SLASH FICTION: A LOVE AND SEXUAL FANTASY IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Slash fiction emerged in China in the 1990s with the rising polarity of Japanese animation and manga culture, and it has rapidly developed into a cultural icon of the whole nation, especially among female fans. The major objective of this thesis is to investigate female slash writers in China as well as how they see slash fiction in their daily lives in terms of gender equality, friendship ties and identity. In order to do so, semi-structured interviewing method is used to outline the national features of slash fandom in China. This thesis starts from demonstrating that both influences from Japanese culture and leading media narratives speed up the proliferations of slash boom, and highlighting that slash fiction has already became a mature business in China. Moreover, findings of this research also indicate that Chinese female slash fans reflect their wishes of equal love and sexual fantasies by creating homoerotic stories, by applying various feminism theories. The crossover between the fans and the producers, and the motional identifications between the slashers and the characters are also presented through different angles. Ultimately, the last part of the analysis proves that slash fandom offers a new way of socialization.

Keywords: slash fiction, fandom, feminism, friendship ties, identity

Content

1. Introduction

When speaking of homosexuality, most people think of some labels of stigma. However, in Asian countries, particularly in East Asia, there are countless females who are obsessive with reading and writing fan fiction between male homosexuals, which is then academically called slash fiction. This genre of fiction has been declaredly accepted as a part of Chinese popular subculture and it has attracted countless female followers. Slash fiction is appealing to young female Chinese due to its focus on the aesthetic depiction of romance and sexual relationships between two male protagonists. It is remarkable that slash fiction has developed from a minority to a crucial part of Chinese popular culture since the 1990s. Slash culture has not only influenced the media narratives, but also shaped the traditional image of fandom. Chinese slashers publish their works and organize fan conventions, which has made slash fiction a fresh commercial opportunity. On the other hand, the Chinese government has released a series of regulations and online censorship in order to stop the spread of sexual depictions of the homosexual. The regulations have been particularly severe these recent years due to the inevitably increasing popularity of slash fiction. This paradoxical condition makes slash fiction a truly worthy research topic.

Slash fandom was underground for a long time since the 1990s in China because of the closed culture background at that time. The turning point of popularization of slash culture was the publication of slash fiction. It was easy to find hundreds of different slash fictions online but there was barely one slash fiction in the bookshops until 2008. In March 2008, "Guangnian (光年)" was published by the North Literature and Art Publishing House, which is generally considered to be the first official publication of slash fiction in China. Since then slash culture has became popular and has been playing an important role in Chinese subculture. There is not an exact number of the total amount of slashers in China. However, there is no doubt that there is a large population of slash fans. For instance, in 2009, there were 71,315 members

on the most popular slash fiction forum in China, Lucifer Club. The average daily posts were around 200 to 400 on Lucifer Club[1]. On Jinjiang (the most popular fan fiction website in China), the total clicks of the most popular slash fiction of 2015 "Tideng Ying Taohua (提灯映桃花)" were over 58 million and the comments on it were more than 44 thousand[2].

Slash fiction has already drawn the academic attention since the 1970s in the West. Scholars such as Jenkins Henry, Russ Joanna, and Constance Penley, have given excellent analyses of slash fiction from various angles. However, research on the current situation of slash fiction in China is not that common. There are a few reasons for this, and the most glaring one is that generally the theme of homosexuality is still a 'taboo', due to strict censorship and regulations in China. Furthermore, even though some scholars dare to challenge the sensitive topic, they are more willing to focus on the real-life homosexual per se which has not been researched so much. Thus there are only a few journals and theses on the exact topic of slash fiction in China. Slash fiction, nevertheless, has attracted a large amount of women fans in China. The followers of slash fiction are very diverse in age and in what they do for a living. The influence they are creating and will create is definitely meaningful to society, which stands for a new generation of women who are likely to express their longing for equality and to challenge the traditional gender paradigms in China.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate Chinese female slash writers, and through qualitative interviews critically analyze the connections between slash fiction writers and issues of identity, feminism and friendship. In order to achieve this aim, this thesis begins by analyzing the characteristics and localized production process of slash fiction in China through thematic analysis, and then exploring the slash fiction production process (meaning especially the writing and publishing of slash). Another part of this thesis is to examine the connection between slash fiction and slash fans'

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[1] (2016, May 15). Retrieved from http://www.docin.com/p-1291607375.html
[2] (2016, May 15). Retrieved from http://www.jjwxc.net/onebook.php?novelid=2555721

identity and social life through 15 semi-structured fan interviews, as well as how slash fiction can project the desire of female slashers for gender equality in China.

Definition of Terms

It is generally believed that slash fiction originated from *Star Trek,* which is an American science fiction series that first aired on TV in 1966. Thousands of audience members were touched by the great friendship between the male characters Captain Kirk and Spock. However, for a small group of fans, especially women, this close relationship between Kirk and Spock definitely meant more than mere friendship: it also meant love and intimacy. This group of fans have written and published their fan stories about Kirk and Spock within the settings of *Star Trek* since the 1970s in the West, which was then named slash fiction by its fans and academia. Similarly, on the other side of the Earth, a genre focusing on love relationships between male protagonists was germinating in Japan from the beginning of the 1970s, which was called *Yaoi*. Both slash fiction and *Yaoi* greatly spread all over the world and spontaneously became popular in China with the rapid development of pop culture in the 1990s.

In China, "*Danmei Tongren (耽美同人)*" is widely used to describe the genre of fan fiction which focuses on homosexual love instead of "slash", and the idea of "*Danmei Tongren*" in China is actually imported from Japan. The term "*Danmei Tongren*" is made up of two parts: "*Tongren (同人)*" means fan-made production; "*Danmei*" is another separate word which is also developed from the Japanese word "*Tanbi(耽美)*". "*Tanbi*", which is known as "*Yaoi*" or "*Boy's love*", first appeared as a writing style in Japanese modern aesthetism literature. From the 1970s, "*Tanbi*" gradually started to stand for a genre of subculture focusing on love relationships between male protagonists. Opposite to naturalism, "*Tanbi*" is a branch of romanticism and is full of soft, sensual beauty and delicate sensibility, which meets the girls' desire and fantasy of beauty (Ruan, 2008:4). "*Tanbi*" could be seen as the general terms of boy's love,

including manga, anime, videos and fiction while "*Danmei Tongren*" only involves fan-fiction. However, to avoid confusion, this thesis still uses the term of "slash fiction" as an English translation.

1.1 Research Questions

The research questions for this thesis are based on the topic of slash fiction in China. Especially, this thesis will focus on the influences of slash culture on the writers in their daily lives from different aspects in order to examine the differences between Chinese and foreign slash fandom. The research questions are as followed:

(1) What are the distinctive characteristics of slash fiction in the context of China?

(2) In what ways do Chinese slashers reflect their personal wishes of love and gender equality in their writings in the context of Chinese patriarchal society?

(3) How do slashers see their identities shifting from fans to producers in the production process?

(4) How has slash fiction developed Chinese slashers' friendship in the fandom community?

2　Literature Review

2.1　Fandom Studies

"Fandom" is a term used to describe the social and cultural environment of fans in industrial societies (Harris, 1998:4; Fiske, 1992:30). In this era of media, discourse was once decided by media producers. Audiences were consciously considered as the passive receivers of information and thus no long needed efficient interactions with media producers. Thus the whole process of mass-media communication became a one-way dissemination. Fans, the earliest and most active group, started to challenge the media authority as well as express their own feelings and ideas, which was encouraged by decentralized social media. The study of fandom hence attracted the attention of more scholars. There are two mainstream viewpoints of fandom studies: a fan based perspective led by Henry Jenkins and another critical approach of fans led by Camille Bacon-Smith.

Fans are usually labeled as "crazy", "violent" and "lonely" (Jenson, 1992:13-14). These clichés are created by the power of the conventional media from the early stage of 20th century (Pan, 2006:33). One of the most famous scholars of fandom, Henry Jenkins, who also sees himself as both a passionate fan and an academic, wrote his book *Textual Poachers* (1992) in that he wanted to stop the misunderstanding and demonization of fans and to encourage more positive fan studies (Jenkins, 1992:7). Jenkins analyzes fans through an ethnographical perspective in *Textual Poachers*, especially emphasizing social mechanisms, cultural practices, and the complicated relationship between mass media and consumers. Michel de Certeau, as another representative scholar of first wave of fandom studies, claims that "the consumption of popular mass media was a site of power struggles and fandom is the guerilla-style tactics of those with lesser resources to win this battle (Certeau in Fandom, 2007:2)." Based on Certeau's theory, Jenkins tries to upgrade the stereotypical images of fans spreading among the public from "crazy psychos" to "brave culture fighters". In his opinion, the reason why fans create their own stories over the original producers is

because "they (available texts) seem to hold special potential as vehicles for expressing the fans' pre-existing social commitments and cultural interests (Jenkins, 1992:34)" which could be seen as "poaching". Fiske (1992:30) also argues that fans create a specific cultural system which other normal cultures do not have in this industrial society. *Textual Poachers* has been widely considered a must read for fandom studies. Unfortunately, *Textual Poachers* does not give us the background of how Jenkins gets inside of fandom since Jenkins was already a fan, an insider, as mentioned before. Matt Hills (2002:68) claims that Jenkins' work is not comprehensive enough and it fails to present the fan practices.

In contrast, other scholars, for example Camille Bacon-Smith, hold another critical view to fans. Bacon-Smith offers a different sight of fandom studies in her book *Enterprising Women* (1992), which was coincidentally published in the same year as *Textual Poachers*. She criticizes that some fandom academics such as Jenkins have used the fan community to complete their "political agenda" (Bacon-Smith, 1992:282). Her book presents how a person becomes a fan, as an outsider, and the shift among different fan groups through participant-observer approach (ibid, 1992). She describes herself as an "outside ethnographer" who is eager to get into the "field" of fandom and to understand its wonders. In addition, after conducting a series of fieldworks (for example, attending fannish activities), she comes to a conclusion that fandom is a place full of painful victims where the fans could reflect their daily dilemmas and seek comforts from people who share the same interests: "I realized that at the heart of the community …… [is] where the tears falls (ibid, 1992:269)." Similar with Bacon-Smith, Pullen (2000:53) also mentions that fans are consumers who cannot achieve their demands and desires in real life so that they recreate their favorite works in a unique way. Moreover, Jenson doubts the positive influence fans will create on mass media as well because of the limited definition of "fandom". Jenson (1992:19) thinks fandom is there in that it is not difficult to get access to middle and lower classes, while those 'fans' that are rich and from the upper classes

are a community that should be called "expertise" instead of "fandom". In other words, fans invest their money and time in their hobbies based on their personal classes and values, which means the influences fans create on mass media are uneven and inflated.

Matt Hills also pays special attention on fan studies through ethnography perspective in *Fan Cultures* (2002). Hills (2002:66) points out that "cultural studies' 'ethnography'…… failing to consider processes of auto-legitimation within fan culture, and instead depicting these processes as fan 'knowledgeability'." He (ibid) thus argues that both Jenkins' (1992) and Bacon-Smith's (1992) works are too inflexible as the two authors insist on their own standpoints and do not want to accept other's views of fandom. Therefore, Hills stands on a relatively neutral ground to explore the "truth" of fandom by separating the fans and the academia, and argues that the "truth" in "broadly ethnographic terms" is actually between the moral dualisms in terms of Jenkins' "poachers" theory and Bacon-Smith's "victims" theory (ibid: 70& 89).

Bacon-Smith's "victim" perspective is not representative in that she pays much attention to the media content, at the cost of the audience members themselves. This weakness also leads to the omission of the environment, the background and other influential factors affecting the audiences. Fandom (including all kinds of fandom) is an activity through which fans exert their strengths, creativities and critiques, rather than just one through which fans expose their weakness and complaints. Although Jenkins' approach to fandom places more stress on the vital rule of "collective and political basis" of all the factors inside fandom (Jenkins & Tulloch, 2005:203), it can still help illustrate the special features of fandom in a subjective way. Thus this thesis will be mainly based on Jenkins fandom theories to further investigate Chinese fandom in the field of slash fiction.

2.2 Studies on Slash Fiction

Scholars such as Jenkins (1992) and Fiske (1992) have already offered a comprehensive framework on why fans not only are addicted to their beloved dramas and characters but also create their own derivative works. They write fan fiction, make fan videos or even produce star-related merchandises. Slash fiction, as the topic of this thesis, is one of the most imaginative fan productions. Slash fiction stands for a genre of fan fiction that portrays homoerotic stories between fictional protagonists (Jenkins, 1992:186). Slash has gradually attracted more academics' attention than other kinds of fan fiction due to its special characteristics. Nowadays it is generally believed that slash fiction appeared because of the long-lasting enthusiasm from the fans of the TV series *Star Trek*, debuted in the early 1970s.

Scholars have different opinions on the reasons for why slash fiction emerged. Constance Penley (1994:310) argues that slash fandom is a "highly self-reflexive […] fandom". It is clear that slash fans' intellectual and political interests can be found in this fandom as a reflection of the fans seek reasons why they themselves are so addicted with reading and writing homoerotic fan fiction (ibid:310). Bacon-Smith focuses more on the subtextual relationship between slash fiction and the original media contents. She argues that some audiences might be misled by the directors' subconscious plot settings and close-ups. However, slash fans then get obsessed with observing and interpreting (or misinterpreting) the small actions such as characters' facial expressions, the feeling from their eyes which are the "codes of romantic homoeroticism (Bacon-Smith, 1992:231-232)." Some consider slash fiction as a way to break the current hierarchical situation presented in mass media. Before the emergence of slash fiction, fan fiction was dominated by male fans for a long time. Cornel Sandvoss points out that slash fiction lets female slash lovers "break into the male domain of science fiction fandom and establish their own distinct space of reception, productivity and discussion (Sandvoss, 2013:25)." Feminist Joanna Russ considers slash fiction as a female pornography (Russ, 2014). Based on Russ's idea,

unlike men, women's sexual desire cannot be fulfilled by commercial pornography so instead they create slash fiction as a way to break the stereotyped image of women, which explains the reason why she also thinks slash fiction is the pornography "by women and for women" (ibid:86). Slash writers do not want to be male; instead, they are merely keen on creating a sexual fantasy where the characters are not obliged to follow their social roles and the characters can become what they themselves have chosen to be.

Disagreeing with Russ, Jenkins refers to Stoltenberg's definition of "pornography" which shows sex with "no past […], no future […] and […] no present (Stoltenberg, 1989:107)." Based on Stoltenberg's concept, the idea of "slash is female pornography" is thus problematic because slash fiction focuses on the interpersonal reactions among male characters including feelings, experiences and affects. Accordingly, Jenkins (1992: 191) elaborates that slash is not a genre only about sex, it is also "about the limitations of traditional masculinity and about reconfiguring male identity." Under his framework, sexual scenes in slash fiction are supposed to illustrate the characters more vividly and to enrich the plots. Moreover, sexual descriptions are always included in other general themes (romance, action, and horror, for example) so that sex is one part of plot structures, which is necessary for developing the story.

Another group of scholars mostly consider slash fiction as a metaphor for what slash fans long for. Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith (2014: 98) believe that female slash writers are working together to fight the patriarchal grain by creating "a universe that contain androgynous heroism and transcendent romantic love." In this regard, slash fiction is derived from female writers' desire for ideal gender equality, which they fail to have in the real life. Anne Kustritz (2003:373) also concludes that the slash writers share their "dreams, fantasies, and desires", which they are not allowed to, by creating slash fiction.

Romance or porn?

One of the core debates on slash fiction is whether slash fiction is romance, or just pornography. As mentioned before, Russ believes that slash fiction is a female pornography. On the other side, Penley (1994:319) thinks that female slash writers "are reshaping both romance and pornography to their own desiring ends." Kustritz (2003:377) also asserts that slash writers build up a new friendship-based love mode instead of the traditional formula of heterosexual love stories. She does not want to call slash fiction 'pornography' as pornography is the action of sexual acts, whereas the sex portrayals in slash are written in a romantic narrative. By combining previous works, Catherine Driscoll (2006:94) gives a comprehensive view on this debate from the point of view of sex/gender system that "both romance and porn consume the question of sexed and gendered relationships more for its epistemological context than its content." In conceptualizing sex/gender system, Driscoll (ibid: 94) states that sex and gender in practice is inseparable in romance, and the bind between sex and gender is always portrayed as a central topic, which means romance itself is pornographic. Further emphasizing on the inseparability of pornography and romance, Driscoll (ibid: 79) asserts that fan fiction, including slash fiction, actually belongs to a genre which is a combination of porn and romance.

In addition, some academics address the eroticization in slash fiction. It is argued that discovering the erotic part of characters' lives from dramas is fan writers' instinct (Jenkins, 1992:175). For slash fans, imagining the intimacy of two male characters becomes even more attractive and challenging than heterosexual couples. Yet, it seems that the female slash writers do not really know the details of gay sexuality at the beginning, which results in the sex descriptions in slash fiction are very boring and "full of magic words" (Russ, 1986:86). Additionally, Bacon-Smith expands the meaning of "eroticization", not merely being limited in slash world but outside the stories. Bacon-Smith (1992:239) reflects the relationships between the fans and the actors: slash fiction is a sexual fantasy where "they can share … sexual relationships

with both of the male screen characters with whom they already maintain an imaginary relationship." Similarly, based on Lamb and Veith (2014) who understand slash fiction as stories with true love, Busse (2006:212) describes explicit sexual portrayals in slash fiction as a metaphor of close friendship and intimacy between male characters. The understandings of the eroticization will help explain why slash fans are motivated writing sex scenes of the homosexual, and how they visualize their fantasy between themselves and the actors or between characters by creating slash fiction.

2.2.1 Asia and Slash Fiction

In Japan, there is a term, *Yaoi*, shares many similarities with slash fiction. *Yaoi* is an acronym for "Yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi (no climax, no fall, no meaning)" which was introduced by the popularity of Japanese animation fandom (Chin, 2007:211). There are various angles to study *Yaoi* considering its complicated background. Some claim that *Yaoi* is a sexual fantasy where *Yaoi* fans identify with the settings of *uke* (the passive role in homosexual relationship) and desires of *seme* (the dominate role in homosexual relationship) (Zanghellini, 2009:285). Some point out that, similar to slash fiction, *Yaoi* is an overwhelmingly female-gendered genre and it could be seen as a pornography directed by female (Nagaike, 2003). In addition, slash fiction only stands for a genre of fan fiction while *Yaoi* involves a broader range such as mange, animation and video, which will certainly lead to differences.

In the early 1990s, Japanese animations and comics started to become popular in mainland China due to the similar cultures and values. *Yaoi*, as an important part of Japanese culture, inevitably permeated China, especially the young generation. As a result, Chinese slash fandom has been influenced profoundly by Japanese *Yaoi* culture in terms of aestheticism. There are already countless and comprehensive studies of *Yaoi* in Japan and slash in the west due to the unbelievable spreading speed, thus this thesis will refers to the overlap among slash fiction and *Yaoi* culture to analyze the

particularity of Chinese slash fandom that Chinese slash is a place where slashers reflect their daily affections and sexual fantasies.

Current fandom studies, which are discussed before, present a fruitful approach to understanding fandom in Western society. With the rise of East Asian pop cultures, especially Japanese manga and animation, scholars started to pay more attention to what is happening in Asian countries since 20 years ago. The majority of fan studies with a focus on East Asia have centered on Japanese popular culture, which could be resonated in the whole East Asian area as well (Chin, 2007:211). Different from the Western "resisting" angle, the fandom in East Asia has been connected with the word "intimacy", which addresses a particular focus on the relationship between the fan and their adorations (ibid: 212). To contextualize, fans in Japan as well as in other East Asian countries are seeking a certain "personal relationship" with their favorite stars which decides the future fandom consumption market (ibid :212-214).

Even though slash fiction has developed into a trend in mainland China, there are only few journals and theses, which focus on the topic of slash fandom. The Chinese translation of slash fiction is "Danmei" which literally means romantic and beautiful in an aesthetical aspect. Li Yinhe (2003:401), a well-known Chinese sexologist, states that actually Chinese slash writers are addicted to creating slash fiction because of their preferences for the true love between two very good-looking men, rather than the homosexuality itself. In other words, slash fans in China do not have enough knowledge of real-life homosexual people and lives. Their experiences on the homosexuality are mostly influenced by Japanese *Yaoi*. As a result, they are hence really romantic and idealistic in their creation of beautiful characters and homoerotic stories as a reflection of their love fantasy. In China, it is not so common to talk about sex, particularly between parents and their children. Most of the conservative parents tend to avoid talking about sex within the family and do not teach proper sexual knowledge to their children either. Moreover, Chinese women are educated to be

more restrained than males in all respects. Consequently, a strong sexual repression formed, especially among young females. Ruan (2008:29) thus supposes that, from social psychological perspective, the overflow erotic depictions in slash fiction mirrors the social demands, including certain abnormal demands, especially in a country such as China with its severe sexual repression.

Criticisms

There are different criticisms on slash fiction. Kendra Hunter (1977) claims that slash fiction is a type of "character rape" which is then broadly spread in fan fiction community. She (1977:75&81) argues that an author should not force her characters to do something due to author's own pleasure and authors of slash fiction obviously abuse the characters, Kirk and Spock for instance, by forcing an improper homosexual relationship, in what could be seen as bad writing. Agreed with Hunter, famous slash writer Jane Land (1987: ii) points out that all slash fiction writers misunderstand the Trek Universe and present a new slash world with their own preferences and desires. Nonetheless, slash fiction is applauded by Henry Jenkins (1992:219), who thinks that it "posits an explicit critique of traditional masculinity, trying to establish a homosocial-homoerotic continuum as an alternative to repressive and hierarchical male sexuality." In addition, Jenkins (1992:186) also claims that slash fiction is a really important and special genre of fan fiction, and might be the most creative contribution to popular literature.

2.3 Feminist perspective

It is suggested that most fan fictions about *Star Trek* in the 1970s are written by women. Although the situation has been changing dramatically by the Internet, slash fandom still mostly consists of women. Penley (1994:304) even claims that the slash fandom is "almost 100 percent females."Considering the facts that slash fiction always draws sexual differences and sexual relations together (Penley, 1997:103), feminism has always been in the center of the debate of slash fiction.

Many feminists regard slash fiction as a form of crusade against patriarchal world. Russ (2014:89) claims that slash fiction helps female slashers escape from the traditional male-dominated society: "[w]hat they (slash fiction writers) do want is ……a love that is entirely free of the culture's whole discourse of gender and sex roles, and a situation in which it is safe to let go and allow oneself to become emotionally and sexually vulnerable." Bacon-Smith (1992:249) supposes that female slash fiction writers try to break the norms of hierarchical power. Agreeing with Russ, Kustritz (2003:383) also addresses the important influence of slash fiction which challenges the traditional images of gender and romance, and allows female slashers to build up their own narratives that "subvert patriarchy by reappropriating those prototypical hero characters who usually reproduce women's position of social disempowerment."

On the other hand, Lamb and Veith think slash (2014) fiction actually is an androgynous romance. It is argued that, different from traditional romantic fiction, slash fiction offers a new loving relationship – a love between two exact equal people (Lamb & Veith, 2014:98). Lamb and Veith (ibid:101) also suggest that all heterosexual relationships, even for truly equal couples, will eventually be destroyed by the arrival of children because women have to take care of the baby at the cost of sacrificing their own lives, which consciously puts women in a weaker position. Nonetheless, in slash fiction, the protagonists are equal in all aspects (mixing masculinity and femininity) and none of them has to sacrifice, which is an ideal parenthood that does not exist in a patriarchal society. Slash fiction removes the threats of romantic stories from "the area of gender discourse" so that female slashers can dream their ideal relationship in their imagined equal world. Penley (1994), however, believes that the relationship in slash fiction is just between lovers regardless of gender or sexual orientation. It seems that in many slash fictions, the male protagonists are highlighted as normal couples more than gays so that "the two

men are somehow meant for each other, and homosexuality has nothing to do with it (Penley, 1994: 313)." In addition, Russ (in Enterprising Women, 1992:245) sees the male characters in slash fiction are just female with a penis, which shows "femaleness free of male domination."

Partly agreeing with Lamb and Veith, Ruan Yaona (2008) claims that slash fiction indeed describes those females who do not want to be weaker in a love relationship. Nevertheless, after reading different kinds of Chinese slash fiction, Ruan (2008:35) concludes that although the characters in slash fiction are theoretically male, one of them in a relationship is relatively more feminine than another (with more girly personality and appearance, for example), which means total equal relationship is just a utopia. Jenkins also does not agree with Lamb and Veith who see slash fiction as expressing androgynous love. Jenkins thinks (1992:196) that they neglect the big diversity of slash fiction as there are actually very strong female characters in some slash fiction which represents an equal world. Thus slash might offer "utopian alternatives to current configurations of gender, […] however, slash also runs the risk of celebrating gay male experience (and more traditional forms of male bonding) at the expense of developing alternatives feminine identities (ibid, 189)." Furthermore, Jenkins has his own opinion in terms of gender debate in slash fiction, and he refers to the term "homosocial" from Sedgwick (1985:1), which means the competition, friendship and mentorship, rather than the love and romance in same-sex relationships. Jenkins (1992:175) believes that slash fiction fans misunderstand the subtext in original dramas, and shift the relationship between male characters from homosociality to desire and love. This interpretation somehow explains one of the reasons why female slash fans are addicted to homosexual love stories because they fancy the imperative bonding between close friendships of the characters they like, which they do not have in the real life.

Penley (1994) also put special emphasis on slash fiction writers in terms of the debate

of feminism. Feminists are generally considered as middle-class professionals while slash writers are mostly either working class or "subprofessinal" (Penley, 1994:319). In her opinion, slash writers do not dare to claim that they are feminists since their writing is not accepted by feminism group that are moralistically anti-pornography (if Russ's concept of "female porn" is correct) (ibid: 314). To understand slash writers' identity better, Penley (1994:321) traces back to the source of the problem, fandom, which she thinks contains diverse ideologies and is much more related to slash writers' demands and hopes than a feminism identity that "disdain popular culture and believes that pornography degrades women."

Even though slash fiction, as argued before, has been seen as voices opposing male-dominated pop culture, the actresses in slash are always portrayed as authors' rivals and are marginalized not only in Western slash fandom but also Chinese slash community (Scodari, 2007:50). Moreover, most Chinese slash writers are not aware that slash fiction has been considered by Western mainstream academia as subversive to patriarchal society. Some Chinese slashers even have misogyny so that they smear the female characters to foil the "true love" of male protagonists. As a result, the thesis will try to examine how the current academia in term of feminism fits the Chinese slash fandom and to understand the paradox – real feminism or over-optimistic expectation- in China by empirical research in the following analysis.

2.3.1 Online Slash Fandom and the Fourth wave of Feminism

It is without doubt that the rise of the Internet has shaped the studies about online fandom, which offers scholars a chance to understand the interactions among fans better (Pan, 2006:35). Media contributes a great deal to the growth of slash fiction because tight social networks of fans accompany the proliferation of slash culture (Sandvoss, 2013:25). The development of social media also drives fans to get in touch with each other easily and the rising popularity of online blogging websites and forums have gradually replaced the traditional fanzines as the main promotion way

among slash fandom. Online fan community thus becomes a feasible sphere for "expanding social networks of individuals (ibid: 36)." Lothian et al (2006: 105) claim that online slash fandom is a place where "the forms of radical intersubjective contact" can happen. Different from offline fandom, fans feel more comfortable to speak out for themselves. This is especially true of those subculture fans' groups, like slashers, that can form up a collective empowered action through the Internet. Additionally, given that slash fiction is still not accepted by some people, Busse (2006:213) describes slash fandom as a dream place where slashers could build up friendship bonds with other women who share the same interests. Online slash fandom could be reinforced by collective power online so that they can raise their concerns to the society at large and tie the community together through their 'shared identity' and 'shared sociality' (Pan, 2006:37 & Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013:166). In this issue, online slash fandom is strengthened owing to certain collective power rather than owing to disrupted individuals.

Similarly, the Internet has also led to the development of feminism studies. It is argued that social media is the place where the fourth wave feminism was born. Jennifer Baumgardner (2011) claims that the fourth wave started from 2008 and it introduced the use of blogs, online social media such as Twitter and Facebook where gender equality is discussed. Kira Cochrane (2013) declares that the fourth wave of feminism is a product of the increasing amount of feminists online and full use of advanced technology. Incorporating Cochranne's idea, Rivers (2014:10) states that, nowadays, the majority of active writers online were born during previous feminist waves which sought to end sexism and misogyny, thus they unconsciously have feminism blood in their bodies. There is scarce research on the connection between the fourth wave of feminism and slash fandom so far. Among this void, Rivers' voice on the fourth wave and online columnists stands out. Rivers (ibid:185) advocates that "…the increase in female columnists can account for the proliferation of women's views on issues that could be considered 'feminist' and thus linked to what is being

hailed as the emergence of the fourth wave." In addition, the Internet leads online feminist writers to a bigger audience as social media creates opportunities for the writers and their readers to interact online which largely promotes the spread of the fourth wave of feminism (ibid). Furthermore, Diana Diamond (2009:213) identifies the fourth wave feminism as a feminist movement in a psychoanalytic perspective which "combines politics, psychology, and spirituality in an overarching vision of change." Diamond (2009: 216) also points out that gender is supposed to put in "the center of narratives of social change" during the fourth wave of feminism.

It is suggested that the Internet indeed offered female fans better access to new technology into cyberspace where "masculine mastery" was the mainstream (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013:29). Yet since research on the relationship between slash fiction and the fourth wave of feminism is only just budding, this thesis aims to point out that both these two fields are beneficial from technology, intersectionality and grassroots audience, which could be seen as positive relations during the research process.

2.4 Identity

As aforementioned, slash fandom is a place where slashers share the common interests and cultural affiliations. Considering the identity is a broad topic, the following part will focus on the identification between slashers and their characters, and the consumer and the producer inside slash fandom.

Although many scholars think slash fiction is written by women about male homosexuality (Penley, 1994 & Bacon-Smith, 1992), it is still hard to judge authors' sexual identities according to the genre specialty. Bacon-Smith (1992:247) discovered that most slash writers are heterosexual women who are currently single. Jenkins (1992:191) points out that even though slash fiction is usually considered as a female genre, there are still men who participate in the writing and reading of slash fandom. Ruan (2008:48) posits that most of slash fiction writers' genders are female while in

their stories they identify with homosexual males instead of females. Jenkins (1992:191) concludes that slash fiction is "a projection of female sexual fantasies, desires, and experiences onto the male bodies of the series characters." Penley's work (1994:314) is crucial to rethink the relationship between the authors and the characters they create: "In the fantasy, one can *be* Kirk or Spock and also still *have* (sexual objects) either or both of them since, as heterosexuals, they are not *un*available to women." Slashers resonate with characters not only sexually, but also emotionally. They most commonly replace the main characters with themselves; however they are not opposed to playing other roles (ibid). Ruan (2008:87) also has similar ideas that fan fiction writers always want to have emotional resonance with the characters they create; therefore they will replace themselves with the heroine in heterosexual love stories.

In addition, Penley (1994:316) points out that slash writers do not only identify with characters, but also full scenes and entire narratives; which they themselves fail to have in the reality. In this regard, slashers create their own fantasy and want themselves to be parts of worlds which have sexual and racial equality or global ecology (ibid). Furthermore, Busse (2006:209) claims that sexuality is just one part of "fannish identity" thus she focuses on writers of online slash fiction. She finds out that online slash writers more prominently blur the boundaries between the reality and fantasy they create. Sometimes, writers acted out role-playing games during the production process so that they were able to lose their real identity in various aspects of the story. Even though resonating with the characters in slash fiction enables writers to create stories with richer feelings, being drawn to the fantasy, for a long time, will cause problems in the reality such as holding false hopes and failing to recognize the reality.

There is also identity shifting from fans to producers in slash fandom. Jenkins and his colleagues (2013) create a new media model which is called "spreadable media". The

change in broadcasting paradigms results in a shift from 'distribution' to 'circulation' of media content, including a more participatory, two-way exchange between consumers and producers (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). In contrast to "stickiness" media, there are no clear borders among "producer", the "marketer" and the "audience" (ibid, 2013:7). In this sense, slash fandom is an epitome of the "spreadable media" model: originally slashers were the "audience" of TV shows and, after creating their own slash works, they become the "producer" and even the "marketer" who influence the whole fandom market. These roles are crossed because technology makes media content circulation easier and bound the economic structure and the market together.

As discussed above, the identities felt among slashers are quite broad in scope. Writers of slash fandom identify with all aspects of the narrative, beyond just resonating with gender or sexual identities, going so far as to blur the line between their own reality and fantasy. Furthermore, slash fandom allows slashers to move fluidly throughout roles in the actual production and reception of the work itself.

The theoretical framework above has highlighted how important and special fandom and slash fiction are in nowadays popular culture worldwide, and has provided the connections between slash fandom and feminism perspective and identity. As one of the most creative fan production, slash fiction has shaped the academics' ideas on the audience who are able to change the industrial market. Slash culture has also created a place where female fans can share their identities, love and sexual fantasy. In the following part, this theoretical framework will be used to further explore the characteristics of slash fandom in China and relevant topics together with the empirical data.

3 Methodology and Methods

Methodology is described as the "armed wing of science" (Seale et al, 2007: 7) because it helps researchers to form the research topic and the framework, and leads the researchers, especially during the qualitative research process. In contrast to quantitative methodology, qualitative methodology focuses on deeply understanding the background and the reasons for social phenomena (Silverman, 2015:32). However, the central issues of qualitative methodology are its reliability and validity, considering the samples and actual operation process. Silverman (2015:20) argues that "qualitative interview studies are often conducted with small samples and the interviewer-interviewee relationship may be defined in political rather than scientific terms." In order to reinforce the trustworthiness of qualitative methodology, credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability should be taken into account; for instance by conducting interviewee checks and peer debriefings during the whole process of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Earlier research on fans studies has taken various methodologies, mostly qualitative approaches, which provide details and depth of the female slashers' experience. Penley (1994) completes her essay on slash fandom through a psychoanalytic approach. She works as both participant and observer, and as both fan and academic, to explore "how the subject participates in and restages a scenario in which crucial questions about desire, knowledge, and identity can be posed and in which the subject can hold a number of identificatory positions (Penley, 1994:303)." Jenkins (1992:101) conducts his fan studies within a position of "aca-fan". Media studies are used by Jenkins to address the inseparability between slash fans and the rest of the public. Bacon-Smith (1992:299) applies ethnography to develop "a knowledge of the structure and meaning of the fan language with a number of techniques." She finds the particularity of female slash fandom through an ethnographical approach, while also observing the fans from an over-privileged position which makes her findings lack the diversity of fandom.

3.1 Semi-Structured Interview

The two most frequent methods of previous research on slash fiction are content analysis and in-depth interviews. As this thesis focuses on the authors of slash fiction rather than slash stories itself, content analysis then does not match the aims. As one of the most common research methods, interviews are usually used for collecting qualitative data. The interview method is suitable for understanding interviewees' feelings and personal stories, as Rapley (2007:15) states that the "[…] interview is presented as enabling a 'special insight' into subjectivity, voice and lived experience." It is important to understand the real 'voice' of slashers as it offers a chance to get to know the basis of slash fandom vividly. In order to achieve the goals of this thesis, the semi-structured interview method was used to mediate between this new subculture phenomenon of slash in China and the relevant theories.

There are four basic types of interviews: informal, structured, unstructured, and semi-structured (Berger, 2011). Among all the interview methods, semi-structured interviews offer interviewers and interviewees a chance for "interactional exchange of dialogue" (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 3). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews focus more on *Why* rather than *How much* or *How many* (Fylan, 2005:66). Moreover, Byrne (2004:182) posits that semi-structured interviews are suitable for marginal groups which "have been ignored, misrepresented and suppressed in the past." Such intentions are relevant to this thesis because the aims of this thesis are to determine reasons why slash fiction has been so popular in China, as well as the relationship between the minority fandom, slashers, and other related issues. Additionally, semi-structured interviews work relatively better on sensitive topics. Fylan, 2005:67) claims that "while taking part in an interview is likely to be equally uncomfortable/distressing – the fact that we can talk through the topic with the participant, debrief them afterwards, and answer their questions about why we are doing the research, and stop at any point means that we can be much more confidently that at the end of the interview they are not any worse off emotionally than they were

before." By interacting with the participants, it would be easier for the interviewer to introduce the sensitive topic of slash fiction in China, and to change and adapt questions based on the reactions of interviewees during semi-structured interviews.

3.1.1 Interview process

The whole interview process was divided in many steps, including piloting interviews, developing semi-structured interview questions after piloting, revising semi-structured interview questions, recruitment and ultimately the final interviews themselves. At the very beginning stage of the research process, there was only an informal theoretical framework of the topics of media participation and fandom. After conducting four pilot interviews and reading several relevant books, the feminist perspective as well as identity and friendship issues were included which would help the thesis to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the topic of slash fiction in China.

Four pilot interviews were conducted in December 2015 in order to get a general idea of how slash fiction worked in China and to test the feasibility of the themes. Although semi-structured interviews are flexible and open compared to structured interviews, precise interview outlines are still necessary. Pilot interviews also helped to structure a better interview outline and a deeper theoretical framework of this thesis. After doing four pilot interviews, some the semi-structured interview questions were changed. For instance, the question "Does your family know that you are writing slash? If not, why?" was deleted afterwards since answers from pilot interviews did not show the explicit connections between slash fandom and family topic. Questions about friendships were then added instead of family. The final semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A) were completed based on the themes of the slash fiction landscape in China, slash fiction production process, gender equality in a patriarchal society, friendship ties, and identity. These five themes were chosen because the first and the second themes would clearly clarify the slash fandom in China and current slash fandom studies have not covered the latter three themes to

any great degree yet.

Considering that most Chinese slash writers try to cover their tracks by using pseudonyms, it is hard for the researcher to access them. As a result, the snowball sampling was then used in the whole interview process. The interview process started from one slash writer, who was found on the Internet by the researcher in November 2015. Then more slash writers were introduced by previous participants. Given the fact that the central problem of snowball sampling is that "[…] in the social science […] it contradicts many of the assumptions underpinning conventional notions of random selection and representativeness" (Atkinson & Flint, 2004:1044), the researcher filtered all the interviewees' basic information with the awareness to avoid repetitive samples. Eventually, 15 interviewees within different ages (between 23-32 years old), careers (students, accountants, office workers, bank tellers, and freelance workers), cities (Shanghai, Shenzhen, Wuhan, Beijing, and Tokyo), and years of doing slash fiction (between 3-10 years) were chosen for the Chinese slashers research. This sample was decided based on the background trends for slash. According to previous research (Ruan, 2008; Chai, 2011), the major age range of Chinese slashers is 18 to 30 years and female slash writers usually live in big cities, with decent jobs and degrees.

Due to geographical restrictions and time differences, every interview was conducted through WeChat (a Chinese online communication application). All the interviewees were under a statement of informed consent in Chinese and all of their names have been changed to keep them anonymous, as they requested, and to guarantee an ethical thesis. The average length of most of the interviews was 40 minutes. All the participants were Chinese slash writers so that the interviews were conducted in the Chinese language. The interview result of participant Yuka was fully translated and transcribed (see Appendix B). The rest of the results were coded as well (see Appendix C). The interviews gradually went more smoothly based on accumulations of interview experiences. After five interviews, the researcher decided to add

follow-up questions targeting specific aspects for the rest of the interviews, which depended on the personal background of the interviewees. For instance, the interview of participant Yuka was mostly about gender equality but with less focus on identity (see Appendix B). According to Rapley (2007:27), repetitively listening and transcribing the interviews develop more creative ideas and produce "a *textual* version of the interaction that could be used both for further analysis and reports." After coding the transcriptions of the interviews, the results will be fully used in the chapter of Data Analysis.

The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis and coding, which enabled the researcher to examine the interview results by different themes. Thematic analysis is a process that "moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes (Guest et al, 2012:7)." Besides, coding is used to summarize and connect the interview results within the themes (ibid). During the process of transcription, the main themes were fully grounded on the theoretical framework of this thesis. By classifying, reviewing and comparing, the interview results were then expanded into wide-ranging themes to answer the research questions of this thesis. The final transcripts were categorized into two tables: on an individual level and on a group level (see Appendix D) to offer more angles for data analysis. In order to guarantee the reliability of transcripts, this process required repeated examinations and rethinking. For example, the interview results were diverse and some were conflicting, especially between interviewee Lulu and Yuka, who had completely different opinions on the idea that "same gender is the basis of equal love". The researcher thus decided to analyze this topic with the dual visual angel of agreement and disagreement.

3.1.2 Limitations

As mentioned before, all the interviews were done via WeChat, which prevented the

interviewer from observing the interviewees' facial expressions. The limitations of WeChat also made the sound recordings a bit disruptive, which did not influence the results fortunately. In addition, the interactions during the interviews were a bit dry compared to face-to-face interviews. Opdenakker (2006) also mentions that although online interview method allows interviewers to reach their subjects more easily, it reduces social cues since the interviewees' reactions and body languages cannot be seen by the interviewer. Nonetheless, the researcher tried to focus on the voice and the intonation of interviewees in order to compensate for the unavailability of body language.

Furthermore, snowball sampling offered several interviewees on this minor topic, but it is a method based on the social networks. Most of the interviewees were friends with each other since slash fandom is still a minority group in China. Even though the researcher tried hard to guarantee the diversity of the interviewees, some parts of the results were still repetitive (particularly encountering the question of attitude towards the love relationships between slash couples). Moreover, all the interviewees were with good education degrees which also caused their responses to be idealistic.

4. Data Analysis

This analysis chapter is based on qualitative research on slash fans, including 15 semi-structured interviews. The chapter analyzed the data according to five themes: the landscape of slash fandom in China; slash fiction production process; gender and slash fiction; identity; and friendship ties. It is these themes that will provide the most wholistic view of slash fans and their relations to slash fiction. Among the subjects, everyone showed a strong concern for the current situation of slash under the circumstance of ideology control from the government. Furthermore, throughout the interviews, the interviewees showed an implicit feminism position when touching on the gender issues associated with slash fiction and the patriarchy in China. However, they held an avoidance of politics as they consider slash to be a relaxing activity and do not want to involve or associate the complicated world of politics with leisure.

4.1 The landscape of slash fandom in China

4.1.1 Go slashed!

Scholars such as Jenkins and Penley had an existing comprehensive understanding about the reasons why slash fiction appeared and became widely spread in the West as well as Japan. However, in China, the situation is completely different and complicated due to its national features. Hence, the coming section will be focused on the environment in China where slash fiction is bred. According to the results of 15 interviews, it was Japanese *Yaoi* and idol culture that triggered and accelerated the development of slash fandom in the context of leading mainstream media narratives in China since the 21st century.

Influence from Japanese popular culture

With the increasing popularity of Japanese animation in China since the 1990s, *Yaoi*, as a subculture, started to attract the young Chinese generation's attention. Therefore, the media sources of slash fiction in China at this time were mainly Japanese animation and manga. The first homosexual works that the five interviewees

themselves had read (Yuka, Lulu, Yaya, Tree, M) were Japanese *Yaoi*. For example, interviewees Yuka and Lulu mentioned that their first male-only love manga was Slum Dunk, a famous Japanese basketball manga. The early slash works Chinese girls became familiar with were mostly *Yaoi* works from Japan, which had a great impact on the beginning of Chinese slash fandom. Even though slash in China has now developed its own merits, most Chinese slashers still tribute to the inspiration of *Yaoi* from Japan. Interviewee Yaya claimed that "Japanese *Yaoi* culture was a pioneer of the homosexual theme worldwide."

In addition, Japanese idol culture also triggered the slash fiction boom in China. As discussed before, *Tanbi* is an aesthetic style in literature, thus good-looking young boy bands were used as resources for slash fantasy fiction as they helped to visualize slashers' fantasies. Interviewee Tamarin described how she started to get addicted with Japanese idols:

> There were not so many people who could be 'slashed' by me 10 years ago in real life so that I shifted my 'slashed' fantasy to Japanese idols because there are various types of boy idols, either masculine or feminine. Anyway all of them are good-looking.

Three interviewees (Liyu, Moomin, Haidai) also confirmed that they do tend to pick up characters who have more striking appearances. This result is consistent with Chinese scholar Li Yinhe (2003:401) who stresses that true love of homosexual couples only exists between good-looking males in the slash world. In this regard, interviewee Liyu explained:

> As a slash writer, I have to consider that most of my readers are not homosexual and they don't have so many gay friends in their real life so the slash world or I would say the homosexual world they understand is mostly influenced by Japanese *Yaoi* where all characters are cute and handsome.

However, while Li's idea is suitable for some slashers it is too extreme in general. Interviewee North argued: "there are also some characters that don't have beautiful appearances but attractive personalities in every drama. As time passed, we started to realize that good-looking can't stand for everything." This was interesting as the slashers from Western society were not as focused on highlighting the boys'

appearances as were their Chinese counterparts since Western slash fans put more attention on the sexual relationships of the male characters than their appearances.

Leading media narrative

Although slash first appeared in China in the 1990s, it did not receive media attention until the 2000s.Also at the beginning of the 21st century, the number of slashers in China began to grow. Interviewee Lulu elucidated:

> I started to read *Yaoi* manga 15 years ago when the media narrative was completely different from now. At that moment, homosexuality was still a sensitive topic. There was nothing about homosexuality on mass media. Of course, you could barely find boy's love manga or fiction in bookstores either.

Due to the growing popularization of the Internet, there are now many ways to access current information or news and communicate with people from all over the world. More and more society began to acknowledge that homosexuality is simply one kind of love, just like other types of love in the world. Thankfully, homosexuality was declassified as a mental disorder by the Chinese Society of Psychiatry (CSP) in 2001[3]. As a result, mainstream media changed their attitude towards homosexuality and became more tolerant of homosexual themes. Along with the development of *Yaoi* in China, Chinese slashers were no long satisfied with only fancying foreign characters considering the language problem. Therefore, they shifted their focus to domestic mass media such as TV series, movies and games, such as *Swords of Legends*[4] and *Nirvana in Fire*[5].To fulfill the high demands of slashers, media narrative has changed to "slashed" as well. The mainstream media started to create the implied homosexual couples' image of some famous stars or fictional characters. This type of slashed media narrative can be seen in the broadcast of BBC series *Sherlock*[6] in 2010. The media did not focus on the detective plots but instead on the slashed interactions between the main characters Sherlock Holmes and John Watson. There is no doubt that the slashed stars on media are feast to slashers both mentally and visually.

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[3](2016, May 15). Retrieved from http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shehui/47/20010312/414361.html
[4]*Swords of Legends*: a role-play video game which was released in 2010.
[5]Nirvana in Fire: a 2015 TV series based on the novel with the same name.
[6]*Sherlock*: BBC TV series with three seasons airing respectively in 2010, 2012 and 2014.

Interviewee Tree explained:

> You could feel it from the media if you would like to check the entertainment news in China! Two handsome and sexy actors on the cover, looking at each other! I guess nobody, especially young girls, would say 'no' to buy them!

By the same token, this is also confirmed by other two interviewees (Marin, Yaya). This proves the idea that under the circumstance of spreadable media, there is a two-way interaction between consumers and producers (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). Jenkins and his colleagues (ibid: 150) argue that "transmedia content may appropriate ideas from grassroots cultural production and reroute them to serve other markets." Accordingly, the media industry shapes the media content depended on mainstream tastes of fandom, and marginalizes the other unpopular ones. In this sense, slashers are the consumers of the media content, and they are attracted by the implicit homosexual narratives in shows like Sherlock. The producers of media industry realize this "slashed" trend, and thus focus slashers as a target market to meet their high demands by promoting more implicit homosexual narratives in Chinese media. Therefore, the leading media narratives greatly help the spread of slash culture in China.

4.1.2 Localization

Slash fiction in China absorbs the soul of foreign slash culture and develops its own merits in the context of Chinese fandom and national characteristics. Chinese slashers have developed slash fiction into a business and bring the beauty of the Chinese language and culture into the slashed narratives and themes.

Commercialization

Although western slashers do publish commercial slash fanzines, most of the publications there are still produced traditionally in regards to design and sale execution of individual works (Chai, 2011). Penley (1994:307) describes the slash fandom in the West a "cottage industry", which mostly produced at slashers' home. In contrast, Chinese and Japanese slash has already developed into a mature production

chain owing to the unique fandom culture. Fiske (1992:37) describes fans as "textual productivity", and East-Asian fans are particularly enthusiastic to the point of turning their passion into making use of their beloved work in a creative way. According to Katyal (2006:469), slash fans have drawn two parallel cultural and political economics together: one is slash fiction, which is mostly on the Internet that shows a huge enthusiasm of participations of women; another is the fan-made science fiction market, where used to be dominated by men. Moreover, by learning from Japanese fan production culture; Chinese slash has grown up a new-style of fandom business.

According to interviewees (Ling, Setsu, Lulu, Momoko, North, Haidai), the basic commercialization procedure is as followed.
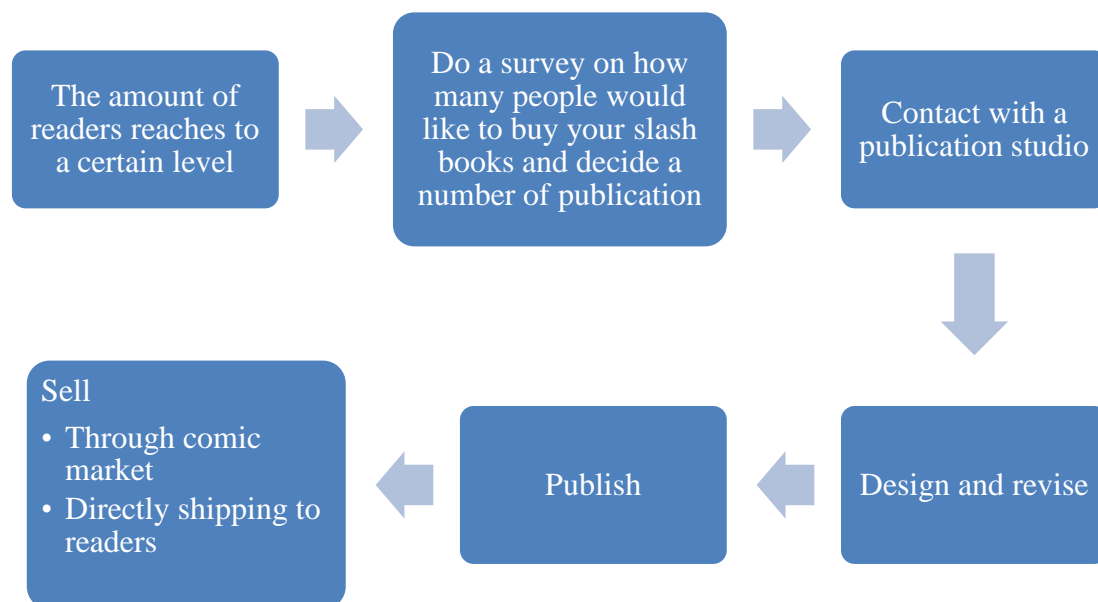
Graph 1*: the basic commercialization procedure of slash fiction in China*

As shown, there are two ways of selling slash fanzines in China. The first common way to sell slash fiction is at Comic Market, a convention for all kinds of self-published fan productions including manga, fanzines, and relevant merchandise. The other way is to ship fanzines directly to readers. Each has its own advantages. Interviewee Setsu explained:

Direct shipping is definitely faster and more convenient for both readers and writers than

waiting for Comic Market as Comic Market is only twice a year in Shanghai. Selling fanzines at Comic Market usually works better for popular authors because booth fee and labor costs are extra costs. Considering the profits, most of the slash authors add side stories which only exist in the Comic Market version fanzines as promotions.

Interviewee Setsu's explanations reflect an oppositional gaze from Penley (1997: 105) who claims that Western slash fandom is a mini-industry without profits. Slash fans in the West do not make money from slash due to the copyrights suits, which Chinese slashers have not worried about since slash fiction is not covered by intellectual property- and copyrights laws in China yet. In this regard, defective laws create the conditions for commercialization of slash in China.

According to the results of the interviews, most of the interviewees see writing slash as a labor of love. Only 6 interviewees (Ling, Setsu, Lulu, Momoko, North, Haidai) have done commercial slash, and half of them dropped it due to different reasons (lack of energy and time, for instance). Interviewees held different opinions on commercialized slash fiction. Some interviewees (Momoko, Setsu) who still create commercial slash fiction thought that slash fiction was a huge market in China and commercialization of slash was inevitable. On the other hand, interviewee Ling, who stopped doing commercial slash recently, noted: "Of course you make money from publications, but you sometimes are at a loss as well. It really depends on the quality of fanzines and your readers. I don't like those writers who only do slash for money, rather than real passion to slash itself." The slash writers in China are divided into two groups, commercial and non-commercial writers, and there are huge differences between these two groups. The non-commercial writers create their works as free labors, while the rest slashers are on the opposite side. Most of the commercial writers are watched by their readers, particularly in terms of the updating speed and plots, as it is important to meet readers' demands. However, in order to attract more readers and to earn more money, some commercial writers produce slash fiction, which is full of cliché and sexual descriptions. Interviewee Marin called this kind of slash fiction as "fast-food fiction" and she said: "this type of slash fiction is usually trendy, but with

low literariness, and will not be read by slashers again because another book will appear soon with the similar content and settings."The "fast-food" phenomenon of slash fiction emerged in China because slash fandom is still at the beginning stage, and most of the fans and producers see it as a huge business opportunity, which at the same time causes chaos. Nevertheless, when the commercial market of slash fandom reaches saturated, the "fast-food" slash fiction will naturally decline with the development of slash fandom and fans. Hence, at the present stage, it is slash writers that should decide what to write and to produce since, as previously discussed, they are the producers of the market.

Creativity

Chinese slash culture has been greatly influenced by the idea of "*Tanbi*", which praises the aesthetic value. It is worth noting that Chinese slashers do not only pay attention to the aesthetic characteristics but also the beautiful narratives, as they play a vital role in the content of Chinese language. Interviewee Tamarin mentioned:

> Chinese slash readers sometimes are too strict with the narrative. For instance, readers would prefer to the slash with more beautiful narratives, even the plots are nothing new.

Most interviewees mentioned that they have their own personal writing styles that could be easily recognized by the readers. Interviewee Moomin admitted that it is sometimes difficult to reach readers' expectations of "beautiful narratives" since Chinese is a complex language, and readers have various tastes in narratives.

Different from slashers in the West, Chinese slashers are keen on writing real-person slash as well, which means the characters are originally created by the writers or are celebrities in real life. As mentioned before, celebrity is one of the most popular slash genres in China, but there are many others. According to the research done by Ruan (2008), romance, mafia, school life, Wuxia (ancient China) and war time are the most popular themes among slash fans in China. In demonstrating this point, interviewee M emphasized:

> "Most of slashers in China used to or still read heterosexual fan fiction which means they

probably have read more fiction than the writers. It is always the most important thing to keep readers fresh so that writers are supposed to have new ideas all the time."

These high demands from readers increase the competition among slash writers. All of the interviewees confirmed that they read slash written by other popular slash writers to get a general idea of the trend and tastes of readers.

4.1.3 Illegitimacy

Media censorship has been built into China's internet infrastructure for more than 10 years to filter out different kinds of sensitive information which might be challenging to the mainstream ideology of the government. Although homosexuality is no longer regarded as a mental disorder, the erotic depiction between gay couples in slash still goes against anti-porn campaigns in China. Some scholars advocate that slash fiction should be banned because they claim that these depictions of homosexual couples will have a negative impact on teenagers (Wang & Liu, 2007). Wang and Liu (2007) assert that the majority of slashers in China are at the age when the values and views on love and life are formed. However, given the freedom on the Internet, there are slash fiction of greatest concern, describing the plots which are meant to get rid of the traditional moral regulations, such as incest and threesome sexual relationships. The rising popularity of this type of slash fiction on the Internet consequently leads to more strict media censorship.

Moreover, the current situation of slash is a paradox in China under the circumstances of censorship. Interviewee Ren described:

> Nowadays the publications of slash increased dramatically comparing to 5 years ago. In addition, comic market is also allowed to be held every year where most slash fanzines are sold, which also means slash has already been an important part of our popular culture. However, the government has released various rules these years to ban homosexual fiction and TV series for anti-porn campaign.

In 2011, 32 slash writers were sent to prison for writing erotically about homosexual couples in Zhenzhou[7] which caused a huge uproar in China. Those 32 slash writers

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[7](2016, May 15). Retrieved from http://news.ifeng.com/society/1/detail_2011_03/21/5271646_0.shtml

were sued for writing slash fiction involved violent and sexual descriptions, and the website where they posted their fiction was forced to shut down as well. Most slashers on the Internet could not agree the way how the government treated slash fiction negatively just because some slashers wrote eroticization.

To avoid being caught by the government, Chinese slashers have recently begun to post their works on private blogs and forums, instead of open websites. Furthermore, all of the interviewees write slash fiction anonymously, which is indicative of the general situation of slash writers in China. Some of the interviewees (Haidai, Setsu) only post their slash without sensitive content on the Internet and publish the whole version in fanzines. Interviewee Haidai asserted: "It is troublesome, but, after all, nobody wants to be caught by the police in what the censorship of slash is too acute in China." It is worth noting that unlike other countries in the world, China still does not have a rating system on all kinds of mass media. Interviewee Ren further claimed that given the whole environment in China, censoring all slash fiction is "understandable but a one-sided method… It's the time for the government to realize the importance of rating systems because slash is obviously a trend among the whole young generation in China." Lobato and Thomas (2015: 190) state that regulations on the media should not always be "whether or not to regulate", but to consider all the conditions since "effective regulatory systems need to be grounded in a rigorous understanding of the dynamics, risks and possibilities." It is nearly impossible to ban all the slash fiction in China as there will always be various ways to escape from the censorship. Instead of making slash fiction completely forbidden, the government should recognize the inevitability of growing slash fiction, and carry out a more flexible regulatory system and rating systems to protect teenagers.

4.2 Slash fiction production
4.2.1 Motivation for slash production
When discussing the motivation for slash production, the answers differ among

individuals, who write for various purposes and have different interests. The most common reasons were strongly connected to the original media content. Interviewee Yaya's simple answer could stand for all the similar results that "I could not stop imagining the future life of the characters from my favorite TV series so that I write all my imaginations down!" Interviewee Lulu even described her motivation as a "voyeuristic desire":

> I get really excited when I find some hidden interactions between the two characters I love! You know, it's a kind of voyeuristic desire that makes me feel we were sharing our own secrets. Now observing their facial expressions and eye contacts has been my favorite.

This opinion could be supplied by some interviewees who pointed out the role of the original media content. For instance, interviewee Yuka noted:

> "I would say the original content is sometimes really leading even though it is a normal heterosexual story. Directors like to focus so much on the communications between two male protagonists which enables me to feel that they might like each other."

In this sense, all of the previous answers could reflect Bacon-Smith's (1992:232-233) notion that some audiences might be misled by directors' unintentional close-ups and by small interactions among characters: "the television director makes a conscious choice to use the extreme close-up, but setting a scene as simple as two or more characters in conversation so that viewers can correctly interpret it presents a problem in logistics." For instance, if the characters who are engaged in close relationships, they are shot in plenty of close-up for the audiences to read their facial expressions and eye contacts. However, facial gestures are not shot clearly for the audiences to see if the characters are rivals or enemies. The audiences are thus manipulated by the TV directors.

This phenomenon, together with the slashed media narrative is a constant cycle: as more audiences get misled by the original media content, more slash fiction will be generated, more slashed plots will be demanded by slash fans, and the original content creators may even respond by implying more interactions between male characters. However, this situation disturbs other groups of fans who like the more obscure and

minor slashed couples. For example: in one drama, there are only two or three slashed couples who are popular among all of the slash fans despite various characters. Thus, slash fiction about popular couples are the mainstream in slash fandom, while works about less popular couples are relatively neglected. Interviewee M explained: "I can't blame anyone for this embarrassing condition so I have to create my own slash fiction for my beloved couples which could be seen as my motivation."Hence, this "slashed cycle" significantly speeds up the expansion of slash in China, in addition to other factors.

Predictably, commercial motivation was mentioned by one interviewee, Momoko, who used to write heterosexual romance and started slash fiction several years ago. Interviewee Momoko elaborated on her motivations for slash:

> My inspirations of heterosexual plots have dried up. Instead, slash fiction is more attractive for commercial authors, like me, because slash is still at its beginning stage and readers are not familiar with it yet.

10 years ago it was fairly easy for writers of heterosexual fan fiction to get readers in China. However, heterosexual romance has already passed its prime as readers are much pickier than before and are getting tired of all the heterosexual story plots. As stated previously, slash fiction has become a new business in China, and many commercial writers have changed their fields to slash fiction as a result. In this regard, some slashers' motivations for slash production are mainly commercial rather than real passion to slash fiction, which contributes to the unique characteristic – wide spread popularity - of slash fandom in China.

4.2.2 Attitude towards eroticization in slash

Similar to motivations for slash, interviewees' attitudes towards erotic portrayals in slash were also diverse in the light of their personal purposes and interests. Most interviewees did not want the public to prejudice erotic scenes in slash just because the characters are homosexual. Interviewee Lulu asserted:

> It is really necessary because everyone has sexual desires. I think authors who don't want to present erotic scenes in slash actually don't approve the kind of slash love mode. Since

readers have acknowledged that it's common to have erotic depictions in heterosexual romance, then what's the difference if there is lots of erotic stuff in slash?

Other interviewees, for instance Marin, described that portraying sexual scenes is natural and tempting. This is consistent with Jenkins' notion that slash fans, by nature, want to discover the erotic dimensions of the characters they fancy (Jenkins, 1992:175). For many, intimacy is one part of love and should not be judged by the public. Interviewee Yuka even highly praised the eroticization in slash: "Comparing to heterosexuality, slash itself is a taboo and sex depictions are considered as pornography in China. When these two taboos encounter, they will create more emotional affections among characters." In slash fiction, the characters are portrayed as couples fall in love with each other regardless of huge pressures and social taboos, which makes the love and sexual descriptions between them even more beautiful and more moving.

Bacon-Smith (1992:213) sees slash fiction as a sexual reflection between the fans and actors which is also supported by some interviewees. Interviewee Haidai commented:

> The actors are so charming and sexy that I have always been fascinated. I know it is impossible for me to have further relationships with my favorite actors. Thus I present the erotic scenes between him and his lover, which euphemistically realizes my sexual fantasy with them.

But this attitude was only mentioned by two interviewees (Haidai, Moomin) who at the same time supported the idea that intimacy boosts loving relationships.

On an individual level, interviewee M thought depicting intimacy would be really challenging and could prove her writing skills. Although this viewpoint was not mentioned by other interviewees, the reason why some interviewees did not portray eroticization in slash was merely because they did not know of the sexual behaviors of gay people. This honest reason could be seen as an oppositional gaze from Bacon-Smith (1992:248), who claims that unlike heterosexual fiction, there is no pressure for slash writers of writing homosexual erotica. Moreover, most interviewees actually tried to get as much knowledge of gay sex from watching gay videos and

Yaoi manga from Japan in order to make eroticization in their slash more convincing. Russ' (2014) notion that slashers seemingly do not have the knowledge of gay sex at the very start could be applied here.

In addition, another frequent answer was to fulfill readers' high demands on intimacy depictions. Interviewee Liyu noted:

> To be honest, the reason why I write erotic scenes is because it helps promoting my slash works. There are some slashers in China, especially young girls, are superficial that don't really care about the quality of plots. For me, it doesn't matter adding some paragraphs of eroticization because readers are the god.

Liyu's comment can be linked to Yang Ya (2006) who holds a point of view that slash fiction is derived from the sexual desires of women. In China, slashers cannot access to sexual knowledge properly due to lack of sex education at schools. As a result, reading slash fiction becomes an improper way to satisfy female slash fans' curiosity on sex. Disagreed with Liyu's attitude, interviewee Yuka stated that slash fiction should be connected with love in mind rather than erotica, even though there is a high demand on sexual depictions from readers. Particularly, some young slashers even do not have mature values on love and the world, and their values will be influenced by over-erotic slash in the condition without rating systems in China.

4.2.3 Challenges during slash production

The most highly-mention challenge during writing slash was ethics based on the results of interviews. Most interviewees admitted that they were profoundly aware of the importance of ethics in their real life. However, when it comes to slash world, they abandoned the ethical standards. In this point, interviewee Setsu said:

> In my slash stories, I present the love of commit incest which makes me feel guilty since it betrays the social norms in China. It is really difficult for me when my readers question about the ethical problem of my slash fiction. But I have to admit that I wouldn't do the same as what I portray in slash. Incest? Never!

There are various kinds of themes in slash fiction including some unusual themes which violate the moral standards in China. Among the unusual themes, incest is one of the most popular themes among interviewees. In slash world, incest is described by

Chinese slashers as a great love regardless of the society. However, in the reality, no one would tell others if he/she has the secret of incest taboo, especially in a conservative country like China.

Similarly, some interviewees were suffered moral denunciations of slash fiction itself. Interviewee Marin mentioned:

> I grew up in a society where pornography is forbidden and I was taught to behave as a good girl which means I should self-respect properly. Now I am producing slash fiction on homosexual couples which are considered as pornography by the government. I struggled a lot at the beginning.

This is supported by Nagaike (2012:3-4) who claims that "when she (slash writer) first realized that her daydreaming was initiated by and eroticized through male homosexual fantasies, she defined herself as insane and perverted." The contradictions between social norms and personal hobbies distressed all the interviewees. But it is notable that all previous difficulties only exist between slashers and the social norms. They are not internal challenges of slashers per se. Expected answers, such as self writing skills and time arrangement, were not mentioned by the interviewees, which also shows that social norms influence slashers reflectively during their production process in China.

4.3 Feminism perspective

4.3.1 Slash and gender difference

Throughout the interviews, most of the interviewees had an agreement on a recurring idea when talking about the difference between slash and heterosexual fan fiction that love has nothing to do with gender. Interviewee Ling asserted: "They are two individuals just happen to love the person with the same sex. That's it!" Interviewee Yuka listed four differences between writing slash and heterosexual fiction:

> First, the way how the characters express their feelings is not the same. Second, I think how homosexual couples get along with each other is definitely different from heterosexual couples. Third, their identifications and personalities are different. For instance, both of them are male so it would be easier to understand a person who is the same sex. Fourth, the way they think is different as well. Women usually are more

sensitive and paranoid in heterosexual romance.

Given that four points, interviewee Yuka reaffirmed her thoughts towards the gender differences in slash:

> It always takes a long time for me to rethink these four points during writing. However for me, all relationships in this world are the same because everyone should be equal. I don't like to stress my characters are different because they are gay. I think all my stories are about love between two individuals.

The idea of not focusing on the gender and sexual orientation of main characters was repeatedly mentioned by the interviewees, which is supported by the idea that Penley (1989:259) raises that slash is not stories of gays, but lovers. The two male characters just love each other, and sexual orientation should not be involved in it.

Another important aspect raised by Lamb and Veith (2014) who see slash as "androgynous romance" was mentioned by few subjects. Nonetheless, this notion works in an opposite direction in slash fandom in China. Interviewee Momoko admitted:

> To be honest, I would say that I describe my bottom character as 'female with a penis'. Actually I feel like I was writing heterosexual romance with a slash setting.

The idea of Lamb and Veith is to show how female slashers subvert the traditional gender paradigms and to prove that slash is a result of slashers' desire for equal world (Lamb &Veith, 2014:101). However, in the case of China, in the depth of some slashers' heart, they still have not acknowledged the love relationships of homosexual couples so that they unconsciously identify slashed characters with heterosexual people during writing process. For instance, in most slash fiction, there are apparent differences on characters' personalities: the penetrator is usually more masculine and the other is more feminine. In this sense, Ruan Yaona's (2008) declaration that it is impossible to reach complete equality in love relationships in Chinese slash fiction could be used here. An equal love relationship means that both sides need to take same responsibilities on family and parenthood, while some slash fiction in China is another copy of unequal heterosexual love relationships camouflaged by homosexual settings.

Talking about the topic of equal love, a new point of view was stated by interviewee Lulu that same gender is the first step to reach an equal love relationship. She explained:

> I think heterosexual love relationship will never be equal. In my stories, there are no man and woman, but people who are mentally tender or strong.

Interviewee Lulu further considered slash fiction as an "asexual romance", which was similar as the idea of "androgynous romance" but more radical. Agreed with Lulu, interviewee Marin said: "I don't like the idea that some slash writers always make clear of the top and the bottom role in slash, which is exactly an imitation of heterosexual relationship." For these interviewees, role definitions in slash essentially strengthen that relationship model of heterosexual couples should be the mainstream ideology that male (the penetrator in slash) takes the lead in relationships.

With a few subjects remarking that some slash fiction could be seen as "pornography by women and for women (Russ, 2014:86)". Indeed, slash fiction is different from other gay fiction in China since its target is female and its narrative is more feminine. However, majority of interviewees did not understand the idea that females want to express their lust on slash. Interviewee Yuka said: "If I were them (girls who want to satisfy sexual desires), I would read heterosexual erotica since we female don't exist in the sexual descriptions in slash fiction!" In this regard, Russ's idea is behind the times and one-sided because she neglected the possibility of heterosexual pornography by women and for women, and the situation that not every slasher is there only for sexual desires.

4.3.2 Slash and the patriarchal universe

Slash fiction has been seen as a symbol of subverting the patriarchal society in the West. Throughout the interviews, there was also a strong correlation between most interviewees' awareness of slash and gender equality.

Marginalization of the role of female has been a kind of common problem in a

male-dominated society. As a result, Chinese females are educated to be more restrained than males, particularly in love relationship. As the so-called 80s and 90s generation, many Chinese females want to have a new and stronger independent femininity that they do not want to be always in a weaker position when they are in a relationship. Among the young generation in China, slashers are especially prominent in feminism waves due to their high-educated background and independent personality. Interviewee Ren elaborated:

> In heterosexual romance, women are always portrayed as weaker and more sensitive, both mentally and physically. However, in slash relationship, there is no such a norm that requires one person to take care of the family because both of them have the same responsibility.

Holding the same proposal but from a different standpoint with Ren, interviewee Tree noted:

> In Chinese heterosexual romance, girls are usually described as characters that are cared by boys. Why can't man be the crying person who runs to his girlfriend for cuddling? Why should man always be strong and women always be sensitive?

In applying Lamb and Veith's (2014:101) idea, in slashed world, the protagonists are equal at the aspect of gender and share the same responsibility in their relationships so that the stereotypical gender paradigms in patriarchal universe would not influence the homosexual love relationships.

On the other hand, scholars, like Jenkins (1992), think the development of slash fiction is at the expense of feminine identities, which is remarked by the subjects as well. Interviewee Lulu pointed her position out, particularly in the case of slashed "androgynous romance", that:

> There are lots of slash fiction that you can actually feel it's a heterosexual romance but with a homosexual setting, which shows the strong demands in their emotional world from the writers and their readers. I think this kind of slash could also been seen as the extreme blind worship to the patriarchal world because they even follow the gender norms in a homosexual world, which they don't recognize.

A few interviewees still contended that there are independent and great female characters in slash fiction. Nonetheless, interviewee M disagreed with this opinion: "Among all the slash fiction I have read, when the relationship between main

protagonists doesn't go really well, female are always the characters that make a mess to promote the plot development." Furthermore, interviewee M even did not agree on connecting feminism with slash because slash fiction is a result of exclusion of female for her.

Based on the results of interviews, the original purpose of those slashers, who write and read slashed "androgynous romance", is not to follow the gender paradigms for sure. However, all the subjects grew up in a male-dominated society, which means they naturally have been involved in the gender stereotypes. Moreover, regardless of their political claims, to meet readers' demands is still one of the most important things to think about for slash writers. The current situation in China is that slashed "androgynous romance" mode has been popular for these years, which also shows the atmosphere of the whole slash market in China is still male-dominated.

Penley (1994:320) declares that most slash writers are from working class and do not want to claim that they are feminists. However, 7 interviewees are university students and other 8 interviewees all work in big cities, for example, accountants and advertising employees. Furthermore, 8 of them saw themselves as feminists while other 7 subjects did not. However, among the 8 feminist interviewees, most of them had never tried to put their feminism claims into their stories during writing process because they did not know how to connect slash and feminism together. Interviewee North was one of the writers who considered herself as a feminist, but she also said: "I even do not know the exact meaning of feminism since I have never studied about feminism at school. I do not want deliver wrong messages and mislead my readers." Only two interviewees reflected their feminism claims with slash fiction. Interviewee Lulu commented:

> 10 years ago, when slash was only an offline activity, I did not connect it with feminism at all. Since writing slash fiction online has been one of the most common ways in China these recent years, I got to know more slashers, who have strong claims on gender equality. I started to think about what I can do to influence more young females through slash fiction as China is still a male-dominated society.

This is supported by the notion of Rivers (2014: 185), who thinks that the Internet enables feminism, especially the fourth wave of feminism, to spread out, and online media allow women to interact with others' lives. It is difficult to define which wave of feminism China is experiencing, but the traits of the fourth wave of feminism are surely glaring that the Internet is the key factor of online feminism in China.

On the other side, a few subjects refused to make slash fiction political. For example, interviewee Ling regarded herself as feminist but she did not feel comfortable with tagging slash as feminism: "I just want to make friends and share my fiction with other fans. Why should I make such a relaxing topic political?" Interviewee M mentioned that some slashers are misogynic so that they are so keen on writing slash fiction. Hence, even though Chinese slashers are aware of the gender problems in China and have critical thoughts on feminism perspective, they still do not have systematic academic knowledge in terms of feminism due to the reasons that slash fiction is still at its early stage and lack of complete education background on feminism in China.

4.4 Identity

4.4.1 Crossover of fans and producers

Results from the interviews resonated with Jenkins and his colleagues who argue that in the model of spreadable media the boundaries of the "producer", the "marketer" and the "audience" are relatively blurry (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). As discussed before, the high demands from slashers in China changed the media narratives as well as the direction of fandom market. In this sense, it is inevitable for Chinese slashers to play multiple roles in the model of spreadable media because not one of these roles can be dispensed with in the circulation of slash fandom. However, Chinese slashers apparently did not realize the importance of themselves in the whole slash market. The interviews suggested that most subjects were more likely to identify themselves as "fans" at the first place, then "amateur producers". Interviewee Liyu confirmed: "I

don't see myself as a writer or some other famous characters. I just want to share what I write with the people who have the same interests." Some interviewees even did not think their success was derived from their writing skills. Interviewee Moomin noted:

> Readers come to read my fiction only because I happen to write the characters they like. That's it! I think no more than 10 readers would read my fiction based on my original characters.

Additionally, there was an interesting finding that keeping writing slash is to get a sense of accomplishment. Interviewee North said: "It's always cool to see myself followed by my readers, which means I am acknowledged by someone." Interviewee Momoko even admitted that slash was a way for her to satisfy her vanity:

> I really pay a lot of attention on my followers and click rate. I am afraid of losing my readers one day.

These unconfident feelings were caused by the liquidity and competitiveness of the huge amount of slashers in China, which also demonstrate that to avoid an abnormal development, a balance among the "audience", the "producer" and the "marketer", is needed during the rapid progress time of slash fandom.

4.4.2 Emotional Identity

Chin (2007:211) advises that in Asian slash fandom, there is a strong mental intimacy between slashers and stars. The fan relationship to the stars is consisted of passion, love and faith, which was supported by most subjects during the interviews. Interviewee Yuka remarked:

> If you really love the characters, it would be a nature for you to create another considerate person who loves and spoils him. I want someone to take care of my favorite characters for me in the stories I create.

Slashers know the truth that their beloved starts are only on the screens so that they wish to seek a closer intimacy relationship by slash. Other interviewee also emphasized on sympathizing with the original media content and characters. The results of interviews suggested that understanding and loving the stories and all the characters thoroughly is the way to write great and splendid slash fiction.

There was also identification between the writer and the protagonist. Interviewee

Haidai described her experience: "I sometimes get really into the stories I create that I can't distinguish between the reality and the fictional world." "I feel my protagonists' pain, happiness, confusion and everything! I cry when he breaks up with his lovers. I smile when he gets promoted in the company. I feel them. I feel all the feelings." This is similar as Penley (1994:316) who claims that slash writers replace the roles with themselves emotionally so that they can create better slash fiction. Readers can feel all the emotions of the characters, no matter joyful or depressed, by putting themselves into the respective character.

4.5 Friendship ties

With the development of the Internet, fandom started to transform since the early 1990s (Hellekson & Busse, 2006:13). Among the whole fandom, slash has become more like a "producing with sharing" hobby. Nowadays, the Internet offers slashers platforms where they can share and discuss their works online so that the slash community is built up much faster than before. Driscoll (2006:93) claims that "fandom is web of communities distinguished by type, pairing, and/or genre. […] Every community is a field of subcommunities shaped by friendship groups, specific projects, geographic location, the contingencies of the Internet or other meeting places, and real-life conjunctions". In other words, slash fandom is a community where all the fans share the collective interests and ideas, and where friendship ties are built on as well. Throughout the interviews, all slashers mentioned that slash played a crucial role not only in virtual world, but also in real life. Most common feelings about slash fandom community were peaceful, lovely and cheerful. A significant number of interviewees agreed that their friends increased dramatically after doing slash.

Interviewee Yuka said:

> Slash definitely helps to build up my friendship ties. We discuss the TV series we like and share our own works online. It's always much easier for me to talk with people who share the same interests.

Interviewee Tree even described slash as her life-changing factor. She noted that:

> I used to have social anxiety disorder and I was not good at communicating with people in real life at all. Honestly, I felt really inferior. But after writing slash, I got a lot of

readers who liked my works and we discussed the idols and dramas we like. Then I met them in real life. I found it was such a difference when I met them as I was not afraid of opening my mouth any more. Nobody would judge my interests. I am still not good at socialization today either, but at least slash enable me to improve a little bit.

Although the mainstream media narratives are getting slashed in China, slash is still a subculture that most fans are young females. It is not common to talk about slash fiction with relatives and colleagues based on the results of interviews. Interviewee North confirmed:

> How I get along with slash friends is different from my real life friends. When I am with my real life friends, I have to hide my slash hobby. And I have some friends who are homophobia, so I try to avoid homosexuality topics. However, when I am with my slash friends, everything is open. We share the same interests and secrets which makes our friendships more fun.

These quotes could be aligned with Busse's (2006:213) notion that online slash fandom creates friendship ties and offers slashers a place where they could have physical affections connecting with other women. Slash fiction could be seen as a cooperation between the writers and the readers. Slash writers can post their stories on the websites they prefer, and then readers will comment and help the writers to improve their works. This kind of interaction leads to a closer relationship between the readers and writers. As a result, slash has indeed been providing Chinese slashers with a new way of socialization.

However, the way of treating friends still depends on people. Interviewee Tamarin agreed that slash did make her life more fun than before, but she also asserted that slash only exists in virtual world:

> I do make slash friends online, but I have never met any of them and I have never told them my personal information. I don't want to see myself into virtual world too much and get cheated by others.

Interviewee Tamarin is a special case. Based on the interviews, most interviewees are likely to trust other slashers, who they meet online, more easily than other people in real life due to the reason that most slashers commonly consider the whole slash fandom as trustable and reliable. They tend to expose themselves and share secrets with other slashers, while at the same time there are some people with ulterior

motives who could make use of the friendship ties and trust. Hence online privacy issues in slash fandom should also be moved up to the agenda in the future time.

4.6 Summary

The analysis above illustrates the complex and unique fandom of slash fiction in China through five perspectives: the landscape of slash fandom in China; slash fiction production process; feminism; identity; and friendship ties. It is clear that current situation of slash fandom in China is paradoxical in different aspects. Firstly, there are conflicts between slashers and the government. Although homosexuality is no longer considered as a mental disorder, the government still holds a negative view on the homosexual, by banning homosexual TV and porn. Moreover, the high degree of censorship on the Internet and the lack of sexual education make women stifled and eager to have the freedom of expression in China. Thus, slash fiction arises with young females with the proliferation of the Internet. The influences from Japanese *Yaoi* culture and the media narratives help slash culture growing up in an inflated way. Chinese slashers have developed slash culture into a huge commercial chain regardless of the illegal nature of slash fiction. Secondly, Chinese slashers have ambivalences about slash fiction. Chinese slashers grow up in a patriarchal society where women should follow the traditional gender paradigms and moral standards. Some slashers feel guilty about writing and reading slash porn as it is banned in China. Others feel ethically conflicted since slash breaks the social taboos, and they cover taboo topics such as incest within the fantasy world of slash fiction. Lastly, there are clashes among slashers upon various issues. The majority of slashers start to write slash because of their love to the original media content to long for a love fantasy. In this idealistic world, people are supposed to be equal, and gender has nothing to do with love. However, there are a few slashers create slash fiction for commercial reasons that they write lots of sexual depictions and fake homosexual relationships to meet readers' demands. In addition, the slash community shares an implicit feminism identity rather than explicit political position, which most of them have not realized it

yet. Furthermore, most slash fans are positive on the slash community as it provides a new way to socialize and communicate with other fans, while others are still conservative that they think the virtual and the real-life should be separated.

5. Conclusion

The aims of this thesis have been to explore how slash fiction has been developed into a national trend and influenced young females in China in terms of their identities, concepts of gender and love, and friendship. The purpose of this thesis was to point out the unique characteristics of slash fandom and slash writers in China. The theories of fandom studies and feminism, especially "textual poacher" theory of Jenkins (1992), Penley (1994 & 1997), and the "androgynous romance" model from Lamb and Veith (2014), were used to structure the framework of this thesis. A short contextual analysis was made of slash fandom and slash community in China to look at the scale and type of slash fiction. 15 qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted to help in further analyzing slash fandom under the national contexts, including themes such as gender equality and identity.

The first research question of the distinctive characteristics of Chinese slash fandom was answered through external aspect such as influences of foreign cultures, and internal aspect such as mainstream media narrative. From the analysis shown in this research, Japanese animation and pop culture could be considered as the key influence on Chinese slash fandom. Slash in China also absorbed the soul from Japanese *Yaoi* culture which emphasizes the love relationship between homosexual couples in an aesthetic and literary narrative rather than merely homosexual pornography. Furthermore, at the internal aspect, in order to meet the high demands of growing slashers in China, mainstream media changed their narratives to "slashed", which also established the slash fandom market and consequently sped up the development of slash fiction. As Jenkins et al (2013:166) suggested, individual fans are just some parts of audience, while the whole fandom can be seen as reflections of traits of the public. In this regard, slash fandom reveals the trend of a more tolerant cultural environment and slashers' awareness of gender equality, romance and sexuality which shapes the media narratives in China. Moreover, another remarkable feature is the commercialization of slash fanzines, which is barely mentioned in western academia.

There has been a mature business chain of slash fanzine with the rapid of spreading of slash in China such as private publish and design studios. Slash fandom is a "vertical integration (Penley, 1997:105)" where production, distribution, and consumption are incorporated which greatly helps the spread of the slash boom and forms a positive competitiveness among slash writers. The other original feature is the strict censorship on erotica slash on the Internet from the Chinese government so that all slash writers cover their tracks by using pseudonyms. Some publish slash fanzines instead of posting online to escape from the censorship, which is also inseparably interconnected with the commercialization of fanzines. Although publishing slash fanzines involving sexual depictions is illegal in China, the high demands for slash stories still make slash writers to take the risk of being caught by the police. From the analysis shown in this research, the censorship on erotic descriptions in slash on the Internet is understandable in a sense. However, according to Lobato and Thomas on *The Informal Media Economy* (2015: 190), the laws and regulations in the field of media should always be adjusted to ongoing changes since society is highly updating. For instance, the regulations of the homosexual in the field of media were understandable in China due to the cultural environment back to the 1990s. However, with the development of society, the public became more tolerant to the homosexual and outdated regulations and laws therefore need to be changed. In other words, a rating system becomes urgently needed to meet the slashers' demands as well as to protect underage readers with the rising popularity of online slash fiction in China.

The second research question of "in what ways do Chinese slashers reflect their personal wishes of love and gender equality in their writings in the context of Chinese patriarchal society" was also answered by thematic analysis that Chinese slashers hold an implicit feminist position on gender equality against the patriarchal society. Given the same gender of slashed characters, slash fiction represents an idealized equal relationship showcasing that nobody needs to obey the gender norms in China. In addition, although slash fiction is about homosexual stories, slash writers do not want

to make slashed couples special. Love has nothing to do with genders for most slashers, which also explains their positive attitudes towards erotic descriptions in slash fiction. Intimacy is one part of love so that writing eroticization in slash follows the natural development of relationships. It is worth nothing that, from the analysis shown in the thesis, the "androgynous romance" model (Lamb & Veith, 2014) which is meant to subvert the traditional gender paradigms and to create an equal homosexual relationship works in a different way in Chinese slash fandom. Some slashers, who actually have not accepted real homosexuality, unconsciously tend to replace the slashed couples with heterosexual relationships, under the influence of patriarchal norms. This type of slash fiction delivers a message that fixed gender paradigms are still dominant even when it comes to homosexuality, which causes a misunderstanding of the real homosexual world for readers, especially younger generations of female slash fiction fans. Moreover, even though most slash writers yearn for love and gender equality, only a few agree to connect slash fiction with their feminist claims, considering the marginalization of female characters, since the majority see slash fiction as an unpolitical hobby.

In solving the third research question of "how do slashers see their identities shifting from fans to producers in the production process", the findings demonstrate that Chinese slashers have multiple identities in many aspects. Firstly, most slashers identify themselves as fans that coincidentally are also keen to fan fiction, rather than identifying as professional writers. This identification greatly shortens the distance between the writers and readers and offer more chances for them to communicate, which naturally generates better stories according to the interviewees. The crossover of fans and producers also fulfills the slashers' senses of accomplishment that they feel proud of followed by other fans. Secondly, Chinese slashers are likely to identify emotionally with the characters they create in order to make the stories more resonant for readers (Penley, 1989:259). Readers can feel all the emotions of the character, no matter how joyful or depressed, by putting themselves into the respective characters,

positions and experiences.

Further, slash fiction has inspired Chinese slashers to socialize with other fans who share the same interests and hobbies in terms of the last research question, which is that "how has slash fiction developed Chinese slashers' friendship in the fandom community". It does eliminate the communication obstacles and helps to build more friendship ties in the slash fandom (Busse, 206:213) because slashers share the same interests and identities which bind them even closer. However, slash fandom, especially the online community, also blurs the border of the virtual and the real, which can cause the problems such as the leaking of personal information. It is risky for the slashers that leaking of personal information will create opportunities for criminals. Some slashers get addicted to the online virtual community to the extent that they cannot tell what the truth is anymore. The central issue of online slash fandom is that both readers and writers should think carefully about their own identity construction and performative roles (Busse, 2006:215).

This thesis has focused on exploring the environment of Chinese slash fandom and analyzing the traits of this unique fandom in relation to the ideas of feminism, identity, and friendship. In conclusion, slash fiction could be seen as a symbol of the contradictions between Chinese traditional society and a boom of open-minded culture under the new era. Slash fiction was derived from the wish for love and equality by the Chinese young female generation as they embraced Western advanced thoughts, for instance feminism and equal rights. On the other hand, they grew up in a typical patriarchal society with strict national ideological controls. Slash writers shift their love fantasy to homosexual couples in slash fiction, which they fail to achieve in reality. In heterosexual relationships it is always females that sacrifice themselves for their families (Lamb& Veith, 2014:101), while in slash world, the homosexual relationships are theoretically equal, which are more ideal for Chinese slashers. Jenkins (1992) describes fans as "*Textual Poachers*" who reconsider their personal

issues, such as identity and gender, by creating fan productions and building up their own imagined world. In contrast, Bacon-Smith (1992) thinks fandom is a place where "victims" of their daily dilemmas seek comforts. In the sense of Chinese slash fandom; Chinese slashers are more like "*enthusiasts*" - a mixture of "*poachers*" and "*victims*". They not only expand the original media content in fandom, but also try to create a fantasy in the slash world where their personal desires and ambitions can be achieved. The collective and connective slash fandom influenced the media narratives and built up a shared social relation because slashers have the same interests. Furthermore, Chinese slashers are ambivalent: they are enthusiastic about their beloved characters, the slash fandom community, as well as their lives; they long for love and gender equality. However, Chinese slash fans are generally too timid to express their claims in reality due to national censorship and avoidance of politics, and there is a strong resistance to feminist identity. There is still a long way to reach the world full of love and equality for slashers in China.

For the future studies, it would be more fascinating to study on the plot and stories in slash fiction through media and narrative analysis in order to study the influences different language contexts will make to slash readers, and how slash fiction of lesbian people has developed. It is interesting to study on slash fiction of lesbian people since *Yuri,* which is a genre of *Girls' love*, has attracted a large group of young males in Japan and China these recent years. In order to gain a more critical understanding on gender perspectives, further research should compare the similarities and the differences of slash fiction of gay and lesbian people as well as focus on male slash fans.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Appendix A: Semi-structured Interview Questions:

Main Questions	Additional Questions	Clarifying Questions
What made you start to create slash fiction?	Do you create regular romance fiction?	Can you expand a little more on this? Can you give some examples? Can you tell me anything else?
What do you usually base your stories on?	How do you pick up/create characters? Will you change your attitude towards the original stories after your own story making?	
Tell me about the love relationship you create	Do you see them as equal characters? What is the difference you think is the love relationship between slash and other heterosexual fiction?	
How do you represent the erotic scenes in slash fiction?	How do you usually get inspiration of erotic part during writing process?	
How do you usually share your fiction with your slash friends?	Do you think slash is a new tool for you to make friends? What are the differences between your slash friends and real life friends?	
Is slash fiction as part of your life?	Do you see yourself as a professional write or an amateur? How do you see yourself now being followed by other fans? How do you think of the fans of your work?	
Is your work for commercial or non-commercial purposes?	How does this business run? How do you decide the price? Tell me more about the slash convention and website.	
What are the challenges?	Examples?	

7.2 Appendix B: Sample of Transcript

Q: Can you tell me about your age, education background and the city you live?

A: I am 30 years old with a bachelor degree. And I live in Wuhan.

Q: Do you see yourself as a feminist?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you still remember the time when you first knew slash fiction?

A: Yes, it was 15 years ago so... when I was 15 years old.

Q: How did you feel about slash fiction at the moment?

A: At the beginning I felt really uncomfortable because I didn't know what slash fiction was before. And, not saying I was homophobia, but, you know, in China at that time homosexuality was still a very sensitive topic. I couldn't believe this kind of stuff (slash fiction) actually existed. I was a big fan of Slum Dunk (a famous Japanese animation about basketball) and for me the characters are just good friends and teammates. But in slash fiction world, they are portrayed as lovers that I couldn't accept. However, with time passing, I started to understand the relationship in slash world and gradually I realized that I couldn't stop reading them (slash)!

Q: When did you start to write your own slash fiction?

A: 18 years old after I entered university.

Q: Why did you start to write slash fiction?

A: Because I felt the homosexual implications between the main characters in the original TV series are very explicit for me, so naturally I started to follow the idea as well.

Q: Have you ever written heterosexual romance before?

A: Yes, before I started to write slash, I wrote several heterosexual stories, not so much. But after, I completely stopped it.

Q: Why did you stop?

A: Ahaha, well, just because I didn't have enough time.

Q: What kind of slash fiction do you usually write?

A: I usually write slash fiction based on TV series or movies.

Q: What are the differences between writing heterosexual romance and homosexual romance for you?

A: There are four big differences: First, the way how the characters express their feelings is not the same. Second, I think how homosexual couples get along with each other is definitely different from heterosexual couples. Third, their identifications and personalities are different. For instance, both of them are male so it would be easier to understand a person who is the same sex. Fourth, the way they think is different as well. Women usually are more sensitive and paranoid in heterosexual romance. It always takes a long time for me to rethink these four points during writing. However for me, all relationships in this world are the same because everyone should be equal. I don't like to stress my characters are different because they are gay. I think all my stories are about love between two individuals.

Q: How do you usually explain characters' sexual orientation?

A: I have never tried to address that they are homosexual. As I mentioned before, in my stories, they are individuals just happen to love the person who is male.

Q: So are the equal in the love relationship?

A: Yes, of course. I don't like to define the top and the bottom by their heights, their appearances or their jobs. Instead, I would like to say in my stories, the person who is more mentally relying on the other plays the bottom role. And another important thing is how much the authors love the characters. For example, I have written a lot about two members Aiba Masaki and Sakurai Sho who are from Arashi (a famous idol group in Japan) and I myself am a fan of Aiba Masaki. As a sincere fan of Aiba, during my writing process, I would like to create a considering image of Sakurai who takes care of Aiba and loves him. So, describing Aiba as the bottom role would fit this mode more. Except this, they are equal at all aspects.

Q: So for you in the homosexual love relationship, even both of them are male, the top still spoil and follow the bottom character?

A: Yes, and I think this is the huge difference between the Western slash and Asian slash. I have read some western slash and the relationships are always portrayed as

two very tough and strong males, both mentally and physically. However, in Asia, especially in Japan, the slash authors really like to create sweet love stories, even though both of them are gay.

Q: So why do you think it's totally different from the western and Asian slash?

A: I think it's because people with different backgrounds have different opinions on love. I have to admit that westerns, especially women, are more independent than people in China. I am heterosexual and I grew up in a society where men are stronger and women should play weaker roles that are always cared by men. No matter how much I have tried to understand the real gay world, during my writing process, my own opinions on love and relationship still influence my stories. But well, this is my own understanding (laughing).

Q: Do you represent the erotic scenes in slash fiction?

A: Yes.

Q: How do you usually get inspiration of erotic part during writing process?

A: Well, since I have no experience on gay sex and will never have experience; I usually get inspirations from other slash fiction. And I watch gay videos as well, just to have a general idea on gay sex, but not too often.

Q: How do you think the erotic scenes in slash?

A: I think they are very necessary because sexual desire is human instinct which helps the development of love relationships. It is the same as erotic scenes in heterosexual romance. But I have to say that there are indeed some commercial slash fiction or boy love comics that only illustrate erotic scenes rather than affective interaction. I can't say that they are bad because after all there is a huge market of it. However, I would never create this kind of commercial erotic slash.

Q: How do you usually share your fiction with your slash friends?

A: I usually post them on my private blog considering the copyrights and legality.

Q: Is slash fiction as part of your life?

A: Yes. Slash fiction brings me happiness and friends.

Q: So it is a new way for you to make friends?

A: Yes, we discuss the TV series we like and share our own works online. It is always much easier for me to talk with people who share the same interests and hobbies.

Q: Are they all your fans?

A: Some of them are, but mostly authors.

Q: How do you see yourself now being followed by other fans?

A: I have never thought about this question before. I don't see myself as a famous writer and I don't think my fictions are amazing. Readers like my slash just because I write stories based on the characters they like. Otherwise I wouldn't have so many readers like now. But I do feel proud of myself seeing fans of my own work.

Q: Is your work for commercial or non-commercial purposes?

A: Non-commercial. It takes too much time and effort to do commercial so I prefer non-commercial.

Q: What are the challenges during writing slash?

A: Sometimes I feel difficult to get up plots and it's also hard to keep writing when I have a bottleneck period.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say?

A: I want to talk a little bit more about the current slash situation in China, is it fine?

Q: Of course, please.

A: It is very obvious that slash is getting more popular in China. However, there are some young writers who misunderstand the real meaning of slash. They create slash just because they want to see two good-looking guys to have sex which they feel it's really new and trendy. This kind of attitude is totally wrong. I think the original reason why slash started to become popular in China was because of the pursuit for equal relationship. However, now some of the young slash writers don't even have mature values on love and their slash fiction will create a bad image of slash in this society and disgrace the whole slash group.

7.3 Appendix C: Sample of Coding & Theme Table (Group Level)

Theme One	Scenery of slash fiction			
Sub-theme	The reason why slash became popular in China	1. Media narrative	"Media started to create the image of homosexual couple of some famous actors or movie characters on purpose. For example, the characters of Sherlock Holmes (BBC TV series) are always the media spotlight."(Marin)	"You could feel it from the media if you would like to check the entertainment news in China! Two handsome and sexy actors on the cover, looking at each other! I guess nobody, especially young girls, would say 'no' to buy them!" (Tree)
		2. Influence from Japanese idol and anime culture	"I started to read Japanese boys love manga since 10 years ago. They inspired Chinese slash culture deeply. Now we have more accesses to this type of anime." (North)	"I think Japanese idol culture has influenced a lot on Chinese slash culture, especially Japanese boy idol groups."(Lulu)
		3. Pursuit for equal relationship	"I think the original reason why slash started to become trendy in China was because of the pursuit for equal relationship. Young female started to realize the importance of	

			equality which they failed to see in this patriarchal society so they put their ambitions in their slash world." (Yuka)		
		4. Heterosexual romance was at bottleneck period	"It was really easy to get readers if you were doing heterosexual romance 10 years ago. However, now perhaps readers are tired of all the heterosexual story plots. Slash fiction is more attractive." (Momoko)		
	Localization of slash fiction	1. Commercialization	"Slash has already been a business in China. There are two ways of selling your slash works: the first, bring them to comic market exhibition; the second, sell them on the Internet. The first one usually works better for popular authors." (Setsu)	"Honestly, I earned a lot of money from my slash career. I got 10,000 RMB (which is around 1,400 euros) from one of my books." (North)	"Of course you make money from publications, but you sometimes are at a loss as well. It really depends on the quality of fanzines and your readers. I don't like those writers who only do slash for money, rather than real passion to slash itself."

					(Ling)
		2. Creativity	"Slash is a really vague definition in China. We don't only write stories following the original TV series, but also create our own settings, characters' personality or plots. Sometimes we even create new characters." (Haidai)	"Comparing to Western slash, Chinese slash readers sometimes are too strict with the narrative. For instance, readers would prefer to the slash with more beautiful narratives, even the plots are nothing new." (Tamarin)	
	Illegitimacy		"Nowadays the publications of slash increased dramatically comparing to 5 years ago. In addition, comic market is also allowed to be held every year where most slash fanzines are sold, which also means slash has already been an important part of our popular culture. However, the	"It is getting risky to post your slash on the Internet now. Those fan fiction website and forums have their own filter system against erotic scenes. What I do is to only post my fiction without sensitive content on the Internet and publish the	

			government has released various rules these years to ban homosexual fiction and TV series for anti-porn campaign." (Ren)	complete version." (Haidai)	
Theme Two	**Slash fiction production**				
Sub-the me	The reasons why the writers started to write slash fiction	1. Voyeuristic desire	"I couldn't stop imagining the future life of the characters from my favorite TV series." (Yaya)	"I get really excited when I find some hidden interactions between the two characters I love! You know, it's a kind of voyeuristic desire that makes me feel we were sharing our own secrets. Now observing their facial expressions and eye contacts has been my favorite." (Lulu)	
		2. Explicit homosexual implication from the original drama	"I would say the original content is sometimes really leading even though it is a normal heterosexual		

			story. Directors like to focus so much on the communications between two male protagonists which enables me to feel that they might like each other." (Moomin)		
		3. Lack works	"My favorite slash couples are not that popular so that there are few slash fiction about them. Then I decided to write my own slash instead of waiting." (M)		
		4. Bored of writing heterosexual romance	"My inspirations of heterosexual plots have dried up. Instead, slash fiction is more attractive for commercial authors, like me, because slash is still at its beginning stage and readers are not familiar with it yet." (Momoko)		
	Attitude towards erotic scenes in slash	1. Intimacy is a part of love	"It is really necessary because everyone has sexual desires. I think authors who don't want to present erotic scenes in slash	"Comparing to heterosexuality , slash itself is a taboo and sex depictions are considered as taboo as well in China. When these two taboo	

			actually don't approve the kind of slash love mode. Since readers have acknowledged that it's common to have erotic depictions in heterosexual romance, then what's the difference if there is lots of erotic stuff in slash?" (Lulu)	encounter, they will create more emotional affection." (Yuka)	
		2. For commercial reason	"To be honest, the reason why I write erotic scenes is because it helps promoting my slash works. There are some slashers in China, especially young girls, are superficial that don't really care about the quality of plots. For me, it doesn't matter adding some paragraphs of eroticization because readers are the god." (Liyu)		
		3. Challenging	"I just want to see if my readers like the erotic depictions I write as it's really		

			challenging and difficult." (M)		
	Challenges during production process	1. ethics	"In my slash stories, I present the love of commit incest which makes me feel guilty since it betrays the social norms in China. It is really difficult for me when my readers question about the ethical problem of my slash fiction. But I have to admit that I wouldn't do the same as what I portray in slash. Incest? Never!" (Setsu)	"I grew up in a society where pornography is forbidden and I was taught to behave as a good girl which means I should self-respect properly. Now I am producing slash fiction on homosexual couples which are considered as pornography by the government. I struggled a lot at the beginning." (Marin)	
Theme Three	**Feminism**				
Sub-the me	Slash and gender difference	1. Love is equal	"Love has nothing to do with genders." (Yaya)	"Of course writing slash is different from heterosexual romance. Men and Women act differently for sure. However for me, all relationships in this world are the same because everyone should be	"They are two individuals just happen to love the person with the same sex." (Ling)

				equal. I don't like to point out my characters are different because they are gay. I think all my stories are about love between two individuals." (Yuka)	
		2. Asexual romance	"I think heterosexuality will never be equal. Same sex is the basic to reach an equal relationship." "In my stories, there are no men and women. There are only people who are mentally tender or strong." (Lulu)	"I disagree the classification of the top and the bottom role in slash, which is a imitation of heterosexual relationship." (Marin)	
		3. Androgynous romance	"To be honest, I would say that I describe my bottom character as 'female with a penis'. Actually I feel like I was writing heterosexual romance with a slash setting." (Momoko)		

Slash and the patriarchal universe		1. Slash shows a desire of equal world	"Marginalization of the role of female has been a kind of common problem in a patriarchal society. " "In heterosexual romance, women are always portrayed as weaker and more sensitive, both mentally and physically. However, in slash relationship, there is no such a norm that requires one person to take care of the family because both of them have the same responsibility." (Ren)		
		2. Slash represents an ideal equal relationship	"In Chinese heterosexual romance, girls are usually described as characters who are taken care by boys. Why can't man be the crying person who runs to their girlfriends for cuddling? Why should men always be strong and women always be sensitive?" (Tree)	"In my stories, the two main characters take care of each other, both mentally and physically." (North)	

		3. blind worship to the patriarchal universe	"There are lots of slash fiction that you can actually feel it's a heterosexual romance but with a homosexual setting, which shows the strong demands in their emotional world from the authors and their readers. I think this kind of slash could also been seen as the extreme blind worship to the patriarchal world because they even follow the gender norms in a homosexual setting. " (Lulu)		
		4. Disagree on connecting feminism with slash	"I think slash fiction is a result of exclusion of female so I don't agree on the feminism ideas on slash." (M)		
Theme Four	**Identity**				
Sub-the me	Crossover of fans and producers	1. Fans who produce and share own works with others	"I don't see myself as a famous writers or something. I just want to share my works with the people who have the same preferences."	"If you see yourself as a big person, then it would be hard for you to create good works because you no longer hold your love	"Readers come to read my fiction only because I happen to write the characters they like. That's it! I

			(Liyu)	to the drama and characters but vanity." (Yaya)	think no more than 10 readers would read my fiction based on my original characters." (Moomin)
		2. A sense of accomplishment	"I don't think I am famous but I do feel proud of myself and I do get senses of achievement." (Yuka)	"It is always cool to see yourself followed by others because that means my works are liked by others." (North)	
		3. Satisfy vanity	"Writing slash is the way I satisfy my vanity. I really pay a lot of attention on my followers and click rate. I am afraid of losing my readers one day." (Momoko)		
	Emotional identity	1.sympathize with the original dramas and characters	"I think the way to write good slash fiction is to understand and love the stories and all the characters thoroughly." (Tamarin)	"If you really love one of the characters, it would be a nature that you want to create another considerate character who loves and spoils him." (Yuka)	

		2. Identification between the writer and the protagonist.	"I sometimes get really into the stories I create that I can't distinguish between the reality and the fictional world." "I feel my protagonists' pain, happiness, confusion and everything! I cry when he breaks up with his lovers. I smile when he gets promoted in the company. I feel them, I feel all these feelings." (Haidai)		
	Feminist identity	1. Being aware of feminist identity	"I consider myself as feminist, but I have never tried to put my feminism claim in my slash stories and I have never felt "oh, this slash is so feminism" from other slash fiction." (Ren)	"I have been trying to put my 'gender equality' idea into my slash fiction. However, I feel that my readers only resonate so much with me." (Lulu)	"I am feminist, but I don't agree on connecting feminism with slash. Think about all the female characters in slash. Either being neglected or being demonized. I even think some of the slash writers are misogyny." (M)

		2. Refusal to feminist identity	"By doing slash, I just want to make friends and share my fiction with other people. I don't want to make such a relaxing topic political." (Ling)		
Theme Five	**Friendship ties**				
Sub-theme	Slash and friendship	1.Slash is a new way to socialize	"I used to have social anxiety disorder and I was not good at communicating with people in real life at all. Honestly, I felt really inferior. But after writing slash, I got a lot of readers who liked my works and we discussed the idols and dramas we like. Then I met them in real life. I found it was such a difference when I met them as I was not afraid of opening my mouth any more. Nobody would judge my interests. I am still not good at socialization today either, but at least slash	"Slash definitely helps to build up my friendship ties. We discuss the TV series we like and share our own works online. It's always much easier for me to talk with people who share the same interests." (Yuka)	"How I get along with slash friends is different from my real life friends. When I am with my real life friends, I have to hide my slash hobby. And I have some friends who are homophobia, so I try to avoid homosexuality topics. However, when I am with my slash friends, everything is open. We share the same interests and secrets which makes our

			enable me to improve a little bit." (Tree)		friendships more fun." (North)
		2. Slash only exists virtual world	"I do make slash friends online, but I have never met any of them and I have never told them my personal information. I don't want to see myself into virtual world too much and get cheated by others." (Tamarin)		

7.4 Appendix D Sample of Coding & Theme Table (Individual Level)

			Yuka	Lulu
Theme One	**Scenery of slash fiction**			
Sub-theme	The reason why slash became popular in China	1. Influence from Japanese idol and anime culture	"The first slash fiction I read was about Slum Dunk (a famous Japanese basketball manga) which I guess could be the pioneer to Chinese slashers."	"I think Japanese idol culture has influenced a lot on Chinese slash culture, especially Japanese boy idol groups."
		2. Pursuit for equal relationship	"I think the original reason why slash started to become trendy in China was because of the pursuit for equal relationship. Young female started to realize the importance of equality which they failed to see in this patriarchal society so they put their ambitions in their slash world."	"Chinese young females try to break the patriarchal gender norms by writing slash"

	Localization of slash fiction	1. Commercialization	"I have never published my fiction because it takes too much time and energy."	"I only published once because I happened to know a publish studio from my other slash friends. I sold 54 in total." "I didn't earn any money from it, but I don't mind since it's just for memory."
		2. Creativity	"I don't only pick up characters from TV series, but also create my own stories, settings and characters."	"I have always been writing the same couples but in different story settings and plots."
	Illegitimacy			"It's really sad that our government is still strict on this topic. I have seen some of my slash friends giving up writing slash because the tough censorship and laws."
Theme Two	**Slash fiction production**			
Sub-theme	The reasons why the writers started to write slash fiction	1. Voyeuristic desire		"Sometimes I get excited because I find some really hidden interactions between the two characters I love! I feel I get closer to them by observing them."
		2. Explicit homosexual implication from the original drama	"I felt the homosexual implications between the main characters in the original	

			TV series are very explicit for me, so naturally I started to follow the idea as well."	
Attitude towards erotic scenes in slash		1. Intimacy is a part of love	"Comparing to heterosexuality, slash itself is a taboo and sex depictions are considered as taboo as well in China. When these two taboo encounter, they will create more emotional affection."	"It is really necessary because everyone has sexual desire. I think authors who don't want to present erotic scenes in slash actually don't approve the kind of slash love mode. Since readers have acknowledged that it's common to have erotic depictions in heterosexual romance, what's the difference?"
		2. For commercial reason	" I have to say that there are indeed some commercial slash fiction or boy love comics that only illustrate erotic scenes rather than affective interaction. I can't say that they are bad because after all there is a huge market of it. However, I would never create this kind of commercial	"I don't mind some authors who are writing commercial slash porn. What exists is reasonable. Commercial slash porn exists in China which means there is a huge market."

				erotic slash."
	Challenges during production process	1. Amateur or professional?	"I consider myself as an amateur writer because I want my readers to feel I am approaching."	"When I was still a university student, I had plenty of time so that I was really productive at that moment. However, I work full-time now and I got married 2 years ago. I don't have so much time to keep writing every day. It's really hard for me to take care of both my hobby, my career and my family only if I quit my job and work as a full-time writer."
Theme Three	**Feminism**			

Sub-theme	Slash and gender difference	1. Love is equal	"Of course writing slash is different from heterosexual romance. Men and Women act differently for sure. However for me, all relationships in this world are the same because everyone should be equal. I don't like to point out my characters are different because they are gay. I think all my stories are about love between two individuals." " I think people with different backgrounds have different opinions on love. I have to admit that westerns, especially women, are more independent than people in China. I am heterosexual and I grew up in a society where men are	"I think the idea of 'love is equal' is really ideal. It's almost impossible to reach in China."

| | | | stronger and women should play weaker roles that are always cared by men. No matter how much I have tried to understand the real gay world, during my writing process, my own opinions on love and relationship still influence my stories. " | |
| | | 2. Asexual romance | "I don't agree on people who think homosexual is more equal than heterosexual relationship. We have seen some cases that gay couples are in trouble because of property and family. All the relationships in this world will encounter the same problem as long as two human beings are living together. " | "I think heterosexuality will never be equal. Same sex is the basic to reach an equal relationship." "In my stories, there are no men and women. There are only people who are mentally tender or strong." |

	Slash and the patriarchal universe	1. Slash shows a desire of equal world	"I think the original reason why slash started to become trendy in China was because of the pursuit for equal relationship. Young female started to realize the importance of equality which they failed to see in this patriarchal society so they put their ambitions in their slash world."	
		2. Slash represents an ideal equal relationship		"Females have been portrayed as weak and sensitive characters too much in Chinese heterosexual romance which is already a cliché. Young Chinese women, especially around my generation, grew up in a relatively open and less masculine society. We started to doubt these gender norms in love relationship."

		3. blind worship to the patriarchal universe		"There are lots of slash fiction that you can actually feel it's a heterosexual romance but with a homosexual setting, which shows the strong demands in their emotional world from the authors and their readers. I think this kind of slash could also been seen as the extreme blind worship to the patriarchal world because they even follow the gender norms in a homosexual setting. "
Theme Four	**Identity**			
Sub-theme	Crossover of fans and producers	1. Fans who produce and share own works with others	"I see myself as a normal fan who coincidentally likes to write slash fiction."	
		2. A sense of accomplishment	"I don't think I am famous but I do feel proud of myself and I do get senses of achievement."	"To proof myself."
	Emotional identity	1.sympathize with the original dramas and characters	"If you really love one of the characters, it would be a nature that you want to create another considerate character that loves and	

				spoils him."
		2. Identification between the writer and the protagonist.		"I replace myself with the protagonist during my writing process since I want the readers to fully feel the emotions."
	Feminist identity	1. Being aware of feminist identity	"I have never tried to posit my political ideas in my slash."	"I have been trying to put my 'gender equality' idea into my slash fiction. However, I feel that my readers only resonate so much with me."
Theme Four	**Friendship ties**			
Sub-theme	Slash and friendship	1.Slash is a new way to socialize	"Slash definitely helps to build up my friendship ties. We discuss the TV series we like and share our own works online. It's always much easier for me to talk with people who share the same interests."	"I have two really close slash friends. We don't only talk about slash but also real life stuff, for example, travelling, cosmetics and food. It's hard for me to keep friendships only based on slash. I want them to know a real me."