentionally chose them. Later I would go through the self-reflection about the preparations and encounters before entering the field. The discussions on the

exact method of collecting data and its limitations would be involved in the final part of this section.

3.1. Study Group

Although RPS fandom is already a subgroup in slash genre, it is still a rather complex group where fans would have distinct pairings between different real persons and sometimes even have some diversities within on pairing. Therefore, it is essential to narrow down the focus to a specified group who to some extent share a few commonalities. Therefore, I chose the slash fans pairing up Chinese actor Kai Wang and Ge Hu (KG/GK fans), with whom I also share a membership, as the study group. Limited by the research scale and time, being an insider helped me to have relatively easy access to this community as well as to quickly build up a trust relationship in order to conduct my fieldwork. Additionally, there are other reasons for me to choose them that I will discuss later. Before going deeply into it, there are other important things have to be explained clearly in ahead in order not to cause confusion. The ‘/’ used here is not sharing the same meaning with the one indicating the pairing as explained before (i.e. *Sherlock Holmes/John Watson*); rather, it shows the difference on fan’s preference on who’s being the ‘top’ and the ‘bottom’. This differentiation derived from the ‘*seme*’ and ‘*uke*’ discourse in Japanese BL genre, showing who is penetrating (*seme* or top) and who is being penetrated (*uke* or bottom), which could also be considered as an implication of heteronormativity on gay’s sex (Zhang, 2016). Therefore, with KG representing Kai’s being ‘top’ and Ge’s being ‘bottom’ and GK meaning the reversed, KG/GK fans representing all fans having fantasies about Kai and Ge no matter how their sex position is being imagined.

Kai and Ge first acted together in a TV series in 2014 and later have a second collaboration in 2015, which are broadcast successionaly in autumn 2015. Thus, many fans tend to pairing up them because of the close relations they acted in these TV series since the summer of 2015. In the CCTV Spring Festival Gala 2017, they even sang a song together and made almost every Chinese in a global sense know them, and later the slash fandom between Ge and Kai is suddenly being discussed a lot both in the media and among fans. As a result, the KG/GK slash work and

discussions are both rich in amount and could be traced back to 2015, and primary materials fans took use of could even be traced back to 2014 when the first TV series was shooting.

KG/GK fans have their main community and discussions on Lofter.com, which is operated based on a blog system like Tumblr.com where fans could post with different hashtags to indicate the fandom they are discussing about. Up to April 2017, the number of participants in KG/GK fandom on Lofter.com reached over 12,000. Different from the Chinese slash fans having fantasies on European football players in Gong's (2017, p.166-167) study that they mainly have their conversations on a more open and more easily searched place like 'Baidu message board' and 'Weibo' (the Chinese version of Twitter), KG/GK fans tend to gather together in a more secret way on Lofter.com³. This preference on the platform reflects both their being more regulated of being over exposed and a more intense execution on the saying 'keep the fandom within circle, do not disturb the real person'. As a result, the KG/GK fans serve as a great example according to my research questions.

3.2. Preparations and Encounters

As a both RPS fan and a researcher, there are some preparations to be done as well as encounters to be taken into account before entering the field. The first came to how I should position myself in the field. Having this dual identity to have research on my own community, I am actually positioned as an outsider within, which is commonly adopted in studies where the researchers are also involved such as some feminist ethnographies (O'Reilly, 2008; Stacey, 1988). This position helps me to have an easier access to the researched and build trust quicker than those who are totally an outsider (Kozinets, 2010; O'Reilly, 2008). However, it would also to some extent affect my emotional feelings and even judgement during the fieldwork. Additionally, I should also mind the influence of exposing my identity of being a researcher as it would also affect the power relationship between me and my informant, especially before and during the research (O'Reilly, 2008).

³ There is one post on Baidu message board asking why there are so few fans, later some fans persuade that most KG/GK fans are based on Lofter.com. One of their reason not using neither Baidu message board nor Weibo was because these two platforms are too easy to get access and also many quarrels tend to occur there. More information in Chinese: https://tieba.baidu.com/p/4212513615?red_tag=0279189115

When preparing the post for informant recruitment, I intentionally tried to use less academic words and emphasized on the chat-like interview in order to weaken their notion on my identity of being a researcher and make them feel easier and more relaxed to participate (O'Reilly, 2008). By conducting interviews in such a way where a relatively equal relationship between the researcher and the researched is established, it is more comfortable for informant to talk more and sometimes they would even feel more powerful as they tend to have more knowledge than the researcher to certain issues (Eklund, 2010). However, as netnography is mainly taken place virtually, I usually could only contact my informant through instant text and some emoji to express my feelings, which may sometimes more easily cause misunderstanding between us than face-to-face interactions. Therefore, always having and asking the informant to provide a clear explanation are both essential in this study. Just as Blommaert and Jie (2010, p.52-56) suggested, using follow-up questions as 'for example' and 'can you explain it more in detail' could help the researcher to get a more detailed narrative of interviewees' story and avoid misinterpretation.

Apart from what has been discussed above, the ethical consideration is another concern before entering the field to do the observations. As discussed by Kozinets (2010), while doing netnography, the way in which researchers have interactions with community members makes a big difference in distinguishing netnography from online discourse analysis. Therefore, despite the fact that the virtual community does not physically exist, it is similar to conducting the traditional ethnography where researchers have to choose either to be overt or covert (O'Reilly, 2008). In the case of netnography, once I decided to be overt and to do a 'participant observation' (O'Reilly, 2008, p.150-156), I have to make the community members fully aware of my existence in the field.

3.3. Data Collection and Processing

The process of data collection includes the following steps: a pilot study, a covert observation on several openly accessible online fan sites, recruitment of interviewees and an overt netnography within KG/GK community.

In the pilot study done in May 2016, I had both an overt observation on an online discussion on how Chinese *fujoshi* reflecting on their preference and behavior, and some in-depth semi-structured interviews focusing on the reasons they entering BL genre and their agency in this fantasy. From the pilot study, I tend to gather some general ideas on Chinese *fujoshi*, which helped me to have more reflection on the previous literatures and further narrow down my topic for the present study. Later the covert observation is also conducted in January 2017 to gather more information, through which I noticed the extra attention on self-regulation in KG/GK community differing from other fan groups. Therefore, I decided them as my study group and started entering the field as an outsider within.

As discussed in the previous section, in order to make myself fully visible in the field and relax the fans' tension, I posted a recruitment announcement on Lofter.com with KG/GK tag in which I revealed my identity as both a KG/GK fan and a student from Lund University. The post was written referring to the letter of consent but with less academic wordings and after the recruitment an official letter of consent is shown to all of my informant.

Finally, I gathered 16 fans, with whom 10 individual interviews and one focus group discussion of 6 fans were conducted. All of them were done through either QQ or WeChat, two Chinese online instant messaging service as online interviews/discussions. Similar to Zhang's (2016) experience, this kind of informant-friendly online interview also allowed me, in Sweden, to carry out my research with interviewees in China, USA and UK. In order to get more detailed information about fans' personal experiences, in-depth semi-structured interviews were chosen. Because of the anonymity online per se and the different level of acceptance on exposing themselves fans have, 7 individual interviews were done through instant text; other 3 were conducted with recording through voice call; the focus group discussion was also held with recording through voice call within a chat group.

The individual interviews and group discussion are all based on one guideline but with different focuses according to each participant. The guideline covers questions concerning to the following aspects: 1) the time in and the reason enter

into BL genre and KG/GK fandom; 2) fan behavior, preference on fiction and sexual expression; 3) their views on regulation within fan community; and 4) the link between slash fandom and reality life.

On average, each individual text interview and the focus group discussion lasted for about 3.5 hours while the voice one lasted for about 1 hour each. All the interviews and discussions are in Chinese and I later transcribed and translated all the materials presented in the analysis part into English. In order to protect all my interviewee's privacy and prevent them from being recognized by other KG/GK fans, I refer them as capital letters. The list of informant is as follows:

Informant	<i>Fujoshi</i> Age	Time of Being KG/GK fan	Type of Participation
F	8 years	November 2016	Individual interview
A	7 years	November 2015	
J	11 years	November 2015	
C	3 years	July 2016	
N	5 years	March 2016	
K	8 years	March 2016	
W	6 years	January 2016	
R	8 years	November 2015	
Z	10 years	November 2016	
S	8 years	January 2016	
D	10 years	August 2015	Focus group discussion
M	7 years	September 2015	
X	1.5 years	December 2015	
V	9 years	September 2015	
L	11 years	March 2016	
U	11.5 years	December 2015	

Table 1 List of informant

3.4. Limitations

As mentioned before, I posted a recruitment announcement on Lofter.com to gather informants. Later I received several private messages showing their interests in my study. After having some conversations with several of them, they also have a tendency to recommend their friends to me to have interviews. Thus, a semi-snowball sampling is employed in this study. However, since some of my concerns in this study are related to their sexual desire and expression, the ones who want to share their stories with me are already with a certain feminist notion. Therefore, they could not be representable for the whole slash fan community but rather sever as an angle of the inner voice.

Besides, netnography also has some limitations in this study. Firstly, as all of the interviews and discussions are conducted through online communication, it caused some problems in recognizing their emotions only through emoji or voices (Kozinets, 2010). Hence, netnography to some extent limited my understanding on the possible emotional expressions through body languages. Another problem brought by netnography is the gender identification of my informant. Since I recruit all my informant online and my target group should be all female RPS fans, I have to trust the self-information given by my informant which leads to some uncertainties. Except the group discussion and the three audio individual interviews by which I could recognize my informant's gender as female, others are all depended on the trust built between us and some detailed information during conversations. Therefore, some risks are also involved in doing netnography.

4. Data Analysis

In the analysis part, I would like to use a queer lens to investigate the ways in which people navigate sexuality. By saying ‘sexuality’, it does not only mean in which gender people are having sex with, but it also related to what people get sexually aroused from. The power structures of sexuality here would serve as a theoretical framework to see how slash fans’ behavior and preference are influenced by social norms. Since in nowadays Chinese society, it is still not fully acceptable for women to openly talk about sex nor is homosexual considered as normal (although officially it has not been a crime nor an illness for more than ten years in China) (Farrer, 2006; Kam, 2013), real person slash fans’ practice of having homoerotic fantasy between two men is actually acting under the power structures of sexuality. On one hand, their preference on equal romantic relationship, expression of sexual desire and creation of space of alternative masculinities may reflect their resistance to the gender roles and heteronormativity to some extent. On the other hand, the rule within fan communities, especially real person slash ones, that they should ‘keep the fandom within circle, do not disturb the real person’ is regulating slashers from overexposing themselves. Thus, this regulation could be regarded as a compromise to low social acceptance of homosexuality in China. However, by having this compromise, slash fans actually save their secret space for having this queer fantasy from the heteronormativity.

4.1. Resistance

4.1.1. Pleasure, Desire and Power

Seeking ideal romantic relationship in slash

Although each interviewee has their own experience in getting in touch with slash fiction, most of them show a notion on gender equality and a resistance to gender stereotypes on women at an early stage. This kind of notion triggers most of them from reading heterosexual romantic fiction to slash ones, in which the homoerotic relationship meets more their expectation on equality. In describing this change on choice, many of the interviewees paid attention to the role making, especially the female ones. For them, female characters in heterosexual romantic

fiction are not fulfilling neither their imagination on womanhood nor their eagerness for equality in a romantic relationship. This notion echoes Bacon-Smith's view of decades ago when she did her fieldwork on slash fiction, in which she claimed that one reason why women turn to slash fiction was because of the dissatisfaction on female characters presented in the films and TV shows whose producers are mainly male (1992). However, female characters in romantic fiction are still being largely described of traditional gender role and this is continuously one of the main reason for women to go slash. For instance, W said that the percentage of her choice on slash fiction to heterosexual ones is 7:3 and she thought this mainly resulted from the role making of those female characters in most of the heterosexual romantic fiction that she has access to.

Well... I think nowadays one of the most popular kind of heterosexual romantic fiction is the one with a super bossy man and a weak woman [as a setting couple]. You know, those women in such fiction are just as weak as small rabbits! It is absolutely not what I think about being a woman. It seems that the romantic relationship in many of the heterosexual ones that I read are unequal and sometimes you can even feel that female is totally relied on the male. I really hate this kind of thing [romantic relationship]. (W, *fujoshi* for 6 years, KG/GK fan since January 2016)

In explaining her choice, W showed a strong dissatisfaction with the female characters in the heterosexual romantic fiction and regarded this as actually misrepresenting womanhood from her perspective. And W continued explaining her choice on slash fiction in regarding to her ideal romantic relationship.

Comparing to heterosexual ones, I think the relationship showing in slash fiction is closer to my ideal romantic relationship. As for me, I hope a woman could be a relatively independent human being in a romantic relationship that the two individuals are caring and supporting each other... Just take sending flowers on Valentine's Day as an example. It is socially accepted that men should be those to send women flowers, but for me I would wonder why

women cannot actively send followers to men. Although this idea was being criticized by my family, I eventually find it in slash fiction! It hits me so direct that I feel like I finally know that my expatiation is realistic! (W, *fujoshi* for 6 years, KG/GK fan since January 2016)

For W, the notion on gender equality and dissatisfaction on women's gender role was in her mind even before she reads slash fiction. However, she got oppressed in daily life when she talking about her ideal romantic relationship and reading heterosexual romantic fiction as she did not find her notion on gender equality being neither accepted by her family nor shown in fiction. However, once she got in touch with slash fiction, she felt a strong comfort for her expectation and found a space to fulfill her notion on gender equality. This idea is similar to what has been discussed by previous studies on *Star Trek* slash stating that women is actually using this way to fulfill their eagerness for an equal relationship, despite women's overly lower social status than men in reality (Lamb & Veith, 2014; Penley, 1997).

On the other hand, the limited story line that mainly dealing with 'love' in heterosexual romantic fiction is another factor that makes some women prefer to slash ones. Slash fans are feeling bored to the sameness of romantic fiction that put women in the position only for love, not caring about their other domain in life.

Well...I mean, most of the time in heterosexual romantic fiction you can read no more than 'love'. While in the slash ones, as they deal with two men, you can read more about their career development and sometimes even patriotism. (Z, *fujoshi* for 10 years, KG/GK fan since November 2016)

This notion on the variety of stories in slash fiction is also mentioned in the group interview in discussing why they actively choose to read more slash fiction rather than the heterosexual ones:

V: [The relationship] seems to be more diverse in slash fiction between the two men. Not like the women are mostly depending on the love in heterosexual ones, the characters in slash ones show a strong independency, not being

subject to each other. I mean they can each live a good life without mentioning 'love'. (V, *fujoshi* for 9 years, KG/GK fan since September 2015)

M: Exactly! In the heterosexual romantic fiction, love is everything! With love, women have everything; without love, women have nothing. So ridiculous! (M, *fujoshi* for 7 years, KG/GK fan since September 2015)

V: Well [how the story is presented] is in fact based on the writer who produce the fiction and I know in slash ones there are also such things. While for me it is NO. (V, *fujoshi* for 9 years, KG/GK fan since September 2015)

D: Me too! ...And I think this is a huge problem in heterosexual romantic fiction. Where are the other domains in women's life?! (D, *fujoshi* for 10 years, KG/GK fan since August 2015)

L: (laugh) Yes! I also feel the plots and the relations in heterosexual ones are all fucking the same! While for slash, you can even create stories not only between human beings. Human-animal, animal-animal [homoerotic relationships] are all available in slash fiction. (L, *fujoshi* for 11 years, KG/GK fan since March 2016)

M: That's true! There are also types of fiction aiming mainly for the erotic scene such as ABO (laugh)! Well... at least I've never read heterosexual ABO, but only slash ones. (M, *fujoshi* for 7 years, KG/GK fan since September 2015)

From this notion of the diversity/sameness of plots, slash fans showed their strong disagreement on the existing gender stereotypes on women. Although their experience may not represent the whole situation in the heterosexual romantic fiction genre, it still shows a certain tendency in which women are being represented in a biased image in which they can only rely on love or a man to live an ideal life. This kind of misrepresentation of women derives from as well as reinforce traditional gender roles of women that women are supposed to be innocent, tender and dependent on men (Butler, 2006; Russ, 2014). Moreover, this kind of women's

image also shows an ignorance of women's other domains in life such as hobbies and careers. Thinking from this perspective, slash fans are trying to relax themselves in the slash genre where they find a more equal relation between two males. Just as suggested by Lamb and Veith (2014, p.100), such partnership between two males in slash fiction seems like a 'union of strengths' where they showed support to each other in both mental and working domain. In other words, slash fans are fulfilling their 'aspirations [including] desire for true equality with men and reciprocity in their intimate relationships' through slash fiction (Lamb & Veith, 2014, p.101). Therefore, they are to some extent thinking and acting out of the heterosexual matrix mentioned in Butler's work (2006), especially on femininities and being straight women. However, if the masculinities of the male characters in slash fiction are taken into consideration in relation to heterosexual matrix, it is still to some extent staying in the box as the favored males in such fiction are those independent, decisive and strong in mind. Although from Connell's perspective it is already a change from hegemony masculinities as their being gay instead of heterosexual (2005), it is still interesting to see how male are being portrayed by women in slash genre. This will be further discussed in the later section.

Besides, the reason why slash fiction is more varied in content and structure is another interesting point drawn from the discussion above. It seems that once slash fans jumped out of the heteronormativity, they can put their boundless imagination everywhere and even create countless subcategories under an ordered structure (Jacobs, 2016). For example, as mentioned by M later in the discussion, there is a certain type of slash fiction called ABO, in which people are being assigned extra 'gender' as alpha (strongest, cannot pregnant, less population), beta (less strong, be able to get pregnant but not best, most population) and omega (weakest, best for pregnant, less population) along with the biological sex as male and female. Since one of the main elements in ABO is that an omega, no matter male or female, could get pregnant after paring up with an alpha, ABO is also being regarded as famous for having a lot of erotic scene (Zheng, 2015). From this perspective, we can also regard slash fiction as a place for women to express their sexual desire, which will

be discussed in the latter part of this section. To add more, according to Zheng's study on ABO fiction, the slash fans also take ABO, which is an extreme situation where the hierarchy among alpha, beta and omega is highly emphasized, as a platform to present, discuss and reflect their thoughts and oppression deriving from the real world (2015). Therefore, on one hand ABO opens a window for women to be able to discuss sex more openly and freely, on the other hand it also allows women to express their gender oppressions as being a woman in the real world through different characters in the stories. Such idea was also mentioned by one of my interviewees S when she talks about how feminism is presented in slash fiction in her point of view.

I think for women to be a slasher is also for them to increase their participation in creating cultural products, I mean actively producing instead of only taking [the cultural products]. I think this is a kind of feminism...As for them [slasher], sometimes creating a slash fiction is not even that related to the original characters but rather as a tool to present some of the ideas that they cannot freely say in the daily life...Slash fiction is just acting as a platform for people who have deeper and wider ideas on the original works to share their thoughts. (S, *fujoshi* for 8 years, KG/GK fan since January 2016)

As a result, even though slash fans have different ways and formats in enjoying slash fiction, many of them may show a notion on gender equality and a resistance of gender role on women, some of them even regard it for practicing feminism. They take slash fiction as a way to express their eagerness for equal romantic relationship, resistance to the traditional gender norms and struggle for gender oppression in daily life. Such notions not only open a world of slash, but also form a 'queer female space' (Lothian et al., 2007) for them, at least to some extent, to express themselves more safely and freely.

Expressing sexual desire

Pleasure is one of the most frequently mentioned words during all interviews. Slash fans experience all kinds of pleasures such as finding an ideal romantic relationship just as discussed in the previous section. Since many slash fiction

contains erotic scene, the pleasure in reading these sexually arousing texts is also being regarded as one of the most important factors in slash fandom (McLelland, 2006; Neville, 2015). This kind of pleasure and desire, specifically in the Chinese context, could be understood from two perspectives: a space against the daily oppression and an enjoyment from female gaze.

As discussed by Jacobs (2016, p.367), the sexual expression of women is still regarded as immoral in Chinese society, and especially in recent years the government even strictly banned many slash erotic content because of 'Boys' Love's supposedly evil impact on youth'. This not only reflects the oppressed situation of women's expressing sexual desire both in everyday life and online, but it also shows a low social acceptance on homosexuality, even though it is no longer a crime in 1997 nor an illness in 2001 in China. Jacobs (2016) also added that to avoid being discovered and to maintain a secret space, Chinese slash fans would use different strategies such as put texts into a picture instead of being textually searched. This kind of strategy is also observed in my fieldwork online. Since Lofter.com would automatically check whether the post contains erotic texts before posting, sometimes the authors would directly paste a link to an image or a website based outside China. By using these tricks, slash fans tend to successfully protect their secret space where they feel comfortable and free to express sexual desire that they may not have a chance to say in the real world because of the social norms on women. For instance, some of my interviewees shared their opinions on the relation between online slash fiction and sexual desire.

I think to some extent, slash fiction, especially those with erotic scene, are good for women to express and discuss sexual desire. Women also have their imagination to sex and willingness to express it, right? ... Especially nowadays I think the Chinese society is still not that open to women's talking about sex. The traditional idea is that women talking about sex is not elegant and I think the older generation still holds this opinion. (K, *fujoshi* for 8 years, KG fan since March 2016)

I think reading and discussing erotic scene online is more private because everyone is just an IP there. It in some sense make me feel free... After all it [the social acceptance on women's talking about sex] is still the problem on respect. Some people hold an open mind to sex while some people don't and I think they are just individual choices. These choices may depend on their own values or different expectations on intimacy. The reason why some people are feeling oppressed is just because their choices are not respected by others. I mean especially our fathers' generation who usually avoids talking about sex. (W, *fujoshi* for 6 years, KG/GK fan since January 2016)

K and W all talked about the oppressed women in nowadays Chinese society and took slash genre as a freer platform, in which they could find more like-minded fans, to express their sexual desire. Besides, because of the anonymity online, these slash fans would also feel safer to discuss and create erotic scenes. By doing so, they could on one hand maintain their identity as a 'good daughter' in their parents' eyes, and on the other hand express their sexual desire as anonymous. Therefore, I would argue that through creating and consuming online slash fiction Chinese slash fans are indeed forming a kind of 'cyberfeminism' as discussed by Youngs (1999, p.56) that they are practicing their agency in forming their own understanding on womanhood and resist to the existing gender norms on women.

Apart from the online space, sexual pleasure and desire they have in slash genre that is different from what they have in heterosexual ones is also worth investigating. According to some of my informant, this difference is related to male objectification and women's distance from being objectified to sexual attraction.

X: I think it [the difference] is mainly because of having empathy or not. For example, once I read or watch heterosexual erotic scene, I would usually have empathy and take the female character as me. While for slash ones, it is totally appreciation from a third person perspective. I would clearly know that those are two men and the sex between them has nothing to do with me, as a woman... Plus, from my own observation, I think many slash fans are women who don't want to compromise to social norms... They love themselves, know

their values and don't want to be bounded with men. (X, *fujoshi* for 1.5 years, KG/GK fan since December 2015)

.....

U: I agree. I think the pleasure we gained from slash erotic scene is also a result of social oppression on women... (U, *fujoshi* for 11.5 years, KG/GK fan since December 2015)

M: You mean reducing this oppression in slash fiction?

U: Right! It seems like once there has erotic energy, it is most of the time related to women! I am so sick of this. While in reading slash erotic scene, I am just an observer and I feel a sense of detachment. I am more relaxed and more comfortable. Moreover, I think it also allows more space for pleasure. (U, *fujoshi* for 11.5 years, KG/GK fan since December 2015)

V: True, it gave me a fresh feeling!

X: More imagination as well.

From the discussion above, it is obvious that these women are having a clear notion on women's social position in relation to sex. When talking about the imagination on both heterosexual and slash erotic scene, all of them showed a totally different attitude towards them. As they said, the slash erotic scene dealing with only male bodies created a safe distance for them, as heterosexual women, to have enjoyment in which women are no longer relevant to erotic energy. This clear distinction echoes what have been discussed as 'female gaze' and 'sexual minefield' in Neville's work (2015, p.197-198) on women's consumption on gay pornography, where male bodies are being objectified and women themselves would have a chance to keep a safe distance. Therefore, to some extent, this kind of imagination could be regarded as both a resistance to the nowadays social norms, where women are often being expected to be submissive and objectified to men, especially when having sex, and an active practice of agency in consuming male bodies, which is

just on the contrary to male gaze. X and U later also illustrated their idea more with their daily experience in having sex with men.

X: You all know that it is common for a man asks a woman to have dinner or watch a movie before they have sex. Previously I would also follow this route but now I have changed to directly ask him whether he wants to have sex or not...After all, all the flirting aims for sex, right?... This procedure of pretending is so exhausted. (X, *fujoshi* for 1.5 years, KG/GK fan since December 2015)

All: (laugh) Right!

Researcher: Then what is the reaction of that man?

X: He was totally shocked! You know many men think they should be the leading role in romantic and erotic relation. So my attitude just hurt his self-esteem.

.....

U: Exactly! Although I think my boyfriend is a feminist, once we have sex I would feel very tired in taking care of his weak self-esteem. Oh, sometimes I really want to kick him off the bed! (U, *fujoshi* for 11.5 years, KG/GK fan since December 2015)

Both X and U clearly noted that an equal relation should exist between them and their boyfriend/sex partner. Even though they wanted to or already took an active role in sex, they still showed their dissatisfaction on it, especially on taking care of men's self-esteem. They usually have to pretend to be comfortable and submissive, but this is not what they really want to have. Therefore, reading slash erotic scene is a huge pleasure that they finally could have enjoyment without caring for others.

Besides, this kind of sexual desire and pleasure they gained in slash genre is also different from gay pornography, despite the fact that they shared something in

common, that my interviewees emphasized their huge attention on how erotic scene contributes to the plot in slash fiction.

I will be both emotionally and genitally aroused when reading slash fiction. The erotic scene of course makes me genitally aroused but I will also have the pleasure because of the plot. For example, the sex after the two men together overcame the social pressure on them would make me feel very excited. I think sometimes sex would represent a lot of things in slash fiction. (W, *fujoshi* for 6 years, KG/GK fan since January 2016)

As discussed by Driscoll (2006), romance and pornography achieved a certain balance in fan fiction where both sexual desire and the detailed emotion is presented. Therefore, in fan fiction, and slash fiction in specific in this study, slash fans fulfill both their desire for equal love and sexual exposure. However, some of my interviewees also expressed their preference more on the plot instead of the erotic scene when talking about their consumption of slash fiction, thus distinguishing slash fiction from gay pornography.

X: For me, the plot is the most important. After having a story setting and background, the erotic scene would give me a really impressive influence [on having pleasure]. (X, *fujoshi* for 1.5 years, KG/GK fan since December 2015)

V: I feel the same. I think sometimes the erotic scene is a part of the plot and also helps the story to move forward. It just naturally happens as in the reality a couple would also have. At least for me, I like reading the erotic scene with emotional intimacy, not only having sex. (V, *fujoshi* for 9 years, KG/GK fan since September 2015)

.....

U: For me as well. I don't like watching gay porn just because of its lacking emotional intimacy. I think since most of the gay porns are male gaze products, the emotional tension that women usually paid attention to is being

neglected...While the slash fiction created by women are full of these tension and I take them as a kind of emotional catharsis...It is because of all the plots and stories that make the erotic scene arousing and fascinating. Otherwise I believe that it is the same to watch gay porn. (U, *fujoshi* for 11.5 years, KG/GK fan since December 2015)

The slash fiction, which is considered to be a product created ‘by women for women’ (Louie, 2012, p.937; Russ, 2014, p.82), is bringing slash fans pleasure more than being sexually aroused. Distinct from gay male pornography whose targets are mostly gay men and shows directly erotic scene, slash fiction focusing more on the emotional intimacy and thus the erotic scene is not standing alone but perfectly collaborate with the plot to give slash fans more emotional pleasure. Just as U said in the discussion, the ‘emotional catharsis’ of the erotic scene on one hand shows slash fans’ understanding on the two persons/characters as in homoerotic relationship, on the other hand reflects women’s emphasis on the combination of love and sex.

4.1.2. Alternative Masculinities

Apart from the resistance to traditional female gender roles and the freedom of expressing sexual desire, slash genre also creates more spaces for alternative masculinities that is different from hegemonic ones. Influenced by Japanese ACG (animation, comic and game) culture, Chinese slash fans got in touch with slash genre (or in Japanese term Boys’ Love) since 1990s (Jacobs, 2016; Louie, 2012; Zhang, 2016). At the beginning, what Boys’ Love dealt with was all about the romantic love of pretty boys who are ‘feminized’ and ‘lack the competitive and conformist streak’ (Louie, 2012, p.934), which is different from the slash fiction such as *K/S* slash in the western societies. In recent years, nevertheless, this kind of ‘pretty boy’ masculinity tends to have a change in Chinese slash fiction under the influence of globalization.

As discussed previously, the male characters described by my interviewees follow certain patterns such as being ‘independent’, ‘tough’, ‘strong’ and ‘direct’. According to Connell (2005), hegemonic masculinities are those help maintain

men's superior position to women under a patriarchal system, thus these features of male characters could also to some extent be regarded as hegemonic ones as they still put these male characters standing at a powerful position in the given society. However, on the other hand, as these male characters exist in slash fiction which deals with homoerotic relationship between men and erotic scene of 'receptive anal pleasure', they also represent a kind of gay masculinities and thus fall into the 'subordinate masculinities' since homosexual men are still in a subordinate position to heterosexual men (Connell, 2005, p.78). Just as Connell mentioned that there are other masculinities in a subordinate position, some of my interviewees also expressed their disagreement on the slash fiction where male characters are too 'sissy', which is highly related to being feminine. Their intention could be understood as 'being a tough and independent gay is okay but being sissy is not acceptable'. This kind of notion, nevertheless, reflect a hierarchy among male characters in slash fiction, which is again derived from the 'domination/subordination' (Connell, 2005, p.81) power relation between hegemonic masculinities and the others as well as the power relation between men and women.

Apart from the gayness and the debate of being sissy or not, this kind of alternative masculinities also opens more space for male characters in relation to emotional intimacy, which is different from the hegemonic masculinities.

U: I think there is one important part in slash fiction as miracle. You know it is a kind of physiological instinct for a man not to show their fragile to others, especially to another man. It's a matter of life and death! ... While in slash fiction you can observe such exposure of fragile and love, because of emotional struggling or sexual desire. I mean it is so touching that made me feel I saw God. (U, *fujoshi* for 11.5 years, KG/GK fan since December 2015)

X: Right! I think it to some extent reflect our mind and need... In our opinion, men sometimes are also fragile and they really need to express this feeling. (X, *fujoshi* for 1.5 years, KG/GK fan since December 2015)

On the contrary to the masculinities described before as being ‘tough’ and ‘independent’ that follows the hegemonic ones, what U and X motioned above is actually creating an open space for the male character’s formation in slash fiction from a female perspective. In their mind, men can also have and should have space for expressing their weakness and fragile, not pretending that they are always tough. This notion also echoes Russ’s (2014, p.90) idea that slash fans are actually ‘creat[ing] images of male bodies as objects of desire’. This kind of image not only forms more fullness of the male characters that jump out of the gender stereotypes, but more importantly it reflects women’s willingness to see the softness of men and their notion on gender equality.

Although different slash fans may have varied preference on masculinities, one reason for explaining the emerge of this kind of alternative masculinities of male characters in slash fiction may result from the different layer of a certain character. As discussed before, slash fans tend to find a relatively equal relationship in slash fiction where two individuals involved could respect each other. For them, this equal relationship should and only could be built up based on two independent individuals. However, this does not mean that the individuals are 24/7 tough, which is also not possible at all. Moreover, some slashers even try to free those ‘tough guy’ from the shackles of hegemony masculinities and use their words to create a space in slash genre to let them express their weakness and love. Therefore, the masculinities in slash fiction tend to be alternative ones which still remain certain features of hegemonic masculinities but also jump out of the box. Moreover, slash fans are to some extent defining a new ‘gayness’ through this process in slash fiction from a female perspective.

4.1.3. Critical Reflections

From the above analyses, it can be concluded that Chinese RPS fans regard their fan practice in a resisting way under the power structures of sexuality. However, it is also worthy of critical discussions the limitations of their resistance under such power structures.

Female gaze equals to gender equality?

As suggested by some scholars (Lamb & Veith, 2014; Russ, 2014), women's engaging in slash genre could be understood as a way in which they express their oppressed sexual desire as well as their eagerness for gender equality under the patriarchal society. And according to the above analyses, this kind of women's active consumption of male bodies and expression for equal love and desire could also be taken as a resistance to traditional gender norms on women in China. However, it is still worth discussing critically from another angle that whether this is really reflecting a kind of gender equality ideology or not.

According to some of my interviewees, the reason why they started reading slash fiction was just because of curiosity on the love between two men. This is similar to what Zhang (2016) discussed in her study on Chinese *fujoshi* community, where she used voyeurism to describe this kind of motivation. As Zhang (2016, p.254) argues, because of both the low social exposure of gay community to the public and the low social acceptance on women's talking about sex-related issues in Chinese society, the slash genre could thus be regarded as a female 'voyeuristic gaze' where women could fulfill their curiosity on both gay and sex. By objectifying male bodies as sex objects, women are feeling their gaining power which they could never have a chance to experience in reality. However, this kind of practice is also problematic as it actually tends to create a hierarchy based on heterosexual privilege where straight women have a certain power on gay men, just as the exact opposite to what have been done by men in male gaze decades ago (Gauntlett, 2008; Zhang, 2016). Therefore, to some extent, although slash genre gives women more power to consumption comparing to the situation before where women are totally oppressed by men in general, it could not easily be equivalent to gender equality. This kind of objectifying male bodies could be understood as a feminism derived from 'maternal identification' that 'tends to reinforce precisely the binary, heterosexist framework that carves up genders into masculine and feminine' (Butler, 2006, p.90) and does not pay enough attention to other cultures such as gay and lesbian. As many feminist scholars argued the importance of intersectionality, the gender equality is never only concerning the binary relationship between men and women (Butler, 2006; Lutz, Herrera Vivar & Supik,

2011). Rather, it is more about respect and treating each other, no matter who he/she is, equally and being aware that we are all ‘thoughtful, emotional beings that we will (probably) try to make some effort to understand’ (Gauntlett, 2008, p.198).

Nevertheless, as Zhang (2016, p.263) suggested that this kind of female gaze could also have some positive influence on young women’s gaining more space to ‘discuss, negotiate, and redefine the complexity of gender and sexuality’, I would argue that sometimes it would also help slash fans to know more about homosexuality and even become more pro-LGBTQ. For example, U shared her experience in accepting slash and gay community at the same time.

It [slash fiction] was recommended by my roommate in university. At that time, I was feeling super weird about having sex between two men because I just don’t understand how they could get aroused from anal sex. I mean I used to think they have anal sex because of the lack of a vagina and I thought the one being penetrated could only feel pain. But my friend later explained to me how they could enjoy anal sex because of prostate. I suddenly had the feeling like ‘That’s why’ (laugh)! Yeah, later I am totally acceptable to both slash and gay... Later I also became a feminist and did quite a lot for promoting equal rights for LGBTQ but that’s another story. (U, *fujoshi* for 11.5 years, KG/GK fan since December 2015)

As U described, the moment she accepted slash fandom is also the one made her understand more about the real gay world. Taken sexual behavior as a starting point, she began to learn more about the LGBTQ community and gradually knew the importance of respecting each other. As for my other interviewees, most of them also shared different influencing factors that made them have a relatively high acceptance to the LGBTQ community. Some of them also stated their observation in a mutual promoting relationship between high acceptance to the LGBTQ community and the RPS fandom. One of my informant N (*fujoshi* for 5 years, KG fan since March 2016) concluded, ‘My notion on gender equality and relatively high acceptance on LGBTQ made me easier to have fantasy in RPS; later during my involvement in RPS I knew more and accepted more LGBTQ community in

reality.’ Although this kind of notice is not representable and also may be varied based on personal background, I would still argue that the awareness on gender equality within slash fans is in progress and worth further investigating.

Forming masculinities under influences

As discussed previously, some slash fans have a preference on ‘tough’ gayness over ‘sissy’ ones, which reinforce a kind of hierarchy based on the current power structures of sexuality. In explaining the reason why slash fans prefer ‘not too sissy’ male characters, some of my interviewees said that it is actually nothing to do with the hierarchy among masculinities but more related to their respect to the original work as a rational choice. According to my observations as well as my interviewees, OOC (out of character) is one of the key regulation among the fan communities and it means the characters presented in the slash fiction is very different in personality from the one in original work, thus is being considered as someone already out of the original character. Considering from this perspective, since there is already a set personality for a certain character, slash fans could only follow the settings and put their imaginations based on a certain frame, otherwise they would be blamed for OOC. Therefore, to some extent, slash fans are also being limited in creation in order to show respect to the original character. This practice of avoiding OOC, I would argue, is actually on the contrary to McGee’s (2005, p.171) view on slash fan’s being free to ‘create a dialogue with the characters that is her own, shaped and created by her’ in slash fiction. When it comes to real person slash genre, fans tend to take this regulation even more serious as they think the slash fiction is based on the real actors and once the slash fiction OOC it would also have influence on their forming imagination.

However, as same as Gong’s (2017) interviewees who neglected the media influence on constructing male European football players, none of my interviewees doubt the public image of Kai and Ge and they seem to believe what Kai and Ge present on TV interviews are their real persona. Thus there again forms a critical discussion on whether the ‘original character’, which the real person slash fiction is based on, is influenced by the hegemonic masculinities. From a Foucauldian perspective, public figures such as actors are also under surveillance of the public

which direct them to follow social norms such as maintain certain ‘body size, sexual and social behavior’ (Storey, 2015, p.135). McGee (2005) also discussed a similar idea that real person slash is no difference to other kinds of slash as the images of actors are also being created and not real. Therefore, it is reasonable to question how real the ‘original character’ in real person slash is and how much it is influenced by the social norms on manhood. Hence, the alternative masculinities presented in slash fictions may also to some extent be influenced by the existing gender norms and power structures of sexuality, but without people’s noticing.

4.2. Compromise

‘Keep the fandom within circle, do not disturb the real person (in Chinese 圈内地自萌，勿扰正主)’ is one of the most famous saying among many fan communities in China, no matter slash or not. It could be understood under different circumstance and it regulates fans’ behavior both among and outside certain fan communities. For instance, when it is linked with a rather general situation among different fan communities, it could be regarded as a respect to fans belonging to different circles. According to some of my interviewees, the first part of this saying means ‘not overly mention one’s fandom to others who don’t like’. Thus, this saying is a regulation on fan themselves. Besides, it also serves as an alert in advance to the public to avoid such fandom if they do not like, especially nowadays on the Internet where almost everyone could get access to everywhere regardless of having intention or not (Jenkins, 2006). Just like one of my interviewee K (*fujoshi* for 8 years, KG fan since March 2016) said, ‘I’ve already put that notice on the page, so they [those who don’t like this fandom] should take the responsibility themselves.’ On the other hand, when it narrows down to the fandom based on real person, fans have to take the influence of their fandom on those real persons into more consideration, particularly the slash fandom describing homoerotic relationship in nowadays Chinese society where homosexual is still not widely accepted. Therefore, apart from the respect to other fans, the saying ‘keep the fandom within circle, do not disturb the real person’ in real person slash is also being regarded as a respect to real person’s privacy as well as a regulation for the fans in order to have protection on real person. Therefore, in this part, I will mainly

discuss this regulation within the fan community with the power relation concerning to sexuality in Chinese society and to see whether this kind of self-regulation could be understood as a compromise to the social norms on homosexuality.

4.2.1. Respect

When talking about ‘Keep the fandom within circle, do not disturb the real person’, all of my informant showed a high level of acceptance to it and most of them reported that they actually strictly regulate themselves in practice. This regulation could actually be understood in two ways when it refers to ‘respect’ in real person slash. One is, as mentioned before, the respect to other fans who are not in favor of this slash. This shows these fans’ emphasis on personal rights of having different choices. The other aspect is respect to real person’s privacy.

I think this [the saying] is the basic line and it has nothing to do with what your fandom is... The online environment is very open and once you promote your fandom outside your circle it seems like forcing others to take it. I think it is very disrespectful and nasty... As for real person fandom, I mean no matter slash or not, you have to think about the influence on them [the real persons] in their life. (F, *fujoshi* for 8 years, KG/GK fan since November 2016)

I totally agree with this saying although I think sometimes it’s easier said than done. However, after all the real persons have their own privacy and life. I think we as RPS fans should not impose our fandom on them. (S, *fujoshi* for 8 years, KG/GK fan since January 2016)

Their words draw a clear distinction between fandom and reality, which made them keep a distance to the real person’s private life. In their mind, although the imagination is based on the interaction between real persons, it is not proper to use the fandom to disturb them. It seems like there are parallel lines where the fandom and reality located separately. For example, K ((*fujoshi* for 8 years, KG fan since March 2016) gave me a negative case of one RPS fan’s behavior in other group, ‘She asked the actor to sign on the slash fiction book and later posted that online! Oh my god she is so ridiculous!... I think we should not take the fandom that serious

and should draw a line.’ To add more, many of my interviewees also showed me an idea that they are more keen on finding ‘hidden clues’ themselves between Kai and Ge such as eye contact and facial expression, instead of having fantasies of those ‘obvious interactions’. This kind of clear notion on the difference of fandom and reality as well as a media reflectivity shows a certain rationality that is different from how fans are described in some previous studies that they are too emotional and irrational to the queer performance presented by the stars intentionally (Gong, 2017; Kwon, 2015). Furthermore, when it comes to KG/GK fandom, the fans have more to say on why they hold this regulation. For instance, K illustrated her idea with Kai and Ge’s attitude towards fan behavior as actors.

...Especially for KG/GK slash, because both of them are actors and they previously said that they hoped fans could focus more on their works instead of private life... I think it is an insult to actors if the public ignore their own job [as actors] and relevant honor. (K, *fujoshi* for 8 years, KG/GK fan since March 2016)

Therefore, the respect in general fandom could be regarded as attention to personal choices, and in KG/GK slash specific it could be understood as a distance to the actors created by fans between to show their respect on both actors’ private life and personal preference.

4.2.2. Protection

Apart from showing respect, ‘keep the fandom within circle’ also helps KG/GK fans to protect themselves as well as the actors. Taking KG/GK fandom in specific, because of the bad relationship between Kai fans and Ge fans resulted from certain events after broadcasting the TV shows, it is awkward for KG/GK fans to overexpose their existence to the outside world. Otherwise, they would have large chances to have quarrels with those non-slash actor fans. In doing so, fans tried to use different strategies such as not mentioning personal hashtag together with slash ones when posting, which is also regarded as one of the most important rules within the KG/GK community. Since Lofter.com operates similarly to previously famous fan site LiveJournal.com based on ‘personalized blogging technology’ (Coppa,

2006, p.57) and nowadays' trend Tumblr.com where fans meet each other by adding hashtags under posts to identify which fandom they are talking about, there is no actual operator within KG/GK fan community as others based on BBS. In practice, this is both good and bad. On one hand, fans of different interests could use only one account to make many friends; on the other hand, it is too open that almost everyone could observe what is discussed by simply search the hashtags, thus a sense of safety is rather lost. Therefore, in order to keep a relatively safe and close place, the rules among KG/GK community such as only adding slash hashtags (i.e. KG, GK) when posting are mainly conducted and protected depending on self-surveillance and sometimes newbies would be alerted by old members of certain rules that they violated. For instance, N shared with me her experience of 'being informed':

I think one of the most important rules in KG/GK community is 'no individual hashtag under the slash one'... I was really confused about this at first because I didn't come across with such a strict rule in other fan communities before. So I posted to ask others the reason but they all suggested me to delete it in the comment and some of them tried to explain to me through private message... Maybe they thought my post would cause quarrels, I guess. (N, *fujoshi* for 5 years, KG/GK fan since March 2016)

N later deleted the post but the notices on getting comments (and it shows several sentences of the comments) still exist. N showed me some of them as well as the private messages she got. From these replies and messages, it is easy to observe a sensitive notion among KG/GK fans and their unwillingness to get in touch with non-slash actor fans.

However, according to the private messages that explained this practice in the community, one domain that is not that relevant to fans relation but more related to Kai's sexuality was mentioned. On 30th November 2015, Kai was being suspected by paparazzi in a post that he is gay and joined sex party in Thailand in 2014. Although later his company stated that the paparazzi should apologize for insulting as well as defaming and should delete all related posts, this issue was still being

hugely discussed online⁴. During that period, some of the public showed their hatred on either his being gay or his involvement in sex party, which is considered as highly relevant to be licentious and shameless. After this, many other actors' fans including Ge's are reluctant and even outraged to see any slash imagination between Kai and their favorite actor.

In this case, it is easy to draw an explanation why the self-regulation is stricter in the KG/GK community than in other ones. More importantly, it to a large extent reflects the nowadays situation in Chinese society that the social acceptance for gay, or more specifically for a celebrity to be gay, is still in a really low level. As discussed by Kwon (2015), the queer performance of Korean stars in order to gain more attention of slash fans and to be more popular is not necessarily related to their actual sexuality, which is also regarded as an unspoken rule among slash fans. This paradox also exists within some Chinese slash fans as suggested by Gong (2017) that they are gaining pleasure from slashing male European football players while deeply believing they are heterosexual. Therefore, if everyone takes this slash fandom just as a 'crazy fantasy' or a way to attract fans' attention and no one related to real person's sexuality, this fandom could be more easily taken by the public as a joke to accept; otherwise, it would be an issue concerning morality. And there is indeed a trend in Chinese mass media to pair up two male celebrities in a joking way, but not really indicating they are gay. The complex feeling of slash fans is explained by one of my interviewees K as parenthood:

I on one hand have a fantasy on them but on the other hand I just hope they are not in love. The reality is too severe for them to experience and I just don't want them to suffer. It might be a feeling of being their parents, I guess...I mean I can totally accept my kids being homosexual but I just cannot bear the

⁴ Some related posts could still be accessed now. For example, one post could be found following this link (in Chinese):

[https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MjM5OTIxMzc4MA==&mid=401899162&idx=2&sn=ab1beee1322eff51534bba65863ba36b&mpshare=1&scene=1&srcid=0405iux6lXcJgWF1XGbnPYnV&key=2f55e0de7713985b5632a20605ba8715f5a17c4f1e303ee5d73311e9d920acc3f1a6ae10686aff3f5f17e9b1fad55676062aedc77b4368ffba5707a87fc23e31970b1bc453b87e65cbea5783c219c8f&ascene=0&uin=Njc5NzM5Njgw&devicetype=iMac+MacBookPro11%2C1+OSX+OSX+10.12.3+build\(16D32\)&version=12020110&nettype=WIFI&fontScale=100&pass_ticket=gwodeJgUbVcw2Tj7WpfpYrZY6%2BiL%2BxLXtB0Z%2FyKL7SYze2HfkTYPk3mVDJjIBMm%2Fk](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MjM5OTIxMzc4MA==&mid=401899162&idx=2&sn=ab1beee1322eff51534bba65863ba36b&mpshare=1&scene=1&srcid=0405iux6lXcJgWF1XGbnPYnV&key=2f55e0de7713985b5632a20605ba8715f5a17c4f1e303ee5d73311e9d920acc3f1a6ae10686aff3f5f17e9b1fad55676062aedc77b4368ffba5707a87fc23e31970b1bc453b87e65cbea5783c219c8f&ascene=0&uin=Njc5NzM5Njgw&devicetype=iMac+MacBookPro11%2C1+OSX+OSX+10.12.3+build(16D32)&version=12020110&nettype=WIFI&fontScale=100&pass_ticket=gwodeJgUbVcw2Tj7WpfpYrZY6%2BiL%2BxLXtB0Z%2FyKL7SYze2HfkTYPk3mVDJjIBMm%2Fk)

reality that they would suffer in nowadays [Chinese] society because of their sexuality. (K, *fujoshi* for 8 years, KG/GK fan since March 2016)

This kind of feeling of being concerned parent precisely reflects the current situation in China that many homosexuals choose to pass as straight in order to maintain their social relationship or to comfort their parents (Kam, 2013; Wong, 2015). The situation is even cruel for celebrities that they have to act according to the dominant social norms under the public surveillance (Storey, 2015). Therefore, some of my informant tend to ascribe ‘keep the fandom within circle’ to this low social acceptance on celebrity’s being gay and see this as a protection for both the relation between real persons and their public fame.

I think it [the self-regulation] is very good and it protects the real person a lot. I mean... for example in nowadays society although you don’t have any malevolence in saying an actor is gay, others would still regard you as malevolent. They just take it as a stigma to that actor. (R, *fujoshi* for 8 years, KG/GK fan since November 2015)

For example, if we express the fandom too much [and it is even noticed by the real person], they may have to keep distance in order to prevent the pressures of being judged as gay and I think this may ruin their good friendship per se. Some extreme cases may even happen where others [who are homophobia] would use our fandom to openly attack the real persons. (J, *fujoshi* for 11 years, KG/GK fan since November 2015)

Apart from considerations for protecting the real person from the public in general, the self-regulation is also a way for KG/GK fans to protect their fantasy from being blamed by others who may have homophobia, especially those in their daily life. For example, C (*fujoshi* for 3 years, KG fan since July 2016) said that since her parents don’t accept homosexuality at all, she dear not share her slash fantasy with them:

My parents knew I like Kai and Ge separately as two great actors but if they know I also support the love between them...oh, I just can't imagine... So I think not talking too much about the fandom [to those who don't accept] is also a protect for myself. (C, *fujoshi* for 3 years, KG/GK fan since July 2016)

Therefore, 'keep the fandom within circle' could be understood as a self-regulation that prevent the slash genre being overly exposed to the public in Chinese society or the people who are homophobia and thus could be regarded as a compromise to the low social acceptance to homosexuality. It seems that slash fans are satisfied as long as they could hold the fandom within their own space. By drawing a line between fandom and reality, they tend to escape from the hardness in the society and only keep the best wishes and imaginations to the happy life in their fantasy.

5. Conclusion and Further Discussion

In this study, I took Chinese RPS fan community as an example to analyze fan practice under power structures of sexuality in China. By using a Foucauldian approach (1990) to build up a theoretical framework on power structures of sexuality and Butler's (2006) queer lens in viewing the possibilities of resisting such power structures, I found that Chinese slash fans are actually doing slash in a way in which they on one hand resist to traditional gender roles and on the other hand compromise to it. This combination of resistance and compromise under the power structure of sexuality in China makes Chinese RPS fans different from the previous studies on western slash fans in which their active resistance and empowerment are largely emphasized (Lamb & Veith, 2014; Penley, 1994; Russ, 2014).

The resistance, which is related to the first research question 'how could Chinese RPS fans' practices be understood as a resistance under the power structure of sexuality', derives from two perspectives, expressing desires and creating spaces for alternative masculinities. On one hand, they actively choose to read slash fiction in order to express their preference and desire for ideal romantic relationship, which they think the homoerotic relation could reflect gender equality notions better than heterosexual romantic ones. At the same time, they also take slash genre as a place for expressing their sexual desire since the anonymity online could give them more safety to talk about such issues that they find difficult to discuss in reality. On the other hand, the sexual desire which is gained partly from objectifying male bodies both represents a 'female gaze' (Neville, 2015, p.197) and opens new spaces for alternative masculinities, in which men are also expected to express their weakness and fragile because of emotional struggling and sexual desire. From this perspective, slash fans are using online slash genre to both resist the oppression they, as women, experienced in reality under a patriarchal power structure of sexuality and creating their ideal male images partly contradicting to the hegemonic masculinities.

The second research question, 'how is the regulation "keep the fandoms within circle, do not disturb the real person" influenced by the gender norms', is related to

another angle of fan practice, compromise. This fan regulation could be understood from both respect and protection perspectives, respectively reflecting slash fans' rationality and restriction derived from the current power structure of sexuality in China. When it comes to respect, the regulation first shows the emphasis on personal rights in choosing differently, which allows different fans remaining their own space for fantasy under a more and more open cyberspace. For RPS fans in specific, the respect also means leaving private space for real persons, which reflects their clear distinction of fandom and reality. Thus, a kind of rationality of fans which differ them from other fans described in some previous studies could be observed (Gong, 2017; Kwon, 2015). The protection, on the other hand, is mainly resulted from the low social acceptance of homosexuality in Chinese society. Although fans may notice the difference between fantasy, in which two real persons are imagined to have a homoerotic relationship, and the reality, they still tend to stand on a 'parents' view' and are worried about the bad influence may have on the real persons if their fantasies are over expressed. To add more, this kind of hierarchy among sexualities in China also worsens slash fans' situation where they may not be able to talk about their fantasy openly and may face stigmatization. Therefore, the regulation 'keep the fandoms within circle, do not disturb the real person' both allows RPS fans to maintain their secret safe space and protects the real persons and themselves from being openly judged.

Besides, both resistance and compromise have their own limitations and spaces for further development. Firstly, although this kind of fan practice could be regarded as an active resistance to the existing power structure of sexuality, whether this could be equivalent to gender equality remains in question. Since female gaze, especially this kind of gaze formed on gay male bodies, stands on the exact opposite position to male gaze, which used to be or still is a trend in the society, it actually again creates an unequal power relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality. As suggested by some previous scholars, gender equality should always take intersectionality into consideration and should never put women and men into a binary relationship (Butler, 2006; Lutz et al., 2011). As some slash fans already noticed the importance of respecting others and became pro-LGBTQ while

others are still incognizant, it is still worth investigating how and what slash fans could do with gender equality in the future. To add more, the alternative masculinities and gayness presented in slash fictions also recreate a hierarchy based on existing power structures of sexuality where ‘tough’ men are preferred more than sissy ones. Although this may be resulted from fans’ respecting the original characters and avoiding ‘out of character (OOC)’, Chinese RPS fans’ reflectivity on the persona’s formation of public figures are not explicitly shown in this case. Therefore, the resistance to the power structures of sexuality is still in the process.

On the other hand, as the compromise still draws a parallel line between fandom and reality, it seems like Chinese RPS fans are taking online slash genre as a place for hobby and self-expressions instead of a place to voice politically. Hence, it still remains questions whether Chinese slash fans would form a bottom-up revolution based online towards the existing power structures of sexuality or remain their secret online space in the future.

With a limited scope in this study, I only focused on some minor perspectives of Chinese RPS fans. Further studies could dig one step further in looking at more linkages between the virtual space and the reality to discuss the possibilities for Chinese slash fans to actively practicing feminism and women empowerment. These linkages may lead to discussions on whether slash genre should only be taken as a hobby or should be regarded as a grassroots’ way of deconstructing the current power structure of sexuality. Moreover, as suggested by Kwon (2015), since there are more and more notions on slash genre by commercial companies, the intentionally selling homoerotic relationship by these companies is also an upcoming issue. Thus, slash fans’ agency in forming fantasies and reflexivity to the persona of celebrities is also worth investigating in the future.

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Appendix

Interview guideline

Part 1. Basic information on identity

1. The time and reason of being KG/GK fan
2. Any other *fujoshi* experience before KG/GK fandom? (If yes, specifies the reason and the time of being *fujoshi*)
3. What do you think about the relationship between RPS fan and *fujoshi*?

Part 2. Fan behavior

1. Which kind of slash fiction do you prefer to create/consume? Why?
2. What's your opinion on sex scene in slash fiction?
 - a) How often do you read sex scene?
 - b) What imagination would you have when you read sex scene?
 - c) What's the difference between RPS sex scene and those in other slash fiction?
3. What's the relationship between your sexual expression and creation/consumption of sex scene?
4. What's the difference between slash sex scene and heterosexual ones?

Part 3. The KG/GK fan culture

1. Is there any materials or regulations that you must read and know before entering the fandom?
 - a) If yes, what are they and why would you think they should be known in advance?
 - b) If no, why would you think so?
2. What's your opinion on 'keep the fandom within circle, do not disturb the real person'?
 - a) Any ideas on why this saying occurred?
 - b) Would you follow this? Why?

- c) What's the relationship between this saying and the social acceptance on homosexuality?
- 3. Is there any common sense within the community?
 - a) If yes, what are they? Why they occurred?
- 4. What's your opinion on the relationship between Kai and Ge?
- 5. What's your opinion on the top/bottom role of Kai and Ge?
 - a) Is the top/bottom relationship changeable? Why would you think so?

Part 4. Slash fandom and reality life

- 1. Would you expose your *fujoshi* or slash fan identity to people you know in reality? Why would you do so?
- 2. What's the difference between talking about sex in reality and doing the same within slash fan community?
- 3. What' your attitude towards LGBTQ community?
 - a) To which level would you accept someone being LGBTQ? (strangers, someone you know but not familiar, good friend, best friend, family members, yourself)
 - b) Why would have such attitude?
- 4. What's the relationship between RPS fandom and the attitude towards LGBTQ community?

Part 5. Any supplement